

# opinion/editorial

## Winter wonderland turns into endless days of ennui

If, as T.S. Eliot said, "April is the cruellest month," January, February and March must be the most boring.

These cold, gray winter days seem to have been cloned from one master day, the coldest, grayest one to be found. The parade of identical days seems to have been marching by forever and the end is not yet on the horizon.

Snow that fell over a month ago is still on the ground. It is every color

but white. Temperatures have been such that there hasn't been as much as a thin trickle of water in the streets.

This kind of weather preys on the mind after a while. Spirits sink, immunities lower and the flu finds easy access to vulnerable bodies. This kind of winter causes all kinds of irritating ailments: aching shoulders from the daily burden of heavy coats; rashes from the ever-present wool scarf; tender, red noses from

continuous blowing and sniffing.

It is a time of impatience. Temperers are quick. Crying comes easier for the sentimental. Laughing comes harder for the jolly.

Spring and summer become vague concepts. Even the most recent ones seem like hazy dreams upon retrospection. There are people who pray for flowers. There are people who make rash promises for just a glimpse of something green. There are some who would kill for a robin.

We are halfway through the ordeal. If we're lucky, in a couple of weeks the snow will begin to melt. A few more weeks after that the buds will start appearing. From there it's all downhill.

But until then we'll have to be content to just stay inside, staring at the golf clubs in the corner or the fishing rods on the wall, dreaming of something that seems 100 years away.

## Gypsy thief heals Ophelia's personal power outage

Marianne had a personal power outage earlier in the week. She clung to her bed like it was the last bit of her broken boat, tossing and turning on the open sea with no land in sight.

When the fever dreams set in late Tuesday, she couldn't tell the difference between the waking static and the dead air that was her sleep. She looked through this dirty window at her own inability to cope, her fecklessness and her desire just to expire and sunk deeper into her pillow. The end was not in sight.

He slipped in shortly before midnight with cigarettes, coffee and sympathy. Looking down at the crumpled figure on the bed, he fought a wave of his own weariness and gently woke her. Finding no words adequate, he silently took her to the

shower and washed her hair, and then patted her dry. For a brief second he thought he saw someone he recognized. They exchanged a smile and a hug and he tossed her a robe.

**michael zangari**

She sat opposite him in the desk chair. At her feet was the collected debris of the previous week. With her foot she moved a side several sketches, a rose here, and abstract here, several pages of prose scratched out or crumpled, an empty package of cigarettes, a dog-eared copy of a book and her journal. With some effort she looked up as if searching for something and, not finding

it at her feet, looked around the room. Her eyes rested on the window, the frost dispersing the lamplight from the street. "Hey Ophelia," he said softly.

She recognized the comment for what it was, not subtle but not unkind.

"That makes you Hamlet, right?" she countered.

Caught in his own move he blushed.

"No," he said, "that doesn't make me Hamlet."

### Heavy silence

He made her clean up the apartment, and together they did the dishes. Afterward the silence became oppressive, and he felt the need to leave.

"I'll give you a wake-up call in the morning," he said. "You know what you're going to have to do to keep it together this

week. You've done it enough for other people, you can do it for yourself."

"You can always stay and wake me up," she said quietly.

He smiled and sadly shook his head.

"No," he said, "I don't think that's such a good idea."

Taking his hand she turned it over and with a wet pen drew an impressionistic rose on his palm. She shaded it and kissed him on the cheek.

Turning toward the bed again she "I'm not crazy."

"I know," he said. Finding no other words he said, "Be well," like it would heal some invisible wounds. He slipped out the door the same way he came in, one more thin gypsy thief.

## Student finds postal system root of French strike woes

Despite my view of this country's tendency to be on strike constantly, there is also a serious side to the issue.

Strikes have riddled this country's services long before this American arrived to complain about them. I imagine complaints about the strikes have been just as predominant, but the problems still exist. Since I have arrived in France, I have been exposed to mail strikes, train strikes, student strikes and even museum guard strikes.

**mary jo pitzl**

The first week of classes at the University of Bordeaux was marred (or blessed, if you wish) by a teacher strike. Students were encouraged to strike the day the education minister visited Bordeaux. They were urged to turn out for a mass demonstration in the center city, but from all indications that effort struck out.

### Threatened education

The girl down the hall moved into the dorm for the start of the school year in late October, but almost moved home when a total teacher strike in her area of study threatened to drag on without end. The teachers finally decided to go back to work, starting classes about a month and a half behind schedule.

The University of Bordeaux campus formerly was located in the center city, but moved to a more spacious suburb when enrollment surpassed existing capacities. Some Bordelaise maintain that the campus was moved to the boonies to take the steam out of the frequent student demonstrations that often complicated smooth functioning downtown.

At first the frequent strikes and demonstrations fascinated me—a sign of the strong French spirit of independence and determination not to compromise goals. I thought. But several months of living midst sporadic strikes has shown me that the French are indeed strong, but in their ability to ignore almost completely what-

ever strike is going on. As for my initial impression of the "uncompromising spirit," that applies much more appropriately to their attitude not to compromise what they are doing simply because a service is on strike than to their determination to reach a 100 percent settlement.

### Way of life

The French have apparently learned to live with the strike as a way of life. A few months ago the dorm and student restaurant were plunged into darkness just after sunset. Why? The immediate explanation was a "strike," although the real reason was overlooked electrical circuits. When the same conditions caused the Paris subway to come to an abrupt halt, commuters initially thought it was simply a "surprise strike."

Strikes happen in this country as easily as the weather changes in Nebraska, or so it seems.

The largest union in France called a "National Day of Action" a while back to protest the government's social security reforms. It encouraged all work to stop from one to 24 hours and urged public demonstrations. Post offices, factories and train stations complied. Considering it was the holiday season, the train system did not close down for an entire day but designated hours when the workers would leave their posts to strike. And the daily newspapers, from which I learned the union's intentions, ceased publication for one day to comply with the strike.

### Postal at fault

The demon of this strike phenomenon is without doubt the postal system. Their strikes, which average one every two or three weeks, have ranged from total shut-downs to "rotating strikes" wherein one service per day is suppressed.

Why this constant state of strike? Obviously employees are not content with their current conditions, be it salary, working hours or some other aspect of management's policy. In many cases "management is the national government.

However, of all the strikes I've witnessed, I've yet to see a settlement. The

post office strikes for a day, then resumes work as usual. Their protest made, they continue work without seeing any change in the conditions for which they strike.

In the United States, a strike ends with some sort of agreement between management and labor. The strike may last several weeks, even months, suffocating services and blocking smooth functioning. But the strikes eventually end and some semblance of normal order returns.

### Public protest

In France, it seems that strikes are used more as a means of public protest than as an indefinite holdout until demands are met.

The French equivalent of teacher assistant posts were cut back this fall. Teachers went on strike to show compas-

sion for their comrades. A week later teachers were back in the classrooms, but the T.A. cutback remained.

Postal employees are enraged that some of their posts have been replaced by machines, and even more angry that these machines malfunction. To protest, they call a strike. But within a day or so employees are back to work as normal. So are the machines, functioning as normally as they can.

Sporadic strike, elusive settlement. The French society has learned to function within these haphazard conditions.

Strikes do not provoke a feeling of deep fear in these hardy souls for they know that, if they only wait a day or so, services will return as normal. Even if this "normality" lasts a few days until the next strike.

