

Introduction to Pedagogy and Precarity: What's Love Got to Do With It?

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YOU MIGHT BE READING THIS even though you should finish marking those papers. You might have come across this issue of *English Studies in Canada* as you cruised through your department mailroom after one of those lectures where you know you were completely brilliant. Maybe you are on sabbatical and had forgotten all about teaching until we reminded you just now, or maybe you are among the growing academic precariat, reading in the library during your “office” hours. With few exceptions, to work in literary studies at the college or university level is to be a teacher, although this fact is overlooked with surprising regularity. Many of us, however, continue to have significant questions about teaching—about how we do it, about the shifting conditions under which we do it, and, increasingly, about how we feel about it.

This forum brings together papers from two professional concerns panels held at the ACCUTE 2014 Conference: “Why Do I Have to Teach like That?” and “Love is Not Enough: Precarity in the Academy.” The connections that quickly became evident between the panels (and which are in evidence throughout this forum) were not unexpected. After all, anybody who has felt emotionally exhausted after teaching a class—and who hasn’t?—can attest to teaching being a deeply affective practice, and even

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the most cursory glance at precarious academic work will tell us that this work is almost exclusively that of teaching. Nonetheless, there are insights to be drawn not only from the individual contributions in this forum but also from the ways in which they productively overlap.

In the forum's opening essay, Sarah Banting likens the undergraduate English classroom to a game in which we ask our students to guess the rules of how to play. Because we are rarely explicit about the rhetorical conventions of our discipline, Banting argues, our students are left to intuit our expectations. The best of them might manage to stumble their way toward brilliance, but others are left bewildered. What would happen, she wonders, if we set out to break the "elegant silence" the field holds about its own rules and make explicit the values and expectations that "tacitly drive our lectures and animate our marking commentary"? Mary Chapman's paper asks a similar question at a different scale, noting that while our undergraduate programs tend to be clear about covering genres, modes, national literatures, and historical periods, they remain problematically vague on the skills we expect them to attain each year. To that end, she offers a detailed outline for a "coordinated curriculum that builds skills over time," scaffolding the acquisition of reading and writing skills in such a way that makes clear their value and that allows next year's instructors to confidently build on this year's work.

Teaching well is demanding work, to be sure, but we do it because we love it. Or do we? Natalie Coulter's piece takes up a much-circulated essay by Miya Tokumitsu, "In the Name of Love," which argues that the imperative to love one's labour can mask and reinforce capitalist exploitation. Showing how the rhetoric of love has helped to obscure the institutionalized precarity of Contract Academic Faculty (CAF), Coulter calls for us to commit to an institutional and pedagogical transparency that would foreground the real costs—economic, affective, and political—of the university's increasing reliance on what she calls "academic piecework." Andrew Bretz's contribution picks up on Coulter's focus on the affective challenges of teaching by reminding us of the particular challenges that arise with asking our students to intentionally explore the uneven power dynamics of our classrooms. Drawing on his own experiences of encouraging students to consider how representations of sexual violence in Shakespeare can contribute to a patriarchal culture that continues to rationalize violence against women, Bretz asks difficult questions about what it means to teach toward the broader goal of social change. Finally, Margrit Talpalaru's discussion of "blogging while sessional" reminds us that the vulnerabilities produced by adjunct labour go well beyond teach-

ing. Observing that CAF often engage in delicate acts of self-censorship in the public representations of their teaching personas, Talpalaru considers the cost of asking CAF to steer clear of the overly personal, the overly emotional, and, most importantly of all, the overly negative. Doing what you love, she notes, can leave little room for the public performance of other affects.

The forum concludes with Geordie Miller's contribution, which draws on Bart Simpson and Georg Lukács to argue that with the difficult realities of academic precarity well established, it now needs to be framed "as a problem of organization, as opposed to a problem of knowledge." Insisting on the need to resist the individualization of precarity that is encouraged by the neoliberal rhetoric of the university, Miller's paper suggests that it is time for us to come together, regardless of whether or not we can expect to find anything approximating love.

The conversation that emerges in this forum is timely, we think, because many of us *do* love much of what we do (at least when we get to do it), but it seems important not to let that love blind us to the shifting contexts in which we work. It seems important, as Roy Miki has warned, "not to love the institution, because it will not love you back."

Work Cited

Miki, Roy. "Transforming English: Editing the Poetry of Roy K. Kiyooka." *Exile's Return/L'Exil et Le Retour*. 29 June 2012. Lecture.

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