

Ross' Rave: Whine, wine, whine

Ross LaBaugh, California State University, Fresno

I'm surrounded by Hoppers.
The painter.
Not the bunnies.

A dozen years ago I picked up a print of *A Room in Brooklyn*. A solitary woman sits in a straight backed chair, her back toward us and facing three cornered windows overlooking the brick tenements of a cityscape. The window shades are uneven and I want to fix them.

The now faded print sits on my desk. Over time, well meaning acquaintances, assuming I'm a Hopper aficionado, have given me other Hoppers. Nighthawks (of course) *Early Sunday Morning*, *Drug Store*. Never landscapes or pictures of the sea. Always the urban, dark lonely ones. I'm crowded by their solitude.

I don't dislike Hopper. In fact, after the initial gloom and hopelessness, there is that tiny sigh, an acceptance, or as my eldest often says, "C'est comme câ!" That's the way it is. There is nothing more. All that can ... has been done.

After an hour tapping dancing through the databases and tickling the curiosity of two dozen bleary-eyed freshmen, you turn to the English 1 TA who says, "Let's thank Ross for showing you guys how to find books and stuff online so you don't have to come to the library."

All that can be done has been done.

But, clearly, it's not the students who bring on my exasperation, it is the faculty!

Not all faculty, of course, are problematic. I've decided that, like wine, they are varietal.

Pinot Gris are light and lean. They are the new faculty. Fresh from grad school. Ink still wet on their dissertation (*Eco-Feminism and Metaphor: A Marxist Approach to the Early Works of Mary Higgins Clark*). On Friday, Tamiq finds out she is teaching English 1 (Introductory Composition) beginning on Monday. She cobbles together a syllabus over the weekend which includes a "tour of the library" on Wednesday. Good intentions, but not full-bodied. It's difficult to find her in the room because she blends in with the students.

"I'm Tamiq. Thanks for letting me bring the class in. When I was in grad school it was like really helpful to know how to do this. I just wish I had done this when I was like a freshman 'cause it would have saved me like so much time. Y'know? Can you like tell them about MLA and EndNote, if you have time? I haven't given them their prompt yet, but I'm using this collection of 18th century women's journals and they'll be choosing any topic they want as long as it's related to the text."

Tamiq sits in the back of the room and edits her Probationary Plan while I explain how to check-out a book.

Riesling are neutral in flavor and present well their place of origin. Arriving mid-fall are the more seasoned faculty. Dr. Hinz has his syllabus well constructed. The assignments and paths to them are well trodden. The library is there, carefully placed at the crossroad between prompt and first draft. There is nothing extraordinary here.

"Hi, Ross. How was your summer? Oh, I forgot, you work in the summer, right? Here's the syllabus. It's the same as last time. They need to choose a topic from the list, although, these are just suggestions and they can pick something else if I approve it ahead of time. No one ever does. (He chuckles.) Dr. Hinz sits quietly in the back of the room, takes roll, listens politely, but hears nothing. Graciously, he thanks me for my effort. "See you next semester," he says on his way out.

Cabernet Sauvignon are noble, thick-skinned, full flavored and aged. These are the tenured professors, members of very important faculty committees and advi-

sory boards. They have long histories with the university. Professor I. Brauz has been teaching Organic Chemistry since the discovery of Dubnium (1965). He's a founding father of the Academic Senate, has chaired the department, served as an interim provost, and now rests on his withering laurels.

"You're new here, aren't you? Agnes used to do all my classes. I think she's retired now. Anyway, show them *Chemical Abstracts* and *Beilstein*. They need to find articles which explain the synthesis of compounds I've assigned them. And, I don't want any internet sources. They need to learn this the old fashion way, like I did. Digging through those books, using the microfilm. Tell them to meet me in the lab in 45 minutes."

He marches out the door.

Box-of-wine: wine, fruit juice, sugar, and carbonated water. Part-time faculty, TAs, graduate students, supplemental instructors, tutors, and Jeff, the guy from the mail-room. These people don't really have any idea what they are doing. No training, no motivation, no background, experience. Not a clue. Their only qualification is a pulse.

Zondra took an American Studies class in 1969 and is filling in for Sylvia who got an NEH grant to study domestic partnerships among the Aleuts. She tells me her sociology students are lazy, the textbook she wanted is out of print, and the chairperson is getting complaints about her "style". When her class comes in I can smell the tension in the room. It's ozonic (that should be a

word). Zondra sits near the door, ticking away in an attendance book. Scowling. The students grumble in small cliques, mirroring her hostility. The temperature drops minute-by-minute. Everything begins to move in slow motion. "Hey captain, that sure looks like an iceberg up ahead."

"You probably have lots to do," I say to her. "No need to stay on my account. I can take it from here."

"Ok, but if anyone comes in late, get their name and the time they came in. I told them they would be docked 1 point for every minute they were late."

Jawohl!

Like you, I'm often discouraged by the way faculty enter into the whole "library thing". On the one hand, I'm encouraged that they want their students to experience what we have to offer. On the other, I often wish they would just get out of the way and leave it to us.

Maybe Hopper is speaking to me. I do notice his subjects are usually alone, sipping coffee, not wine.