

Tony Curtis's 'Folk' is a breath of fresh air

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Professors tend to make it very clear that our essays should always “do something.” Our writing is meant as a means to some sort of academic end, and any paper that fails to make succinct points and to align perfectly with a predetermined thesis is destined to be covered in condescending pen marks: *take this point further, what?, unclear, what do you mean by this?* You won't understand Moby Dick unless you can tell me whether or not Scholar A's psychoanalytic reading carries weight. Remember to cite at least five sources.

In other words, we always have to make ourselves perfectly clear. Even though we often read scholarly essays and dissect them like literature, our writing isn't allowed to leave anything up to the imagination. No thematic elements, no vivid descriptions, no intentional subtlety or ambiguity.

Irish poet Tony Curtis spoke on campus yesterday, and besides being an exceptional reader and writer of poetry, he was able to connect with his audience on a much deeper level. Most importantly, he reminded us that another kind of writing exists, a kind that does the exact opposite of what academia demands of us. Normally, we're asked to take complex ideas and sort them into neat paragraphs. These paragraphs, of course, cannot be written until we've first come up with an over-arching, yet somehow specific claim. Then, we have to fight tooth and nail to defend that claim in the body of the paper. Tony, on the other hand, takes the simple, the everyday, and the seemingly straightforward, dresses it up, and gives it the attention it deserves.

His latest book, *Folk*, begins with a poem of the same name. It sort of acts as an explanation of the cover, which features an old photograph of his mother and father, standing in front of a church, both smiling and getting ready to mount a motorcycle. If months of academic writing have sucked out your soul, then you're probably already reaching for your red pen and preparing to drop the “so what?” bomb.

Well, stop.

I would encourage any lover of poetry to purchase this book. The “so what?” is inherent. You won't necessarily be able to describe *why* these poems matter, they just do. Perhaps you'll cite “entertainment” as being where the true value lies. Either way, he writes beautifully, and his latest book makes for a fulfilling reading experience.

In our essays, we have to make molehills of mountains, to take the complex and the wonderfully uncertain, to condense it and package it and serve it up to be evaluated. Tony Curtis dances circles around molehills, stares them down, and sings to them until they become mountains