

The BennZine Vortex

A Periodic Newsletter of the Bennington College M.A./M.F.A. Writing Program
*Student Life Committee * Vol. III No. 2 * June 21, 1995*

MFA students must write at least 500-page thesis and give 4 lectures

BENNINGTON -- In order to graduate from the low-residency writing program here, students will be required to generate a 500 to 550-page thesis of "publishable quality," and give four lectures, program officials announced Monday.

In a private meeting with graduating fourth-semester students, MFA program officials disclosed an ambitious and tough standard that will require students to issue a 500-page opus of original work, topped off with four "related" lectures to be delivered in the final semester.

"The requirement will apply to fiction writers, poets and non-fiction students alike," said Liam Rector, program director. "It's intended to distinguish this program from all others, and to demonstrate that we are, indeed, capable of reaching the outer edge of our capabilities."

The heightened graduation requirements will also involve first and second-semester students, who will be required to sit on reading committees during each semester beginning at the end of this residency. Reading committee members will be required to read and comment upon at least two 500-page theses each, and to generate a ten-page "evaluation" of the work of the graduating student each semester (See related story). Officials have not yet determined

how they would assign students to reading committees.

"Our goal is to generate large volumes of cohesive writing of publishable quality," said Liam. "You'd be surprised how many colleges don't require publishable quality."

Many students registered shock and fear over the new graduation requirements, while others accepted them without comment.

"I won't lie to you," said Robert Hornbuckle, a third-semester fiction writer. "I'm not even graduating in January, and I'm already frightened by this new requirement."

I should probably begin working on it right away."



JOURNAL ENTRY:

"TODAY I COMPLETED MY THESIS - ALL 532 PAGES."

New students must evaluate two 500-page theses during each future semester

BENNINGTON -- New students in Bennington College's low-residency MAMFA program will be required to serve as readers of theses being submitted by graduating students, officials announced Monday.

In a revised set of graduation rules released to fourth-semester students, the new admittees will be required to serve on "reading committees" for two semesters, reading two 500-page theses each time, and issuing ten-page critical "evaluations" about each one.

"It's meant as an educational tool for both the last-semester students as well as the newcomers," explained student director Sven Birkerts. "It's a way to make sure the graduating students connect intellectually with the first and second-semester students -- a way to generate feedback and input in a fluid exchange of manuscripts between upperclassmen and underclassmen."

Benn Listening

By E. Hem-in-Haw

Biddy bids bye-bye

The time has come for yours truly to bid adieu. Miss Hem-in-Haw has enjoyed her stint helping you through the awkwardnesses of the Bennington MFA residency, but now pass the pointer to my beloved daughter, Ernestine Hem-in-Haw, Junior.

Be confident that my prodigy will answer all your questions concerning residency etiquette and that she will help you comport yourself with slick grace as you slide from workshop to lecture to social hour.

Meanwhile, yours truly has many fine plans for her retirement. First, I plan to read When I am Old, I shall wear Madras. Then I will be attending weekly meetings of Crones Not-So-Anonymous (Crons-Sonnan). Finally, I mean to throw out all my Victoria's Secret underwear and return, with great relief, to Fruit of the Loom. Ciao, my darlings.

---EHH

Quotes of the week

Sven as a Grecian Urn:

Susan Cheever to Sven: "I'd like to see you gallop."
Sven: "Try and catch me."

Sven's advice to workshop students:

"Let the crustacean out."

Maria Flook's advice to a workshop student:

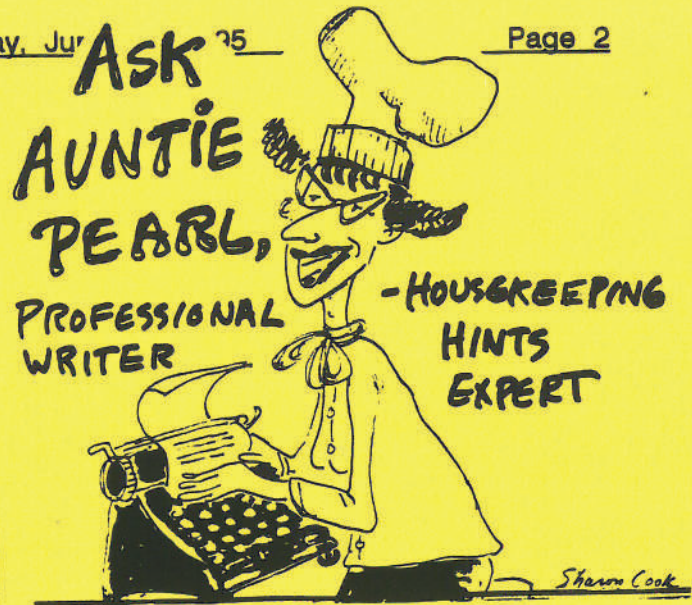
"You must shrink an extraction down to the muscle of love."

Memorable excerpt from a student at Jane Hirshfield's lecture:

"Bad ass bovine."

The actual quote by Maria Flook during her lecture before rumor-mongers bastardized it:

"His dragger is so rusted out."



Dear Auntie Pearl,

When some of my poems appeared in a cat fanciers newsletter, I held a small party in my apartment to celebrate. I invited my writing instructor who, unfortunately, arrived drunk and then proceeded to get sick on my living room rug, a new peach shag. Shall I tell him off? He appears to have no recollection of the event but perhaps he is embarrassed.

--Steamed in Somerville.

Dear Steamed,

Peach shag? In the living room? You obviously did not consult Auntie Pearl before purchasing that rug. Shag is the worst choice for heavily-traveled areas as it matts easily. And peach will show every stain. I suggest a solution of baking soda and water. You might want to order my pamphlet #63, "Taking Pains with Your Stains." Send \$1.00 care of this publication.

--Auntie Pearl

Dear Auntie Pearl,

My writers' workshop has gotten into the habit of stopping by the local pub after class for drinks. Last week at the pub, Roland, a fellow writer, put his hand on my knee under the table. Auntie Pearl, I was shocked! This man has always been very sedate-- prudish even. He is a technical writer professionally, writing dry stories about the latest software and other tiresome tracts. How should I respond?

---Baffled in Boston

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AND NOW THE TRUTH...

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*Student Life Committee * Vol. III No. 2 * June 21, 1995*

Graduation requirements detailed

Twenty students will give lectures, assist in workshops and submit their theses

BENNINGTON -- The teaching and workshopping experience in the low-residency writing program will change forever next January when the first graduating class begins co-teaching workshops and delivering lectures of their own.

The reality of the change became clear Sunday afternoon when the fourth semester students met with program director Liam Rector and student director Sven Birkerts to review the requirements for their fifth and final residency. Beginning with the winter 1996 residency, there will always be a graduating class lecturing and co-teaching -- a phenomenon that promises to be a scheduling nightmare.

"It'll be a nightmare," conceded Liam, who joked, "I think we should spend most of the time we have left fearing it."

Twenty students who were

-Continued on page 4-

STIRRING SPEECH BY
GRADUATING MEMBER
OF THE CLASS OF
'96.



"AND LET'S ALL REMEMBER
THAT LIFE IS LIKE A
ROLL OF TOILET PAPER:
YOU NEVER KNOW WHEN
YOU'LL REACH THE
END."

First Graduation Committee formed to detail plans for winter '96 ceremony

With one half-year to go, the first graduation committee has formed and is slated to convene at 9 a.m. Thursday to begin ironing out the details.

Eight of the 20 graduates-to-be have signed up for the Committee: George Carver, Robin Neidorf, Wendy Button, Stacey Harwood, Carole Merritt, Ruth Farmer, Gail Hathaway, and Tory Estern.

Details of the commencement ceremony remain largely undetermined. However, Bennington officials are hoping to get poet Donald Hall as the graduation speaker.

The College has earmarked funds for the graduation, but those details remain unknown too.

Family members and friends will be invited to the ceremony, although officials have not yet picked the exact date for the ceremony.

Heavy load ahead for 4th semester students

-Continued from page 3-

Twenty students from the program's first semester in January 1994 are expected to graduate in January 1996. To complete their degree requirements here, they will each be required to submit a "thesis," to be reviewed and approved by a panel of two instructors.

While the definition of "thesis" has remained elusive, it has been defined generally as a book-like submission of a student's finest work. For poetry students, this will mean 48 to 64 pages of poetry; for fiction writers, it means a novel, portion of a novel, short stories, or some combination thereof, amounting to roughly 120 to 150 pages. For non-fiction writers, it translates into a collection of essays or a single-topic book of the same approximate length.

"It's the first draft of your first book," Liam explained, describing one possible "thesis." Among poets, he noted, this would mean more than merely a random collection of poems. There would be a "logic within the book," he said.

The instructor chosen by students for their last residency will serve as one of the thesis readers. But it remains unknown, at present, how students will choose the other instructor. Some students expressed a desire to choose one of their former instructors. Susan Dodd, however, suggested students would profit by choosing somebody who does not know their work at all. Jill McCorkle said there were arguments in favor of either method, but cautioned that there should be one, clear, consistent, method established for empaneling the two faculty thesis readers.

In addition to preparing and

presenting a thesis, graduating students will be expected to deliver a 30-40 minute lecture/reading based on their third semester critical paper. How, when and where such lectures will be given is one of the administrative technicalities still to be addressed.

Graduating seniors will also be expected to function as teaching assistants or mentors in their workshops. Their work will not be workshoped during the fifth semester. One proposal would require the seniors to meet the underclassmen in their workshops by way of private conferences outside of the workshop. As Maria Flook described it, the seniors will be given a "weighted voice" in their final workshops.

During the final correspondence period before their final residency, graduating students will be required to prepare their thesis, which may or may not involve the production of new original work. They will each be required to read and annotate 10 books, fewer than the general requirement.

PARTY!

First romp at 9 p.m. Friday

Get your dancing shoes on! The first party for the summer 1995 residency is slated for this Friday night, beginning at 9 p.m. at the Cafe.

Suggestions concerning drinks and spirits should be directed to Wendy Button of the Student Life Committee. Musical requests should be forwarded to Mark S. Guralnick.

Sunday's meeting with fourth-residency students was also an opportunity to test proposals for future semesters. One suggestion would require students to maintain a log of their readings and other activities from beginning to end, and for that log to be attached to their thesis, or otherwise submitted, in the form of a bibliography of their progress at Bennington.

While details of the graduation requirements appeared largely clearer to students than in the past, officials said they were still uncertain about many of the administrative specifics.

Sven says: "You'll have to catch me"

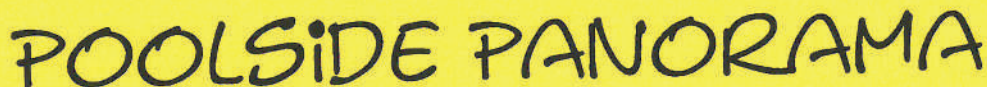
In January it was "buh!" But now Sven Birkerts has clarified his role as director of students. "I'm in the woods," he explained, "and you're in the woods, and I know you're there, and you know I'm there, and that's just the way it is."

He invited students to consult him with any problem more significant than a "bad lightbulb in your room."

"Think of me as your friend," said Sven.

David Broza to perform Friday

Israeli singer David Broza returns to Bennington at 8 p.m. Friday with his musical adaptations of American poetry and his pop ballads. He will perform at Martha Hill - VAPA.



Today our pool got dumped.
We have a witness; You
And your little foot knew
Tiki torches, and the flood
Of another buzz.

**Literary Magazine "b" will
publish again this week**

b magazine, our community's exclusive and enduring literary rag, will be available Friday morning for \$1. Copies may be purchased from Maudy Benz, Tom Rechten, Peter Hausler or Kristin Lee. This time, the literary magazine will feature nonfiction and fiction in addition to poetry and will have some work from faculty too. Don't miss it!

Where it came from is no mystery, though where it has gone is the stubbornly elusive question of the hour. A plastic portable pool deposited on the lawn between McCullough and Leigh drew scores of writers, readers and late-night wanderers before it vanished one day earlier this week.

At daybreak, it was the meeting spot of joggers and bicyclists. At mid-day it was a refuge for wayward thinkers. It also drew dozens of students who made their first public readings "at poolside." And at night, the problem-prone pool lured crowds of partygoers, wading poets, and drinkers with a writing problem.

Investigators say the poolside predicament probably peaked after a gala gathering that began Sunday night and ended Monday morning. The investigation has gone as far as the end of the world where the pool is reported to have been relocated, but still the pool problem persists.

January Residency Update

Mark your calendars now. The January 1996 residency will run from Jan. 5, 1996 through January 16, 1996. Approximately 100 students will be in the program then, of whom 20 will be graduated.

Ask Auntie Pearl...

--Continued from page 2--

Dear Baffled:

You can respond by giving him credit for knowing a good field when he sees it. Technical writing is a respected profession where a competent person can earn a starting salary of \$80,000. While you, missy, with your trite little tales of broken love affairs and poor-but-honest street walkers, have an inflated opinion of your dime-a-dozen drivels. Be thankful an ambitious man like Roland sees something in you (and it's not your imagination).

--Auntie Pearl

Auntie Pearl, who holds a master's degree in home economics, is the mother of six children. She is the author of "a Fistful of Dust," a book of over 3,000 housekeeping hints. She writes a cooking column for the Natic Mall Shopper's World. Send your writing questions to her, care of the BennZine Vortex.

Student Life Committee**TIMOTHY WOOTEN**

Ideas and Issues

COLETTE GUREN

Gossip

WENDY BUTTON

Alcohol and Spirits

ROBERT HORNBUCKLE

Treasurer

MARK S. GURALNICK

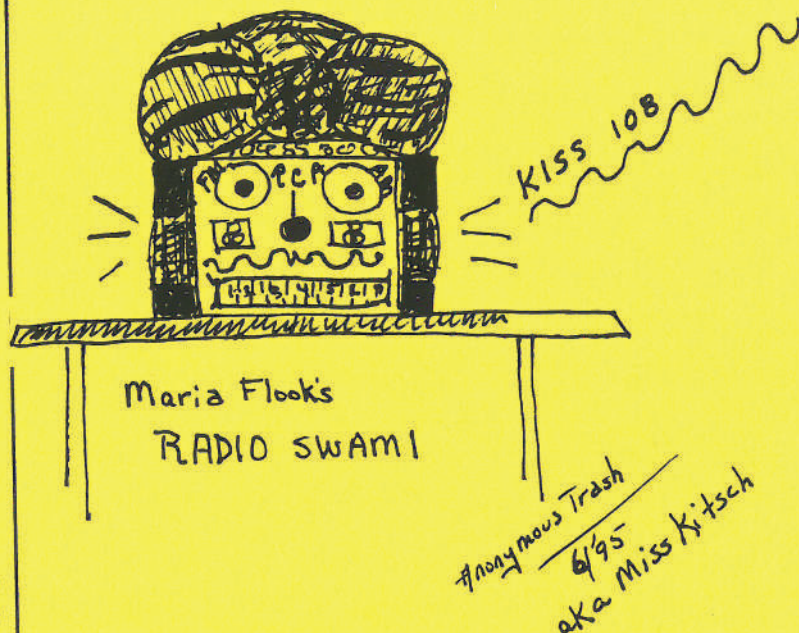
Newsletter, Music, and Parties

The BennZine Vortex

Vol. III, No. 2, June 21, 1995

EDITOR: Mark S. Guralnick**CARTOONIST:** Sharon Cook**CONTRIBUTORS:** Margo Aragon, Renee*Bowles, Cristina Del Sesto, Gail Hathaway***Newsletter Office - Leigh (Card Room)**

All contributions should be delivered to Editor Mark S. Guralnick at McCullough, Room #1, at Leigh House (Card Room), or to his mailbox.

**Swami Maria**

During Lewis Hyde's first lecture about "Unexpected Finds," Maria Flook offered up a sure-fire way to extract advice from unexpected places. "In my family we play radio swami," she said.

Flook's family gathers around the nearest transistor and selects a talk radio show. Once the station is selected, the volume is decreased until silence prompts a person to ask a question. "Then we turn up the volume and the first thing we hear is the answer."

A buzz traveled through the Tushman audience. Throughout the dim lecture hall, first semester students wrote vigorously on notebooks.

Maria Flook has successfully located the Arrow shirt man, the Abominable Snowman and various other creatures once considered mythological. Not one to believe in any of life's mysteries, it is curious how Swami Maria allows herself the luxury of listening for the profound in the profane.

Bennington to face new accreditation

Bennington College's accreditors say they will be taking a new look at the College as a result of the widely-publicized restructuring the school has undergone in the last year, according to the Bennington Banner.

Radiant Notes and Clusters

Announcements, accolades and accomplishments

Michael Lythgoe has poems forthcoming in Poet Magazine, the summer issue of Carribean Writer and the fall issue of the Tennessee Quarterly.

Judy Mandt published a profile of scientist/artist Fred Punzo in an April edition of the St. Petersburg Times.

The Harvard Review, #8, for Spring 1995, features Ruth Farmer's reviews of poetry by Kevin Young and Peter Dale Scott and of essays by Louis Simpson; Victor Cruz's review of poetry by Tino Villanueva and Caroline Finkelstein, and Sven Birkerts' review of an anthology of fiction edited by Christopher Moseley.

Cristina Del Sesto has published articles in the January, February, March and July issues of Hemispheres, the in-flight magazine of United Airlines. Her articles have ranged from a profile of Richard West, director of the Smithsonian's new Museum of the American Indians, to a true personal essay on being kidnapped for a romantic adventure.

Stud Duck #6 features poetry by Gail Hathaway ("Au Bout du Monde," "Sharing my Feelings with you," and "Not a Love Song"), Robin Neidorf ("Off Off Broadway"), Victoria Clausi ("On the Beach at Sunrise") and David Lehman ("Liberty Street"), and Sharon L. Preiss' book review of "Tedi," a memoir of Ted Berrigan.



Sexual Quote of the week

"It has always been a great mystery (as well as a source of embarrassment and shame) to me that my penis, when soft, seems to restrict to the point of nonexistence. It's okay when it's hard; it does quite nicely, I'm told." -- Excerpted from a story by Jaime Clarke presented in workshop Tuesday.

Student Life Committee Seeks New Members

Students are sought to replace four graduating members of the Student Life Committee.

The new recruits are needed to replace Tim Wooten, Mark S. Guralnick, Colette Guren and Wendy Button, all of whom are slated to finish their MFA degrees here in January 1996.

The Student Life Committee was formed last summer as an informal coordinating committee dedicated to addressing student issues, planning social activities and publishing this newsletter.

Only Student Life Treasurer Bob Hornbuckle is expected to remain on the Committee.

Observatory available for alien viewing

Deep star six will be entering the third quark-laden quadrant of alpha centauri in the next few nights, according to George "Lost in Space" Carver, resident astronomer.

All interested skywatchers should contact George to reserve one of the billions and billions and billions of places in space.

One long-awaited celestial event, said George, is the viewing of Uranus. He said he expects to see at least one ring around Uranus.

The observatory is located on the west side of the campus approximately 32 light years south of the sun.

Some like it hot and smelly...

BENNINGTON -- Dank summer temperatures incited instant migraine headaches, testy workshop antics and plaintive cries for "mommy" from students. A sudden demand for bricks of ice echoed from Bingham to McCullough. Calvin Klein-tinged sweat soured as it leaked from literary pores.

It was ugly.

It was nasty.

Many suffered.

Get shot at Commons

Mugs shots for ID cards for new students will be taken in Commons Thursday afternoon, officials said. Photo ID's guarantee students reduced rates at the Y in town and at various copy centers and discounts at movie theatres.

Winter Faculty Evaluations Due

Students are being asked to turn in their evaluations of the winter 1995 faculty as soon as possible. Officials said the faculty evaluations will be used to appraise the success of the winter residency and for future planning purposes.

Students are being asked to address the quality and timeliness of the instructor's responses, and to offer any constructive criticisms or suggestions.

Hump Day

The second year students who began here in August of 1994 are officially half-way through their degrees effective at mid-day today. Yes!

The dining room staff stared in stubborn complacency as they blocked the only air conditioned room in Commons. Students, faculty and visitors dragged their Birkenstock-clad feet to the center room and veranda to roll clear glasses of iced fruit juices and cold beer across their foreheads and necks.

An L.A. poet groaned, "I'm Adviled-out."

The heatwave broke local,

regional and European records. Extended forecast for the end of the world calls for pool-like temperatures suffused with late-night rhetorical pronouncements -- against information.

In other words, people have been in a pretty pissy mood because it's too damn hot in this mosquito coast. Now get some goddamn air conditioning on this tropical outpost of a campus, Sven!

