

Letters from our readers

7 December 2013

On “Adjunct professor dies penniless after teaching for 25 years”

While all humanities departments are suffering in the current climate, the decline of French is something of a special case. Since the end of World War II, the teaching of French language and literature has suffered in American high schools and colleges.

The personal tragedy of Ms. Votjko, an adjunct faculty, calls attention to this problem. If two of her three courses were cancelled, it probably means the entire department was being cut back.

French was long the favored language of the American cultural and political elite, especially in Ivy League schools in the eastern US. Prestigious schools like Smith College set the pace in establishing programs for study abroad in France, early in the 20th century. French was long considered the language of international diplomacy, arts and culture, style and sophistication. Now, many degree programs have been closed or merged into other departments, replacing tenure track faculty with adjuncts. The decline of these programs parallels the rocky road of American-French relations, which has sometimes been acrimonious since the end of the World War II.

The French have a great literary tradition which has much to offer American students.

In his autobiography *My Life*, Leon Trotsky expressed his admiration for French literature. “The art of story-telling is primarily French...To this day I have retained my love for the French novel.” (Dover edition, p. 188).

Lesley J
Ohio, USA

2 December 2013

On “Sean O’Casey’s Juno and the Paycock in New York City”

This is one very fine piece of writing, David. An excellent review of the production and a great historical follow-through. I learned a lot about O’Casey from

this. Thank you so much.

Carolyn
California, USA
2 December 2013

On “BART Board of Directors unilaterally amend union-approved contract”

In October, BART management quickly came to an agreement and signed off on a proposed contract for the striking workers after they killed two workers during an attempt to train a scab driver during the strike. That contract was voted on and approved by the members. Now management refuses to ratify that contract, saying a temporary employee(!) included a clause in the proposed contract granting family leave, that the BART board now says is too costly.

While you state in the article that “the vote was held under severe pressure from union leaders,” I feel that most of the pressure came as a result of the exposure of BART’s crass insensitivity to safety rules which resulted in the deaths of two workers. The media, which until then had been squarely on the side of BART management, found it impossible to sidestep the killings. The pressure was on and shortly thereafter, BART signed on to the agreement.

That they now refuse to ratify that contract under this shamefully flimsy excuse should have all of labor up in arms. It was a signed agreement!

Geraldine
California, USA
1 December 2013

On “UK government moves to clamp down on Internet, citing child pornography”

Quite informative on the motives and snooping acts of super powers, assuming to themselves moral authority on people’s lives. As you rightly said, it also pre-supposes the motives of those using encryption and coding. On the same Google and its Youtube.com, there is so much junk including publicly available images of women taken without their knowledge or

permission, and which would surely shock them if they become aware of them. In some discussion forums, damaging communal hate messages and even inciting violence against religions and nationalities, can be easily posted and accessed without any filters or censoring. What happened to the morality and decency in those cases?

JP

India

1 December 2013

On “ A new film version of Charles Dickens’ Great Expectations: ‘Those wretched hankering after money and gentility’ ”

I was surprised that you did not mention that two endings were provided by Dickens, at least my old edition has two endings. The first ending climaxes with Pip simply accepting the reality that Estella has married into wealth and was never interested in him and that many of his presumptions had been false. The second ending, which appears in the same book, has Estella showing up disillusioned and unhappy, having realized the terrible mistakes she had made. They go off together in a way, which suggests that they lived happily ever after. I assume that Dickens wrote the second revised ending in response to readers who were miffed at the negative ending in the original. Your review did not mention these two divergent versions of the ending, so I can’t know which version was followed.

Patrick M

3 December 2013



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