

Sparling, Don

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Coda

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Coda

There were so many people and things and events I wasn't able to deal with in the section on the 1990s, and this would be even more true of the period since then. Of course I was no longer a member of the English Department, and for a while even stopped teaching there externally. But I followed what was happening, and after stepping down as head of the Office for International Studies in 2009 I drifted back to doing things at the department from time to time. Some years I offered courses on Canada. I had a small part in the project that led ultimately to the creation of the MA degree in North American Cultural Studies. I delivered papers at successive conferences on English, American and Canadian Studies, and roped Canadianists from many countries into attending. I was also part of the team that organized the hugely successful ESSE conference in Brno in 2018. But I wasn't anchored in the department – these were all peripheral activities. And because I was out of the academic rat race I of course had the luxury of being able to pick and choose what I did. So for the past couple of decades I've been associated with the department, but not “in” it. The story of the English Department from 2000 on will be somebody else's to tell.

If I did decide to write about our department now, though, I'd probably start in the same way I started a few years ago when I first had the idea of writing a history of the department. I'd interview graduates. And I think what would interest me in particular now would be the ripple effect – what our graduates do, how they've spread out into all sorts of different areas of activities over the past decades, how they've contributed to the society. I do know the stories of a few of them, and they're fascinating. Most of us are aware to at least a certain extent of former students who've gone on to be university teachers. They're found everywhere – in our department and the English Department at the Faculty of Education, in English Departments elsewhere in the Czech Republic, in English Departments in the UK, the United States and other countries. And of course in departments in other disciplines – again, at MU, other Czech universities and abroad. Then there are the countless graduates who've become teachers, and several who've started up their own language schools. But I suspect that most of our graduates end up beyond the educational sphere. Just to list a few areas I'm personally aware of – business, real estate, law, the IT sector, politics (local so far, but who knows?), diplomacy, journalism, other media, the visual arts, music, publishing, translating. And these are just off the top of my head.

To my mind, teaching – at least in the humanities – isn't so much about passing on knowledge as about fostering a curiosity about knowledge, a realization of the importance of knowledge, and an awareness that this can only be satisfied in an open, questioning, tolerant society. And one of the mysteries of teaching is that you never really know what your students have picked up from you, how much you've influenced them in their careers or their lives. So the question I'd be asking if I was to write about our department now would be: “What are our graduates doing now?” And how much of what they're doing now stems, at least in part, from what they absorbed during their time as our students. You may say this is just a personal interest, but I think it's more – reaching out to them like this might promote self-reflection and raise important questions about what the department is doing, and in the long run could perhaps lead to new forms of cooperation with our alumnae and alumni. But that sounds like a whole new story ...

Opiano.

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