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APOLOGY OF AN OLD COOT

Edward Cole

Because I needed the extra days to hunt up the carbon paper for my rusty Underwood, I am deeply obliged to the editors of the *Review* for giving me considerable time in which to write a reply to the cooties. By the way, in my dictionary (also an ancient, non-interactive model) a cootie is a head-louse, but a coot is a harmless and inoffensive aquatic bird. While I am sure that the mismatch between these eponymous totems is entirely accidental, it may at least be emblematic of something.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the many old coots and cootesses who helped me write "Eclectic Polytechnic."* Although I am honored to be considered its author, I must confess that not one word of it is truly original: I overheard it all in conversations with my peers, who will readily recognize their own contributions. So, if I am to be brought down on the wing, it is because there is always a tendency to shoot the messenger.

In fact, I am quite amazed that "Eclectic Polytechnic" has drawn the fire of our junior colleagues. Written for students at the behest of students, it was not couched in the lofty and arcane prose, etc. etc., which is usually employed in appeals to the faculty intellect. It is rather as if one arrived to play a little solo for the Allendale Book Club only to find in the audience the music critics of the *New York Times*. I assure you that I am, in fact, quite capable of writing on a higher level and that had I only known that you, ladies and gentlemen, were to be my audience, why then But enough of this.

Let us take the cooties' points one by one. I am touched that they think that it is we who have established the standards and expectations which are causing them such vexation. Ah, if only that were the case. Let me ask you old cootesses and coots: wouldn't it have been wonderful had we been given the opportunity to shape the future of the institution which claimed our best years? But alas, it was not to be: we were finessed, snookered at every turn, co-opted and left out of the loop. I'm afraid that the cooties will have to direct their gratitude to our real masters, the administrators. It is they who will have the honor of appearing at the bar of history on the Day of Assessment. We will be quite left out of it, I fear.

But perhaps I did overreach myself a bit in criticizing the cooties' privileges. Really, no cynicism was intended. I must reassure you: my years at Grand Valley have taught me that sincerity and goodness prevail wherever wisdom is diligently sought. All that research, writing, and especially conferencing—how could I have forgotten it? No wonder the cooties can not teach the normal class load. They were trained not to do it, and at pretty good grad schools, too. We who came here from the diploma-mills of the past often forget that, unlike us, the cooties know how to do

research, how to write, and how to deliver scholarly papers. My knuckles are fairly grinding into my forehead as I write this. Will I ever be forgiven?

Yes, the direction has changed. The paradigm has shifted. All our pomp of yesterday is one with Ninevah and Tyre. I have even heard rumors to the effect that, in accordance with the new standards, especially of professional behavior, our old anthem, "Hail to Thee Grand Valley," is to be replaced by the "Theme from Snake-Pit," a tune entirely in harmony with the forces that are building us anew from the inside. Great careers are even now in the making, and to all of West Michigan we shall proclaim: Look upon our works, ye Mighty, and despair!

* I must also thank a few others for their contributions: viz., Peter Chaadaev, Fyodor Dostoevsky, Rudyard Kipling, Percy Bysshe Shelley, Mikhail Bakhtin, and Rodney Dangerfield.