

A Special Hell for English Majors

by Ron Watson

Here hope enters all who abandon ye.

—Dante

Entrence is misspelled in stone at the gate
 Alongside garbled translations from Dante.
 Time died when you did, but you are still late

After centuries circling for a parking place.
 Shakespeare's works appear in drops of rain
 That streak in hieroglyphics down the gate.

Your punishment—reading *Finnegans Wake*,
 Twice: first fueled by endless Irish latte;
 Again, while biding time and yet lagging late.

For Joyce juries you must earn oral grades,
 Turn verbal tricks like footwork into ballet.
 Fail, and you stay; pass, and you clear a gate.

You would have studied art, given the stakes:
The choice was yours and such is fate, they say;
Time now probe the plot, and don't hesitate.

You try to talk as your tongue turns to clay,
 The grand critique at-large, but in its place
 Stone teeth clatter away. You eye the gate,
 Begging to change majors. *Too late*, they say.