

lems as long as they are granted authority to implement top-down reforms.

According to Saltman, once private interests are invited to participate in educational policymaking and curricular strategies, a “circuit of privatization” begins. Business organizations offer grants and donations while demanding “accountability” based on standardization and testing models, which follow corporate strategies for further private/public partnerships. The ‘need for better test results’ becomes a battle cry to criticize all public schools, leading to business offers to help improve efficiency, test scores, and other institutional elements. After schools in the inner city underperform on the standardized tests that have been created by private organizations (and that are enforced as a sole measurement for school achievement) they are branded as failures. They are then delegated to private consultants, who are informed by research produced from venture philanthropy funds.

Saltman shows that teachers also get caught up in the circuit of privatization. Teachers whose students do not perform well on standardized tests are blamed for poor pedagogy, leading to a broad rhetoric of reform, which, in turn, promotes the firing of tenured teachers, the smashing of their unions, and the hiring of business teams to fix the so-called failing schools. In this manner, public funds are then redirected back to the private institutions that so magnanimously give to failing public schools. But by the time public funds revert back to the public school systems (*if* they revert back) certain neoliberal “standards” have already been set to continue the circuit of privatization, setting the stage for another venture philanthropic group to invest in research or a school district (such as Newark), followed

by more attempts to capture and break up public school systems.

Saltman’s book illustrates how venture philanthropy undermines the principles and practices of democratic schooling through the dismantling of public programs and the consequent privatization of teaching and learning. Perhaps the most unfortunate result of this process is that such perfidious business practices introduce a hidden curriculum that discourages concepts of public responsibility. In this way, venture philanthropy is a euphemism for investments that undermine equal access and equitable ideals. By pointing to the dynamic between venture philanthropy and our public system, Kenneth Saltman opens a new stream for critical pedagogical research. If the ‘beneficent act of giving’ is in fact what is now undermining our civic institutions and shifting critical democratic consciousness, continued work needs to be done to combat the ‘restricted economies’ of private distribution, and the ensuing circuits of privatization that derail our public spaces to serve corporate interests.

## *Fight for Your Long Day*

By Alex Kundera  
(Atticus Books, 2010)

### Reviewed by Jennifer Gaboury

While adjuncts teach the majority of college classes in the United States, they also suffer the plight of invisibility. It is easy to understand why universities are eager to keep these labor practices hidden and why workers who lack job security are scared to speak out. Most contingents who yearn to join the tenured-class keep

quiet with the hope of being one of the few who will land a tenure-track position, odds be damned. And if they do not, then it is sometimes suggested that there is something wrong with them, the evidence found in their willingness to work for degrading wages. It is not uncommon to encounter the tendency among administrators and tenured faculty to view long-time adjuncts as defective, despite the realities of the current academic marketplace. For those settled into adjunct life, there is also the difficulty and shame of calling attention to the fact that if they are overworked and underpaid, they are not always able to give students what they deserve, or do so at great cost. And rather than voice that problem, it is often cast inward.

Alex Kundera's novel *Fight for Your Long Day* is an admirable effort to speak to both these anxieties and working conditions. In it we follow Cyrus "Duffy" Duffleman, an adjunct working on four campuses scattered across Philadelphia, across a day as he migrates from class to class in order to scrape out a living, absent job security or health insurance. Some of the universities and scholars featured in the book are thinly veiled real-life examples; others such as the University of America are an amalgam representing the rise of for-profit institutions like the University of Phoenix, where faculty are paid \$10 an hour. We watch as Duffy also takes on tutoring jobs, highlighting not only the need to take on additional work to survive but also the way in which this practice further subsidizes the universities who employ him part-time.

The novel is set against the backdrop of post-9/11 culture that has prioritized war profiteering and is simultaneously privatizing institutions that serve people's

basic needs. The book features a visiting Undersecretary of Homeland Defense and a scheme to create an Institute for Homeland Security at Liberty Tech, one of Duffy's many employers. At one point, Duffy encounters protesters chanting lines that include: "War on terror is an error/no more defense contractors/our country needs tractors/jobs, training, schools and books/we don't need your terror crooks."<sup>1</sup> Kundera invokes an ongoing debate here: as the American Association of University Professors has argued, we must act now to rebuild our "collapsing faculty infrastructure" just as we need to invest to salvage crumbling bridges and highways, rather than choose the business of war.<sup>2</sup> Even without the war economy, though, today's colleges are propped up on the backs of contingent workers and Kundera captures the hollowing out of higher education.

The book is at its best marking the toll that this system takes on adjuncts who manage to remain dedicated to teaching. Duffy is rushed, disorganized, and does not take the best care of himself. Kundera uses descriptions of obesity and excess flesh across the book to identify something out of balance, both in Duffy as well as alienated post-industrial workers riding the train to and from mindless and automated employment. This also captures the elements of shame, frustration and humiliation that echo across Duffy's life as a damaged worker, unable to advocate for himself.

The pace of the book is intentionally slow as we slog along with Duffy across his grinding day. I sometimes found myself wishing for something pithier or perhaps even more heightened satire, even while appreciating Kundera's ambitious aim. The problem reminds me of

the one David Foster Wallace wrestled with in *The Pale King*, released after his recent death as an unfinished manuscript. Wallace struggled with how to portray boredom and the numbing repetition of contemporary labor in a novel with mixed success. This issue of the style of the book overlaps with the question of its intended audience. As someone who was employed for a number of years as an adjunct, I sympathize with Duffy, but I also did not learn much about the adjunct condition. If Kundera's intended reader is one who has yet to consider the plight of the contingent worker, I worry that s/he might not stick long enough with the book given its tempo and mood.

I hope that is not the case as we must find ways to shed light on the Walmartization of the academy and the threat it poses to our cultural life and economic health. There is a need for novels that generate sympathy for the professoriate, for people at the bottom of the ladder as well as those stuck in the middle who are not making six figures as some of the tenured faculty depicted here. Generally, Americans do not seem interested in the plight of workers who, in their minds, are voluntarily choosing low-paid contract work in order to keep their foot in the door of a life of the mind. This is especially true when we are talking about public institutions that would require re-investment of tax dollars in order to address the problem. This makes finding creative ways to tell these stories all the more urgent.

### Notes

1. Alex Kundera, *Fight for Your Long Day* (Kensington, MD: Atticus Books, 2010), 85.

2 "Committee Report, Tenure and Teaching-Intensive Appointments (2010)," American Association of University Professors, <http://www.aaup.org/AAUP/comm/rep/conversion.htm>, accessed: November 1, 2011.

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## Teaching Notes

### When a Text Transforms a Course: *Cowhey's Black Ants and Buddhists*

By Alison Dobrick

Each semester, at a state university in northern New Jersey, I teach multiple sections of the only course in K-5 Social Studies teaching methods in an undergraduate elementary teacher preparation program. This course is taken in conjunction with a significant amount of time spent in the field (two full days a week and two full weeks in an urban public school classroom); the following semester is devoted to full-time student teaching, before our teacher candidates join the ever more challenging competition for teaching positions in the area and throughout the country.

Three years ago, as a new professor assigned the Social Studies methods course, I immediately chose a fairly traditional textbook by an educator and major scholar whose work on multicultural education is very well respected. This is how I had always seen it done. The textbook seemed useful in terms of teach-

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