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## English 101

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## English 101

Naomi C. Gades

I get it:  
you like complete sentences.  
I do, too.  
In fact, my favorites have that liturgical lilt,  
handsomely balanced and perfectly parallel  
to their periodic ends, saving and savoring  
their own momentum, rolling  
into a flashy finish.

I confess:  
I like grammar,  
probably more than you.  
I like it so much I diagram sentences,  
stretching bodices taut over a wire dressmaker's form  
that reveals their shape  
for trimming and arranging.

I even took up a language that boasts  
not three tired articles, but  
whole parquet matrices of them  
to dance and trip across.

And I am very sorry your students  
do not know what a sentence is  
because they do not have the words  
subjects and subordinates,  
much less absolute and infinitive phrases  
that masquerade as independent.  
Parts of speech are not as popular as they were  
for reasons practical, pedagogical, and maybe even political,  
and that's fine. Civilization endures.

So while I wish I had the time to indulge  
in comma splices and modifiers misplaced,  
I don't. I only comment if, being so obscure,  
error distracts or confuses.  
Instead we practice pacifying the whims of  
disciplinary professors like you:  
each audience has its own demands,  
so we name them and paint by their numbers.

What matters in the end are ideas:  
the scaffolding of evidence supporting claims,  
the responsibility of citation and its consequences,  
the story of an argument.

And if they manage not to assert but to prove,  
not to collapse before apparently arbitrary expectations  
but to notice and honor them,  
and to have encountered at least a few beautiful sentences,  
then for a semester, that is enough,  
a plenty of progress.