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THEY MADE ME HATE BOOKS

In a landmark case currently before the British courts, a student is suing his university for making him hate books. “I used to love reading,” Dan Spaniel [not his real name] told our reporter John Smith [not his real name].

“I used to read anything”, said Dan, “*Janet and John* books, *Just William*, *The Famous Five*. At university I enjoyed reading really big famous stuff, you know, a 500-page pot-boiler by Dickens, all six stories by Jay Austen. My parents only read *The Sun* and they were ever so impressed. But then we weren’t allowed to just talk about what happened in the story and stuff. Lecturers made us identify what they called light motives and cymbals and stuff, and interthingummy referentials, and distinguish between his story and her story, and count word-forms and llamas, and stuff.”

Dan claimed that the real problems started with a course on Quantitative Stylistics in the Linguistics Department. He had to download computer-readable versions of books, use software to count the words, and read essays with titles

such as *Taking a poem to pieces*. The legal submission – seen by the THPS – confirms this claim, and lists articles such as *The type-token vocabulary curve*, *Parts-of-speech and semantic categories in Shakespeare*, *Conrad in the computer*, and *Software for Sophocles*.

light motives
cymbals
interterthingummy
referentials

Dan’s lawyer alleges that he was previously an average student, not overly intelligent, who enjoyed a good tale, preferably with a bit of violence (not too much) and quite a lot of funny bits. His symptoms allegedly became so severe that he had to go to the University Medical Centre. He reported that every time he opened a book he became

trapped in endless cycles of repetitive behaviour, such as counting the nouns in the first paragraph. He was diagnosed as suffering from QUACKS (quantitative compulsive kučera syndrome).

Universities may shortly be flooded by similar cases, though only a few are expected to succeed. In one recent case, a student had attended a course on Solipsism in the Philosophy Department of a famous university. He alleged that he was no longer sure of his own existence and that this was making him very depressed.

The university lawyer successfully argued that, if the student himself no longer existed, he could not be depressed. In addition, this was *prima facie* evidence that he had not understood his first-year course on logic, or his second-year course on Descartes' *Cogito*, and should therefore fail his whole degree.