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Tears for Academia

This semester I had the absolute privilege of taking an LGBT Literature course at the University of Connecticut. I selected the class the usual way: I made sure it fit my major requirements, I read the research the professor was involved in, and I asked students in my major if they'd had a good experience with the class. As is often the case with the best of academic experiences, none of these considerations and predictions could have prepared me for the academic and personal affects the class has on me.

The remarkable things I learned about gender and sexuality in this class, ENGL 3613, were not its complexity, or its flexibility, or even its total pervasiveness throughout society. The remarkable thing I learned about LGBT literature is its power. The professor was smart and clever. She offered a selection of books and short stories about characters whose sexuality and gender fell outside the social norm and they were each, in their own way, inspiring. We read a selection of stories about queer experiences of love and hate, bliss and sorrow, power and helplessness. Multiple times in this course I, and several others, were driven to tears. The stories we read were powerful and were often difficult to read. The professor for this class made this no easier. Her emotion and passion for the stories we were reading were unhidden during class, and she elicited feeling even from the students who had barely skimmed the pages of the readings. That is a rare talent, and it is a remarkable thing to watch.

In this class, I discovered my passion for queer literature. More than that however, I discovered my passion for others' passions'. It is one thing to cry over a heartbreaking book. It is

another to cry with someone who feels as strongly as you do. Too often, students go about their work in school dispassionately. They complete homework and write papers and study for tests. This is not to say students are apathetic. Students pursue emotion in other parts of their lives: friends, relationships, even Netflix shows. It is a rarity for students to find emotion in academia. It means the class has connected to something in students that is rarely found. That connection is fragile, it is terribly difficult to achieve, and it is one of the most valuable things a student can have.

This class changed my life. It made me appreciate emotion and apathy and the extent to which we can use them. This class showed me emotion has a place in education. Sorrow allows for a type of learning nothing else can achieve. My professor understood this, and she helped me understand it too. I remember a quote from the famous feminist author, Tanith Lee. Lee once wrote, "Anger and apathy are everywhere. Love is the rarity." This class made me shed tears for academia, and that is a rarity.