Manifesto of a Tenured Radical

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NOTES TO THE INTRODUCTION

1. As Michael Bérubé points out in *Public Access*, the title of Roger Kimball’s *Tenured Radicals* gets some of its force from the fact that “tenure is also thought by both left and right to be antithetical to political progressivism” (22).

2. The emerging crisis in scholarly publishing has several causes, but certainly one of them is faculty members failing to work hard enough to protect library budgets. Indeed, most faculty ignore such matters. Other causes include the meteoric rise in the price of scientific journals, a pattern initiated when the late Robert Maxwell decided libraries were a captive audience for such publica-
tions and started a number of new journals (with salaried editors) that had prices ten or more times what had been traditional; Maxwell was looking for high profits and succeeded in getting them. Organized resistance from scholars and librarians at the outset might have stopped that practice. More recently, paper costs have increased much more rapidly than the rate of inflation.

Can anything be done? Decreasing library sales produce increased book prices, which in turn decrease library sales still further. The only solution is increased funding for libraries. The robber baron profits available to publishers of scientific journals need still stronger organized resistance. And finally, publication subventions may need to be far more common in the future. But many scholarly projects without significant audiences are doomed.

The solution of computerized publication is quite promising for journals but unattractive for books, since reading whole books on computer is highly unappealing and piles of printed-out pages less than convenient. Evaluating computerized publications for tenure and promotion also presents real problems, since standards of evaluation in prepublication reviews are unlikely to survive cost-free publication.

3. Arguments that tenure protects free speech are often dismissed by tenure’s opponents. Indeed, even those who support tenure could cite faculty experience during the height of McCarthyism in the 1950s to prove that tenure’s free speech guarantees may be worth little in times of national repression. At a less dramatic level, however, tenure does offer significant free speech protection. I offer this book and my professional activities promoting the positions I advocate here as evidence to support that claim. The arguments I make here are not all popular with faculty members or administrators, as responses to them have shown. I name names and make strong statements about professional practices and beliefs. In support of graduate student unionization efforts in Urbana I have published essays, written public letters, and filed a notarized affidavit. None of this makes the upper administration at Illinois happy, but the campus administration supports faculty free speech and I am reasonably well protected by tenure in any case. If I were an unprotected adjunct or part-time faculty member at many other schools, however, I could easily lose my job for these actions. The official reason might well be some other minor infraction, like turning in grades late, but the real reason would be to silence someone taking controversial positions. A recent Lingua Franca article by Emily Eakin describes me as a professor “known for his radical views.” That, and my public statements, would be all, say, a conservative religious or community college administrator would need to send me on my way. Even at my own university, moreover, I can think of departments where I would not advise an assistant professor to file an affidavit criticizing the administration unless he or she had an exceptionally strong case for tenure.
NOTES TO CHAPTER 1
1. See, for example, Baker et al., eds., *Black British Cultural Studies.*
2. At talks in the 1980s Bate was fond of opening with a salvo against deconstruction. “I don’t call it deconstruction,” he would announce, simultaneously whipping a handkerchief out of his pocket and waving it before the audience, “I call it decongestion and blow it out of my nose.”
3. See Martha Nussbaum’s *Poetic Justice* for the most recent suggestive effort to read literature as the locus of values like empathy.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 2
1. The most successful multicultural anthology of American literature is clearly *The Heath Anthology of American Literature,* under the general editorship of Paul Lauter.
2. A few years ago one of my graduate students was trying to persuade a faculty member teaching a course on the short story to include some texts by women on his all-male reading list. After some discussion of the general issues involved and suggestions of particular stories of possible interest, the faculty member asked, with a trace of irritation, where he could find the stories the student had suggested. The answer was straightforward but startling: “In the anthology you assign for your course.” Of course we have long known that including works by women and minorities in anthologies is no guarantee faculty members will assign them; some faculty members cling to the skeleton of an older anthology that remains within the body of a new one. But this anecdote extends the uncertainty about how anthologies will be used to a new level—uncertainty about whether teachers will even read the new texts made available to them.
3. The best review of the issue of evaluation is Barbara Herrnstein Smith’s *Contingencies of Value.* For an application of this problem to a specific historical context see my *Repression and Recovery.* Although this is not the place for a full discussion of the issue, I should at least confirm that I believe value is not intrinsic to literary works but rather culturally constructed and variable. Editing broadly multicultural works requires recognizing that literature can serve different cultural functions and thus at least maintaining multiple standards of evaluation simultaneously. Editing multicultural anthologies thus requires subjecting supposedly permanent notions of value to the contingencies of history. On the question of quality versus history see Paul Lauter’s letter to the editor of the *New Criterion.*
4. Langston Hughes, “White Shadows.”

NOTES TO CHAPTER 3
1. For that reading see Walter Benn Michaels, “The New Modernism.”
2. See Hayden White’s *Tropics of Discourse, Metahistory,* and *The Content of the Form.*
3. A number of reviews of *Repression and Recovery* have taken up the bait I set down and paid some attention to H. H. Lewis. My favorite passage is in a 1991 review by David Perkins: “When I read [H. H. Lewis’s ‘Thinking of Russia’] I remember Pisarev's remark that potatoes are better than Shakespeare. Of course they are if you lack potatoes, and such a stanza may also have its utilitarian value. Since H. H. Lewis wrote this in verse, I’m willing to call it a poem. It is part of our literary and cultural past, and I am interested in it, the more so since, perhaps, it stirred many people. But to claim, as Nelson does, that it has literary merit, is incredible . . .” (p. 158).

**NOTES TO CHAPTER 4**


2. One such reader was apparently Diane Elam, in a 1992 paper “Doing Justice to Feminism”:

> There is a certain tendency in the American academy to police what is and is not allowed to be called cultural studies. I can think of no better example of this than Cary Nelson’s essay ‘Always Already Cultural Studies.’ On the one hand, Nelson stresses that cultural studies is not supposed to have a fixed methodology, although it does have no less than fourteen [now sixteen] different points to which it ideally adheres. On the other hand, despite his claims for the variety of shapes cultural studies can take, Nelson seems to have a very firm (and fixed) idea of just what does and does not constitute cultural studies. Thus, he takes to task a number of people for believing that they are doing cultural studies when they are not following the tradition that Nelson has in mind. . . . Indeed, there is
a curious colonial allegiance in Nelson’s stringent—even strident—
defense of a strictly British heritage for cultural studies. . . . I think
Nelson’s assumption that not all studies of culture are cultural
studies sets up an unnecessary boundary. That both Nelson and
Allan Bloom would claim to be studying culture—with dramatically
different results—would seem to me to indicate what is at stake in
the study of culture. If I have more sympathy in the long run with
Cary Nelson than with Allan Bloom, it’s because the former leaves
the question of culture more open than Bloom does, although
Nelson’s weakness is at times to want to slip into being a left-wing
Allan Bloom. (5–6)

Obviously, I am not eager to be seen as policing cultural studies, an activ-
ity that is quite impossible in any case. With so many competing versions of
cultural studies evident in print, the field has passed the point where it could
be uniformly policed. Of course individual reviewers and groups of reviewers
will police their own venues, but that is always the case. My aim is to help sus-
tain a continuing debate about what cultural studies is, a debate that I see as a
necessary part of its self-definition and social effectivity. I persist in thinking
that, if people actually read and think about the individual points in my mani-
festos, as opposed to reacting viscerally to the manifesto form, they will find it
open to a wide range of different kinds of writing. Of course my insistence
on some familiarity with the British cultural studies tradition may seem more
restrictive, but many of the points in the manifesto make rather different
sorts of demands of the field. As to the demand that people familiarize them-
selves with the British cultural studies tradition and conceptualize its relation-
ship with their own work, I am not certain why any responsible intellectual
would feel colonized or coerced by an injunction to read and think.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 5

2. For an extended analysis of white poets taking up the issue of race, see Aldon
   Lynn Nielsen, Reading Race: White American Poets and the Racial Discourse in
   the Twentieth Century. Two important anthologies to consult are Langston
   Hughes and Arna Bontemps, eds., The Poetry of the Negro, which includes a
   section of “tributary poems by non-negroes,” and Maureen Honey, ed., Shad-
   owed Dreams: Women’s Poetry of the Harlem Renaissance.

   I have also taught a unit on race in modern American poetry in which I as-
   sign a group of poems by black and white poets without identifying the race
   of the poet until after we complete part of the discussion. My list of poems
   for that assignment was: Maxwell Bodenheim, “Negroes,” Kay Boyle, “A
   Communication to Nancy Cunard,” Sterling Brown, “Scotty Has His Say,”
NOTES TO CHAPTER 6

1. People wishing to purchase (for educational use) a copy of the videotape of “The Politics of Race and Sex on Campus” as broadcast on C-Span may order it (tape no. 03781) from:
   Public Affairs Video Archives
   School of Liberal Arts
   Purdue University
   West Lafayette, Indiana 47907

Throughout this paper, transcriptions are my own.

2. See, for example, Paul Lauter’s “‘Political Correctness’ and the Attack on American Colleges.”


4. A transcript of this firing line debate may be ordered from:
   Firing Line Debate
   P.O. Box 5966
   Columbia, South Carolina 29250

5. One passage from Silber’s remarks is worth quoting because it suggests some of the reasons why conservatives find recent skepticism in theory so disturbing. In Silber’s case it also helps explain why, as president of Boston University, he feels free to terminate faculty members who express such views:

   What bothers me is how one maintains any function for the university when we reduce the pursuit of truth and the claim of the capacity to transcend the individual and to know other minds, that people come up with the thesis that our knowledge is dependent on our perspective as either a male or a female, as a member of one race or another race, as a member of one class or another class, or as a person living in a period of history as opposed to another. The
denial of transcendence that is implicit in all these statements is inimicable to the very life of the mind and to the very function of the university.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 7


2. See Michele Collison, “Hate-Speech Code at U. of Wisconsin Voided by Court.” There was a subsequent effort at Wisconsin to rewrite the hate speech code more narrowly.

3. Leon Botstein, president of Bard College, spoke at a special Firing Line debate titled “Resolved: Freedom of Thought Is in Danger on American Campuses.” The debate was broadcast on educational television on 6 September 1991.

4. Brown University’s decision to expel Douglas Hann was widely reported. See, for example, the 25 February 1991 issue of *U.S. News and World Report*. It was also widely debated, despite the probability that the whole story was never fully revealed. For quotations from a variety of media responses and for the Brown University president’s defense of his actions see the May 1991 issue of *Brown Alumni Monthly*. Also see Nan Hunter, “A Response on Hate Speech,” paper presented at a Brooklyn College of Law conference on hate speech on 10 April 1991.

5. For a commentary on the antipornography movement that places it in the broader context of differing feminist positions on sexuality see Ann Ferguson et al., “Forum: The Feminist Sexuality Debates.” This forum includes citations to contemporary reactions to the antipornography legislation proposed in Minneapolis. Also see the chapter “The Popularity of Pornography,” in Andrew Ross, *No Respect: Intellectuals and Popular Culture*.


NOTES TO CHAPTER 8

1. The most useful overviews of the Left in America are the massive two-volume *Socialism and American Life*, ed. Donald Drew Egbert and Stow Persons and
the Encyclopedia of the American Left, ed. Mari Jo Buhle, Paul Buhle, and Dan Georgakas.


4. Edwin Rolfe, Collected Poems. All quotations by Rolfe are taken from this edition and are cited parenthetically by page number.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 9

1. The final paragraph of Brodhead’s letter has been distributed to members of the press, some of whom, including Emily Eakin, have referred to it and quoted phrases from it in their stories. Yale faculty member Michael Denning warned the student about the letter (and described it at a public rally) after reading her dossier when it was sent to his department (American Studies). At that point she wisely had the letter removed. Yale’s English department, incredibly enough, had supposedly reviewed the dossier and approved it for distribution with Brodhead’s letter included. The student knew that Brodhead disapproved of her union activity and thus had reason to be anxious about his letter, but she had no idea it would be so negative. I had a photocopy of the full letter, along with copies of all other letters referred to here, available to me while I was writing this chapter. Let me say, finally, that the first two paragraphs of Brodhead’s letter, though positive, follow a standard form for lazy writers of recommendations who are not members of a student’s doctoral committee; he praises the seminar papers she wrote years ago but makes no effort to familiarize himself with her dissertation.

2. Yale’s “Daily Themes” course was in fact the subject of a number of GESO letters, beginning with letters sent to Yale administrators. The course was also the subject of numerous letters and columns in campus newspapers, so the controversy surrounding its funding was no secret. The GESO letter to Perry Bass, a donor who helped fund the course, may be read in its entirety in note 7 to chapter 12 of Manifesto. What had happened was that graduate students in 1993 had urged Yale to recognize that tutors were spending ten hours a week on the course, not the five hours for which they were being paid. The administration agreed and raised the pay scale. Then the English department decided the extra $20,000 a year was too expensive and decided to raise the number of students being tutored by each instructor, thereby of course throwing the hours off again and making graduate assistants once again work beyond the hours for which they were being paid. It was at that point, in February 1994, that the whole issue broke into public debate.
The graduate student in question had actually signed two letters about the course on behalf of GESO—the February 24 letter to Perry Bass to which Brodhead refers and a letter to a group of course alumni, which she wrote herself and sent out from GESO as part of the group effort; she wrote the second letter (in March) individually because she was a Yale graduate and GESO felt having one of its members who was a Yale graduate express concern was a good strategy. That letter lays out the recent history of the course and urges alumni to express support for its adequate funding.

Why anyone would get exercised about either of these letters is hard to guess. They are certainly not rabble-rousing; they seem a responsible effort to get donors and alumni involved in supporting full funding for “Daily Themes,” nothing more. They make no threats and ask no threats of their addressees. Unlike conservative efforts to involve alumni, they do not suggest involvement in course content or recommend withdrawing gifts.


NOTES TO CHAPTER 10
1. See Ernst Benjamin, “A Faculty Response to the Fiscal Crisis: From Defense to Offense.”
2. About fifty of these courses—remedial composition courses that require extensive one-on-one tutorial work—count as two courses each.
3. Faculty members at Illinois, for example, have their health insurance paid for them, whereas graduate students do not. The main benefit graduate students receive is free tuition, a benefit only economically meaningful if there are jobs available for new Ph.D.s. One of the notable effects of the salary differential is that most graduate students find it impossible to get through the summer without taking an extra job. Faculty members, on the other hand, can usually spend the summer reading and writing. Given that the teaching responsibilities are comparable (except for those faculty who take on extra tasks, like directing theses), this one economic inequity seems particularly galling.
4. Making this calculation for the campus as a whole would be more difficult. In my department, where most courses are limited to twelve to thirty-six students, graduate students go through a training program and then, for the most part, teach their own independent courses. Depending on the level of the course, there are some constraints on the course syllabus, but other than that the responsibility is the graduate student’s alone. Thus the graduate student meets all classes, gives all lectures, and grades all assignments. To assign faculty members to teach the courses would require a straightforward one-for-one replacement. The situation is more complicated for those departments that offer very large lecture courses where the graduate students meet discus-
sion sections and grade exams. That might require changing the nature of the courses taught. The costs there too would be considerable. A calculation for the university as a whole would also have to take into account the sometimes wide disciplinary differences in faculty salaries. A very rough estimate is that replacing graduate assistants with faculty members would cost the campus at least $80 million. My thanks to Rene Wahlfeldt for providing me with the raw data on which my calculations are based; she is not, of course, responsible for any of my conclusions.

5. The ideology of professionalism not only turns graduate student rage inward; it also discourages them from unionizing and using the potential economic power they have.

6. See the list of recommendations for graduate programs in the introduction to Michael Bérubé and Cary Nelson, eds., *Higher Education under Fire: Politics, Economics, and the Crisis of the Humanities*.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 11

1. On the unpredictable and unreadable character of the market see Terry Caeser’s “Getting Hired.”


4. In their 1996 review essay “Public Access,” Neilsen and Meyerson also make the ill-informed and rather paranoid argument that those who argue for closing marginal programs stand to gain professionally and financially! How that is supposed to happen I cannot imagine. They thus attack the introduction I wrote with Michael Bérubé to *Higher Education under Fire*: “Although we don’t mean to impugn their motives, it’s worth noting that this proposal requires no sacrifice of Bérubé and Nelson. In fact, it works to their advantage, there being little chance that the graduate program at the University of Illinois would be closed. In addition, their status (both in professional reputation and financial reward) is likely to be enhanced” (272).

Well, the program at Illinois is indeed unlikely to be closed, but it has been radically downsized. In the fall of 1970, when I arrived on campus, there were 268 graduate students in residence in my department. In the fall of 1995 the number had fallen to 117. In the fall of 1970 we admitted 33 new students, in the fall of 1995 we admitted 19. These numbers have been deliberately reduced in a gradual fashion over twenty-five years.

The only personal benefit I could receive from closing other programs would be increased chances for my Ph.D. students to get jobs, but we cannot close enough programs to make this increased chance statistically relevant. Closing graduate programs in fact makes me less mobile; it reduces the job market for senior research faculty and thus reduces the only real opportunity I would have for measurable financial gain. Now if we could close the English
Ph.D. programs at Berkeley, Chicago, Duke, Harvard, Hopkins, UC-Irvine, Princeton, UCLA, and Yale, then Illinois would shoot up in the rankings and my department and I as a member of the graduate faculty would gain in prestige, but I did say close marginal programs, which rumor has it these are not. Neilson and Meyerson would be well advised to test their fantasies against the material world.

By the way, it is worth noting that in 1970 my department had another 40 Ph.D. candidates no longer in residence; they had caught the job wave of the 1960s boom years and landed tenure-track jobs before finishing their Ph.D.s.


NOTES TO CHAPTER 12

1. For a debate about job application requirements, see the letters by Cary Nelson, Eric Sundquist, and Steven Watt in, respectively, the Summer 1995, Fall 1995, and Spring 1996 issues of the *MLA Newsletter*.

2. It is notable that the AAUP’s resolution was adopted despite the objection of a number of faculty members in Yale’s AAUP chapter. Eager to build membership in the Yale chapter, the national organization preferred to avoid a confrontation. Meanwhile, the rest of Connecticut’s higher education community, heavily unionized and no great admirers of Yale, were ready to censure Yale’s AAUP chapter if they had taken a formal stand against graduate assistant collective bargaining rights. It is significant that the AAUP’s national office stood by its principles and issued the statement I reprint here.

3. I was obviously not present at this meeting. My sources are several tenured faculty members whom I interviewed by phone. I felt it important to limit my conversations to tenured faculty in the light of Yale’s keen interest in finding targets for reprisals. Elsewhere in the essay I draw on insights and observations gained from conversations with numerous GESO members over a period of two years. I have decided it would be best not to name any of these people.

4. See the letter Peterson coauthored with Ruth Bernard Yeazell in the February 1996 MLA mailing about the resolution censuring Yale. There they write “The university’s decision not to reappoint those who have refused to fulfill their responsibilities as teachers seems to us altogether just and appropriate” (p. 12).

5. One reason administrators make this argument at a large research university has nothing to do with its truth or falsehood. They are actually protecting constituencies worried about the financial cost of unionization. Thus scientists may worry about the number of hours assistants actually work in their labs, or about the cost of increased benefits. Anything that increases the size of their grant requests may make them less competitive than campuses that
do not monitor research assistant working hours or conditions closely or that offer fewer benefits. Since administrators cannot mount an argument against fairness by saying it’s too expensive, they claim instead that students are not employees.

6. The passage in Patterson’s letter reads: “The university administration, whose leaders are all Yale faculty, has consistently refused to recognize them [GESO] as a union, not only because it does not believe this to be an appropriate relationship between students and faculty in a non-profit organization, but also because GESO has always been a wing of Locals 34 and 35 of the Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees International Union, who draw their membership from the dining workers in the colleges and other support staff. Yale is not prepared to negotiate academic policy, such as the structure of the teaching program or class size, with the Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees International Union. Yale administrators have made it perfectly clear that they have no objection to working with an elected graduate student organization other than GESO, one that is not tied to the non-academic unions on campus” (6).

7. Here, in its entirety, is the 24 February 1994 GESO letter to Texas donor Perry Bass, cosigned by four union members, that produced the collective anger of Brodhead, Homans, and Patterson:

Dear Mr. Bass,

We write to inform you of a recent and disturbing change in one of Yale’s most successful courses. “Daily Themes,” the tutorial writing class underwritten by the Bass Writing Program at Yale, has been “down-sized,” and as former tutors for the course we feel bound to speak up in its defense. The number of tutors for Daily Themes has been cut from twenty to ten, student enrollment has been cut from one hundred to 75, and tutors now teach seven students for the same pay that last year’s Graduate School Dean (current Yale President Richard Levin) recommended for teaching four students. All this to save approximately $20,000 per year.

Last Spring, Yale’s Graduate School discovered how much work it takes for a tutor to give four students the kind of serious attention that our undergraduates expect from Daily Themes. Concerned that the excellence of the course was in danger, Levin made sure that last year, at least, tutors would be paid for the actual amount of work they did. But this year the English Department decided that it could not afford the additional $20,000 per year that it would cost to keep doing this.

So the Department restructured Daily Themes. Tutors are now instructed to read each theme only once, without comments in the margins and without reviewing earlier work. According to the new
guidelines for the course, tutors need not even read the themes in advance: they simply look quickly at the week’s five essays before meeting with the student to ask the questions that come to mind. That’s it. Further, recent guidelines direct tutors to simplify their evaluations of students’ progress in the course by “discarding as dross over 90% of daily efforts.”

In the past, the long wait-list for Daily Themes has been largely unneeded. Not this year. Even though the course began with 25 fewer slots, the Department has had to use the entire wait-list and even offer admission to students below the wait-list. And enrollment is still dropping. Word travels fast among Yale undergraduates, and the word on Daily Themes is, It’s not what it used to be.

As former Daily Themes tutors, we ask you to help rescue this unique and important pedagogical tradition. We know that President Richard Levin and the rest of Yale’s leaders hold your opinion in the highest regard, and we urge you to remind them that Daily Themes is too successful and too important to become just another casualty in the budget-cutting war. Please feel free to contact us with any questions.

8. My Chicago anecdote reports events as the interviewee related them to me. Thus in some (though not all) of the anecdotes in this chapter, I have had to rely on testimony from other people. In other cases, including the SUNY-Buffalo story, I had first-hand knowledge. I am not, needless to say, a committee empowered to investigate departmental practices, so there is certainly potential for not representing all points of view in the way I have operated here. Of course I believe professional organizations should have such committees; if these stories lead people to evaluate their own practices and to discuss the possibility of professional ethics committees, then they will have served their function.