

# Alan Gribben doesn't deserve bitter hatred or hero status

**A**lan Gribben — the Great Satan or the martyr Alan of Arc? Neither, really.

Gribben, the self-proclaimed victim of the English Department's philosophical split over multiculturalism, elicits strong feelings from leftists at this University who sincerely hate his guts. Try as I might, I can't bring myself to despise him. After hearing him speak last week, I finally figured out why — he's not worth the effort.

Though his talk was advertised as being about "political correctness," by its rightist sponsors, Gribben simply whined his way through his "ordeal" at the University.

If the campus right played music like they talk politics, they would only know one chord. Everything they do is played in the key of PC and it's wearing thin —

**George Klos**  
TEXAN COLUMNIST

even for those who thought they had a valid point, once upon a time.

Besides, Gribben is too self-absorbed and ineffectual to be the symbolic victim of PC. He didn't talk about E306, his politicking of wealthy alumni or anything else significant. He went through the standard anti-PC routine of portraying himself as a real liberal.

He also described his lifelong quest for popularity and talked about how the English Department hurt his feelings even worse than his old fraternity did when they brought him up for expulsion.

At least James Duban, the right's newest cause célèbre, has

the dignity and comportment to not be such a whiner.

Gribben is the official national poster child of the ravages of PC. At a recent convention of the National Association of Scholars, he at least spoke somewhat honestly, encouraging wealthy donors to effect changes of opinion in administrators, to testify to state legislators against multicultural curricula, and to work closely with the press, all of which he did here. In the speech last week, he never mentioned any of this, perhaps because it would compromise his victim persona.

The NAS conference was probably where George Will's researchers got the Gribben story. Will did not, of course, report on Gribben's advice to the NAS, but rather regurgitated the tale of Gribben's victimization — which is probably

part of an NAS press packet.

Gribben now accepts speaking engagements around the country, and a British television crew taped his UT speech. Mighty impressive for someone who sometimes portrays himself as apolitical, depending on the audience.

In unintentional self-mockery of the right's complaint of leftist "victimology" in the academy, Gribben reveled in his victimization and ignored the important issues pertaining to his case. All he seems to be able to talk about is himself.

He did the same thing at a conference on the First Amendment in Austin a few months ago. At that conference, Gribben proposed gutting the Texas Open Records Act because people obtained access to the politicking correspondence he wrote to alum-

ni through the English Department.

Gribben admitted last week that he was so "desperate" for friendship that he accepted the solace of the right. But he's being used to further the right's political agenda in the universities. They only care to use him for what he represents — someone who can be a liberal victim of "illiberal education."

The down side of Gribben's newfound fame, in terms of its contribution to public discourse of academia, is that the rest of America will only hear one side of the story. George Will, Bill Murchison of the *Dallas Morning News* and other conservative hacks are political propagandists that use Gribben's version of events because it conforms to the message they want the public to hear, truth be damned.

As Gribben tells his story, con-

flicting accounts are not heard in the rightist milieu. Some parts of his tragic tale of victimization make no sense. Granted, quite a few things in the English Department haven't made much sense lately, but Gribben's account must be compared with the accounts of other participants in order for reasonable people to assess what the truth is. Readers of Gribben's plight will not have the essential information to determine the truth of his accusations.

Gribben hasn't really done anything to deserve the bitter hatred that some have for him. Likewise, he isn't worth turning into a hero, as the right is trying to do. Alan Gribben is simply too whiny and ultimately pathetic to be heroic, martyrlike or satanic.

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## FIRING LINE

### Department rejects diversity

As a former Ph.D. candidate in the English Department at UT, as well as a former assistant instructor, I was extremely disappointed to have missed former Professor Alan Gribben's talk last Monday.

I have deep appreciation for Professor Gribben's belief that we have "entered an academic era of heartlessness." I also have an understanding of what it means to be a victim of character assassinations. And I am deeply grateful to Gribben for being courageous enough to step forward to publicly represent what I believe to be the true face of the English Department.

Thanks to Gribben, I was essentially coerced into withdrawing from the Ph.D. program. This was, for me, only the last word in a sentence that had been composing itself for a number of years.

When I first entered the graduate program in English, I received a failing grade on an essay because I dared to criticize the New Criticism, a blatantly reactionary form of analysis; at the bottom of the last page were the professor's words: "You have been the victim of Communist propaganda. Please see me in my office."

Later, when I wrote a paper for another professor on maternal symbolism in *To the Lighthouse*, I was given a C; the professors comment, "You write like a woman." When I attempted to write an essay on homosexuality in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, a third professor suggested I withdraw from the program, move to San Francisco and become a waiter.

When I confronted a professor as to why there were no non-white, female or gay writers in his reading list for a course in contemporary American fiction, I was told by the dean of the department that the professor had reported having a "commie fag" in his class.

In general, male heterosexual professors avoided me "like the plague," while closeted lesbian, gay and bisexual professors implored me not to "rock the boat." One professor whom I did not even know met with me to insist that I find a lover, settle down, and shut up if I wished to continue in the program.

When I "came out" before the Texas Legislature to protest a potential ban on gay organizations on college campuses, my job as AI fell into jeopardy. I was shortly thereafter let go. Low evaluations

were cited, in spite of the fact that these were laden with "objective" remarks like "I don't know why I had to have a queer for a teacher."

After all, a professor of "cowboy lit" insinuated, I'd probably been sleeping with my students anyway. I hadn't, although a good friend, a female heterosexual, had been sleeping with the head of her committee at the time.

When I suggested a dissertation topic focusing on gay literature, it was met with great disapproval. When I had finished my coursework, more courses were added. In a state of despair, I literally moved to San Francisco and became a waiter.

When I recently returned from the Bay Area, I began to consider re-entering the department in order to complete my dissertation. I was told that too many years had passed.

One professor admitted that I had probably been a victim of a drastic reorganization of the department, which included the hiring of a group of reactionary professors including Gribben. Another told me that I should have expected the treatment I received for "being political," and that, although he sympathized with me, he

would not have stepped forward on my behalf. A feminist professor whom I had admired told me she had no power to do anything then or now. Finally, I was told by the professor whom I have respected the most to "follow my bliss" — somewhere else.

Thus, I am grateful to Gribben for synthesizing in a single persona remarks made by so many over a period spanning a decade. While I am heartened by the presence of younger academics — whose very real struggle against various forms of prejudice has been labeled "political correctness" — I remain grateful to Gribben for unmasking the department as I — and so many other struggling writers, critics, and teachers — knew it.

I frankly cannot imagine why Gribben was let go, except perhaps to ensure that a dirty little masquerade would be allowed to continue. I deeply understand what he means by character assassination and by "an academic era of heartlessness." I heartily encourage him to "follow his bliss" somewhere else, as I was encouraged to do.

*Randolph Conner*  
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### Don't forget your roots

J. Chung's article ("Asian assimilation too slow," *The Daily Texan*, Thursday) reflects attitudes that I hoped had been left back in middle school, before we learned to be more accepting. Reflecting the immature view that immigrants should "go back to where they came from" if they insist on bringing their culture with them, Chung advocates the complete Americanization of citizens of Asian descent.

While it is true that national pride contributes to the formation of self-identity, recognition of our ethnicity is also a potential source of pride.

Ignoring the culture and attitudes of our backgrounds is not the way we should attempt to beat the system in American society. Rejection of our past can only affect our self-identity negatively when we deny its value in our lives. If Chung is embarrassed by the effects of his heritage on the thinking of Asian-Americans today, then he has more soul-searching to do than those he so readily criticizes.

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