

[Oleanna](#) Role-Playing.

Essay by Richard X. Thripp.

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This is a hypothetical letter, written for John from [Oleanna](#) by Richard X. Thripp, a professor in an adjacent office who eavesdropped on the play. This may serve well for character analysis, or to inspire you to write some mandatory essay. I don't know what edition I got the line numbers from, unfortunately.

To my esteemed colleagues in the tenurial committee,

In the eleven years I have known Professor John, he has been a truly compassionate teacher. Though cynical with his claims of college being no more than a “virtual warehousing of the young” (1375), I and many others have respected his views as healthy skepticism to the educational system. Being that our offices are adjacent, I overheard him counsel his student, Carol, on educational theory: “I'm talking to you as I'd talk to my son . . . I don't know how to do it, other than to be personal” (1377). This seems reasonable, but the way he goes on to “teach” her the class is not right; he tells her “your grade for the whole term is an A,” but only “if you will come back and meet with me,” and to “forget about the paper” that all his other students must write (1380). He says “we'll break [the rules]” and that “we won't tell anybody” because “I like you” (1380). Even if he does have her best interests at heart, he should not play favorites or support such deviance, and he is doing a disservice to the students that legitimately pass the course, while setting a bad example for Carol.

I became concerned on Carol's second visit, when she shouted “LET ME GO. LET ME

GO. WOULD SOMEBODY HELP ME?” (1390). I tried to chase John down to question him, but he was too busy on his phone, talking of some important meeting. While this may seem illogical, my fears of his misconduct were diminished when on Carol's third visit to John's office, she announced to him: “you tried to rape me . . . you 'pressed' your body into me” (1397). What I can only see in both cases are vengeful taunts on her part. If he indeed attempted rape, she would have been too fearful to return to his office. Provoking him with such an accusation while in his office, alone with him, is ridiculous. Her very actions disqualify her claims. What was mere detainment in the hope of completing a discussion, she claims to be “battery . . . and attempted rape” (1397). John was not right to restrain Carol. But to claim it an assault is worse. It is not merely slander against John, but an injustice to all the women who must go through the emotional trauma of a real sexual assault. Carol is bringing them down with her hyped accusations.

We have high standards for our students; we have even higher standards for our faculty. John is at fault for over-stepping his bounds as a professor and acting in ways that can be construed as sexual advances. “The rich copulate less often than the poor” (1382) is no comment to make to a young student in a clustered office. Carol is guilty for accusing John of rape, which is nowhere as far as he went; the case will be thrown out by any fair-minded jury, merely for the reason that she has shown no fear of the man whom she claims assaulted her.

My recommendation is to deny John's tenure and ask him to write a letter of apology for his behavior—namely, for ignoring his “responsibility to the young” (1394) by flirting with and making distasteful remarks to his student, and offering to give a high grade on a basis other than academic merit. We cannot promise a lifetime position to someone who is contrary to the ideals of higher education. Should he recognize his mistake, I am in favor of tenurial re-evaluation after a probationary period of one year.

There is another important subject I must address: Carol complains of the unbalanced power in the college, saying, “the thing which you find so cruel is the selfsame process of selection I, and my group, go through every day of our lives. In admittance to school. In our tests, in our class rankings” (1394). Though it may be unfortunate, that is life. As an institution of learning, we can only measure what we can test you on. Now, where this goes too far is when instructors help or hurt students on their own biases, such as her example of “one capricious or inventive answer on our parts, which, perhaps, you don't find amusing” (1394) being the reason to be given a bad grade. That, none of us condone, and it is the very reason we have academic mediation and conflict resolution departments, anonymous reporting of instructors' misconduct, and even procedures as basic as our mid-term instructor evaluations, where the students give direct and risk-free feedback, even if for something as small as unenthusiastic teaching or unfocused course material. While John writes that education is “prolonged and systematic hazing” (1383), we must remember that as a young man, he went through the same hazing himself, as did our other faculty, many slaving years to obtain a doctorate or Master's degree. Would we tell a mother that it is unfair that she orders her children to time-outs, but does not subject herself to them? It is just as unreasonable to say that our professors should be subject to a the same grading process as our students—they have already proven themselves through decades of learning and experience. All our students attend here by choice, and if they can only see our system as unfair and dispossessing, they are free to go without a college education or attend elsewhere, though they will find that we are as fair as any other institution.

Sincerely,

Richard X. Thripp

Associate Professor of Information Studies

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