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BALANCING BOOKS

The Role of Publication in Promotion and Tenure

Michael Spooner
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Of making many books there is no end,
and much study is a weariness of the flesh.
—Ecclesiastes

I never intended a career in publishing. In 1983, I was in grad school, trying to redeem an M.A. in literature by getting a more socially responsible M.A. in Teaching ESL, when somehow there was a baby on the way. I decided it was really my job to find a real job, and I happened into one in publishing. In those days, I wasn't much of a people person, so the post of acquisitions editor had plenty of appeal. Acquisitions editors are the ones, as Dogbert says, who can reject your life's work with a gesture and a witty remark. I wasn't the worst of them, either. I found letters from the guys before me:

"Dear Professor, I could never in good conscience inflict your manuscript on the world."

"Dear Professor, You ask me to debase our reputation for excellence."

"Dear Professor, I would rather shoot myself than publish this."

That last remark reminds me of something Annie Dillard writes in her book *The Writing Life* (1989). "Why not shoot yourself" she asks, instead of sending one more book into the world? I don't love every line of Annie Dillard, as some readers do, but this bit of reflection keeps coming back to me. I'll give you the whole comment here:

Your manuscript, on which you lavish such care, has no needs or wishes; it knows you not. Nor does anyone need your manuscript; everyone needs shoes more. There are many

manuscripts already—worthy ones, intelligent and powerful ones. If you believed *Paradise Lost* to be excellent, would you buy it? Why not shoot yourself, actually, rather than finish one more excellent manuscript on which to gag the world? (12)

The answer to this question, for the academic writer, is that I must finish one more manuscript on which to gag the world, or I won't get tenure. In fact, I'd better have an article or two in print every year, plus conference presentations and committee work, and I would do well to have a book contract in hand before I go up for promotion, or it's possible that I just won't make it. At some institutions, in some departments, one book isn't enough these days; there must now be two before your committee, your chair, your dean, your provost can approve your promotion.

But why not shoot yourself is a disingenuous question, because Annie Dillard's real purpose is not to disrespect the work of writing but to romanticize it, and for this I really can't trash her enough. Annie Dillard *loves* being a writer, and she's a good one, and she's enriched the lives of many readers, and I don't fault her for any of that. But I get the sense that, even more than being a writer, what she loves is to believe that "the writing life," her life, is a sort of mystical priesthood, more destiny than occupation, and that when one lives it properly, tormentedly, one loses oneself completely to it. In this view, she joins the Romantic poets, of course, and the majority of teenage creative writing students. You may remember she ends her book with the story of a brilliant stunt pilot who dies in a mid-performance accident, his family watching from the bleachers. She leaves the comparison tacit, but still, that's her model for the life of writing. Certainly, to her, the writing life could never be described as a life deliberately chosen by a middle-income educated grownup with a three-three teaching load and orders to create an excellent c.v. on which to gag the world, or lose your job. Why not shoot yourself, indeed? What an artistic last line that would be for your vita. What a romantic full stop.

We have to have more models of The Writing Life than this, and the life of a college professor with a seventy-five percent teaching assignment has to be one of them. Writing doesn't have to be a religious vocation; publication doesn't have to be a martyrdom.

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I didn't mean to suggest that editors twenty years ago were all rude and angry persons like Dogbert. As I recall, in fact, it was less preferable to be rude than to be aloof; and to develop the cocked

eyebrow, the bemused look, was item one or two in most of our job descriptions. (Smoking a pipe was in there, too, as was the bottle in the desk drawer.) Any therapist will tell you that these are the defenses of an insecure soul. But an editor was the upper half of the sacred sadomasochistic circle of publishing, and we needed these ego defenses. We needed defense against the grudges of rejected authors, and we needed insulation from the self-doubt that must (or should) plague anyone whose primary role is judgment. We were guardians of a certain kind of access, to whom throngs of academic authors would apply, and it was taken for granted that admitting one scholarly book meant judging fifteen and rejecting fourteen.

Rejection is one of many things that are different today in the culture of scholarly publishing. In this paper, I want to think aloud about three that are rather more important—three that relate especially to that foolish, hollow, corny slogan we’ve pasted on the rear bumper of academe, “publish or perish.” First, I want to notice the explosion of books since 1980; second, let’s talk about peer review and the tenure/promotion process; third, the idea of liberal education has a place here; and, for extra credit, let’s think about balance as a social value and a matter of personal health.

To be sure we understand this last one—balance—I have to tell you a story as we go along. This is a traditional story, a Coyote story, and it used to be told by several of the First Nations of the northern Great Plains. It’s sometimes called “Eye Juggler.” I’ve read a Mandan version of it, a Cheyenne version, and I believe the Lakota- and Dakota-speaking cultures also told a few versions of it. In the 1890s, a Cheyenne fellow told the story to a white folklorist, who then published it in the *Journal of American Folklore* (Kroeber). What’s especially fun about this version is that evidently in Cheyenne the words “coyote” and “white man” are very very similar. It’s not clear which word the Cheyenne storyteller was using. With traditional stories, of course, there isn’t a pure original, but I’ll try to stay close to the Cheyenne source I’ve read.

White Man was going along and he came across a fellow who had popped out his eyes and had thrown them up into a tree.

—Wow, said White Man. I bet you can see everything from up there. I want to learn that trick.

The man called his eyes back into his head

—Eyes come back!

His eyes popped back into their sockets perfectly, and he said,

—*I don't think so, White Man. This isn't a trick for you.*

But White Man begged and begged, and the man finally showed him how to do it.

—*Now listen, White Man, said the man. You can do this only four times. Any more than that, and there will be trouble.*

—*Of course, said White Man. Everyone knows that. And White Man went traveling.*

TOO MANY BOOKS

I implied that we don't reject as many authors as we used to, but of course nobody has reliable numbers on rejection rates going back twenty years—or I'd be surprised if they did (inconsistency in methods for counting rejections would invalidate the data; plus, record keeping is no doubt better now than it used to be; publishers have an interest in *appearing* to maintain a high rate of rejection; and finally, there would be no independent means of certifying their numbers). However, I think the pattern in the facts we do have is highly suggestive.

1. We know, for instance, that the faculty population in the U.S. increased by about 60% between 1985 and 2000 (up to approximately a million); these are the readers who are supposed to buy scholarly books.
2. We know, as well, that the number of new scholarly books published each year by university presses in that same period went up by roughly 300% (Regier 2003). Willis Regier, director of the University of Illinois Press, offers these data: “[in those decades], the number of new books published by California, Columbia, MIT, and Princeton doubled, by Indiana and Yale, tripled, by Stanford sextupled.” At my own press, one of the smaller ones, we tripled our output between 1993 and 1999. Regier cites fourfold increases at Cambridge and Oxford, the world's largest university presses, who published over 2,200 new titles *each* in the year 2000. Figure even a modest print run per title, and Regier adds it up this way: “the total output of all university presses in 2000 was 31 million books” (#15). And we have only one million potential readers. It's clear that we're overproducing for the market.
3. Another thing we know is that academic libraries buy far fewer books proportionately than

they used to buy. They have complicated reasons for doing so, and I'm utterly sympathetic. But the effect on scholarly presses is that a formerly major partner in a small market has all but turned its back on us.

4. Something else that's happened since the 1980s is the coursepack phenomenon. University teachers take a chapter from here, an article from there, and build their own very special books for their students to buy at the copyshop. In case you didn't realize it, this has hurt university presses, while Kinko's has made millions. Now the practice has migrated to what's euphemistically called "electronic reserve." Don't think we haven't noticed: teachers put a dozen chapters and articles, or even a book, on electronic reserve in the library, and then tell their students to go print them all out. Thanks very much. At least through Kinko's we get a nominal permission fee for the work we've done in delivering that scholarship to the world. Electronic reserve gives us nothing.

5. All of this is related to the fact that scholarly books don't have what you could call a profit margin. Universities give us a budget to help us break even in this non-profit market because they want to support a reliable way to referee and distribute scholarship to other scholars—which is a much needed service especially in this era when universities are requiring more publication from faculty than ever.

6. Another market reality is a consequence of all of the above: monographs tend to sell best during their first year in print. This means that we presses tend to depend on our newest books to pay the bills; if the bills go up, or state support goes down, we have to produce *more* new books. Publishing books is expensive, and profit margins in academe are very low, and the public doesn't quite understand why what we do is important to education, so they question the need to support us at all. They tend to think we should support ourselves through book sales.

So we put out more new books—those are the ones that sell. John B. Thompson (2005) calls this boosting your throughput, and it is a treadmill that churns at an ever-increasing speed.

These are just a few of the generally accepted trends in scholarly publishing, but look at what they suggest for a very inconspicuous, seemingly inconsequential matter: rejection rates. Those 60% more professors represent not only the comparatively small increase in market, but they represent the increase in the pool of writers who create scholarly books, too. When we have a big increase in books (300%) from a small increase in writers (60%), it makes me think rejection rates are probably declining. The other thing is that not all of these new writers since the eighties were or are required to create books. The pressure to publish is only reaching its peak now. So the actual pool of new writers is even smaller than it seems.

I could be wrong about rejections. It's possible that our increased throughput is only the natural consequence of an even larger increase in submissions from the not-yet-tenured. We could work out the formula, but it seems implausible to me that this would explain everything. We really can't write much faster than we could in 1985, and there really aren't three times more people writing. The fact I know for sure is that university publishers are now under great pressure to publish more books than ever, and I suspect that, just to cope with this reality, we do the obvious: we accept more of the submissions we get. This doesn't seem unlikely to me. And maybe it's of no consequence.

Why look at rejection rates, anyway? The traditional reason is that a rejection rate tells you something about how good the publisher is. A vanity press accepts all submissions; a scholarly press accepts only the few best. And truly, in spite of the market, judging quality is still the first job in a scholarly publisher's gate-keeping process. On the other hand, we know it has always been a little wrong to see a rejection rate as only a measure of a publisher's quality—I mean, exclusivity and high quality are not the same thing. In addition, and maybe you weren't aware of this, rejection plays a role in simply shaping the unique intellectual profile of the publisher's catalogue. It's a different judgment altogether. That is, we accept certain books because we want to be known for that kind of book, and we reject others—ones that may be quite publishable—just because they don't fit our profile.

There have been other changes in rejection, too. The *kinds* of books that get rejected are changing. Where it used to be routine to privilege the scholarly monograph, now the monograph is one of the least attractive acquisitions to most presses. Where, in some fields, the collected essay volume used to be much in request, now it is received quite coolly. Without the library market, presses cannot count on a baseline of sales for the specialized work that scholars do best. Market pressures are causing university presses to consider other kinds of books altogether: textbooks,

regional books, trade books, even children's books.

But I'm really just using judgment and rejection as a way into a perspective on what's happened in scholarly publishing. What's happened is that economic and social factors have pressured authors to create and publishers to distribute more books that, in my view, are not of the quality they could be. When scholarly books increase by an actual 300% while potential writers increase by a maximum of 60%, we are all conspiring (or being coerced) to accept a lower standard of scholarship in academe. Not in every case, obviously. There is plenty of brilliant work being published; research methods and standards of scholarship are demonstrably more advanced in many fields than they used to be. What I'm saying is that by today's own standards, it's my view and I think it's the view of other publishers that the quantity of middling work, less significant work, merely trendy work, overly specialized work, and especially immature work has burgeoned.

This is not a curmudgeon's nostalgia: I'm just pointing out the obvious. As a community, we have set up scholarly publication as the gate through which now almost everyone must pass to get promotion and tenure. We ask scholarly publishers to stand at that gate and ensure that only worthy candidates pass through. In so doing, we have staked the credibility of American scholarship on the rejection rate at university presses and other refereed publishers. At the same time, however, we have not protected university presses from forces that compel them to lower or reconceive their standards for publication. If we think the rejection rate might be declining, or that university presses might be reconceiving their mission, we need to talk about what might be causing it, and what the consequences may be for American scholarship.

I'm reminded of the school testing high-jinks in Texas a few years ago. When state funding for schools was tied to student success on standardized tests, Texas administrators did a very savvy thing: they used easier tests.

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One big piece of this, of course, relates to the general decline in support for higher education by state legislators. The president at my institution—a land-grant university—no longer calls our school “state-supported.” With only 29% of our budget coming from government monies, we are now merely “state-assisted.” At Penn State, another land-grant school, state funding amounts to only eleven percent of budget. They call themselves “state-related” (Coward).

Professors and especially administrators know the full story of declining state support better than I do, but the effect on American university presses is that we find ourselves accountable to an alien

pressure: a commercial imperative. Unless university presses are simply to close their doors when state support declines, then their income from book sales must increase. Sales income from scholarly books—as an academic, you can see the humor there. But this is simply common sense to the business elite, the land developers, and the lawyers whom we somehow elect to run our governments; common sense to the corporate lobbyists who persuade us they need tax advantages more than our children need education. It's common sense, Professor, that the state shouldn't have to subsidize your research. If there's a market for your scholarship, then no worries. If not, why don't you teach something, study something, that the market wants? As a former president at our place used to say, "you just need to franchise yourself."

There are at least two corollaries to this logic, which are 1) where there is little market, there is little need, and 2) what the market will pay for something is the just index of its value.

Anyone from the world of education should know that these ideas are dumber than a box of rocks. Educators know that in the long term, the value of education to government can easily be perceived in terms of increased per capita income, higher tax revenues, and improved quality of life for us all—and that the even longer-term value of an educated citizenry is simply beyond numbers. Some things are. It doesn't take a rocket scientist to see this, and thank goodness, because legislators aren't rocket scientists. The trouble is that this is long-term thinking, and we have become fixated on the short term. Legislators used to see it, too; that's why—generations ago—we established compulsory education through high school, why we established public universities, and why we agreed to pay for such things together as a society, as a public. Short-term thinking is about seeking today's advantage; it has drained our vision of tomorrow, our commitment to each other. As a public, and especially as educators, we cannot afford to invest heavily in short-term thinking. Day-trading scholarship would be a disaster.

But that's where we are for the time being. We're being driven by the punitive common sense of an affluent and short-term marketing logic that has saturated our society, our governments, and, more and more, our education ecosystem. There are many effects on your campus and mine, and even more in the K-12 public schools. You can see them in everything from No Child Left Behind to NSF grants. A recent provost candidate at my school told us the ideal is a "mission-centered, market-smart university" (McCarthy). I think I know what she means, but I do wish she would find another way to phrase it. It's a serious mistake not to question the premise of such discourse, because frankly, the market just isn't that smart.

University presses make up one small piece of this much larger picture, and one effect on us is that we need to churn out more books than ever before, just to stay solvent. We're doing other things, too, but this has been the main one for twenty years. Now we're starting to see some unintended consequences of this more-books approach, consequences for us and for many others across the mosaic of American higher education. We've gone from more books to too many books.

PEER REVIEW AND PROMOTION/TENURE

White Man decided to try his new trick. And it worked! Out popped his eyes, and he threw them high into a cottonwood. Oh, he could see so well from the tree. He could see over the low hills, see where the river ran, see the true meaning of manifest destiny.

—Eyes, come back! he called.

White Man did it again. When he had thrown his eyes and brought them back four times, he thought about the man's warning.

—Oh, that rule was made for Indian country, thought White Man. Probably it doesn't count here in my country.

A fifth time he threw his eyes into the tree, and for a fifth time he called

—Eyes, come back!

But this time they didn't come back.

Once in awhile, you come across a book in which you want to underscore every single line. For me, such a book is *Enemies of Promise: Publishing, Perishing, and the Eclipse of Scholarship*, by Lindsay Waters (2004). (If Catullus was right that a big book is a big nuisance, then *Enemies of Promise* is a gem: under eighty pages of reading, in 4½ x 7 inch trim size, and published by Prickly Paradigm Press. Could one ask for more?) Waters, Executive Editor at Harvard University Press, has thought all these things through—all these things we're just ruminating about here—and he lays them out in an often humorous, often take-no-prisoners style. He challenges some of the most-accepted, least-examined common sense about publishing in academe. He makes you see how defensive we've all become of the dysfunctional system in which we all have volunteered to live. I said above that nobody knows the trend in rejection rates with certainty but that I know what I think. Waters gives me courage: "it is time for us to start connecting the dots," he says. "We need to start hazarding some

guesses based on incomplete evidence” (7). His own fundamental guess is that the overpublishing in academe is comparable to the phony profits we’ve seen at Enron, WorldCom, and the other market-smart scammers. Universities have so much at stake in the search for funding, that they grasp at any straw they think might have a chance of replacing the dollars we’re losing to lobbyists and ideologues. How can we improve our look in *US News and World Report*? How can we improve that Carnegie ranking? How about our chances for that grant? that corporate “partnership”? These are essentially marketing questions—they’re not educational questions—and where marketing is the dominant paradigm, there’s at least one answer that seems clear. We’ve got to make our faculty look more productive. How do we show that? Oh, I know, we’ll make them publish more. Publications *always* look good—and they’re easy to count.

“Entire forests are being cut down,” says Lindsay Waters, “to please chief academic officers who believe they’ll be raising the profile of their university by raising the ‘standard’ for promotion and tenure!” (8). What they’re doing instead is capitulating to a mentality imported from the world of mediocre corporate managers who gave us the audit culture most of our society now lives in. By audit culture logic, what cannot be counted cannot be valued, and the single most important thing you can do is show growth in the number of widgets you’re counting. Lindsay Waters: “To the extent that people consider the free market the ultimate framework, we have allowed a ‘one size fits all’ mentality to hobble the university” (9). We’re living in a Dilbert comic strip, my friend, where the daily, weekly, quarterly, annual report must be on my desk in the morning, and we’re blithely unaware that our so-called product is used by almost no one.

Look again at Willis Regier’s figures: Who’s going to buy these 31 million new books each year? Academic libraries used to help, but they are so beleaguered now by the monopolistic practices of for-profit journal publishers that the percentage of real dollars they spend on their book collection is nose-diving. Surveys show that library purchasing of monographs between 2001 and 2002 alone went down twelve percent (Anderson, qtd in Waters, 28). That’s what market logic does to the production of knowledge. Regier says libraries can absorb only about 5 million of the 31 million books produced by university presses. Quite logically then, he points out that for us to reach market equilibrium, each faculty member in America will have to buy 26 new university press books each year (#15). That’s year in and year out, and probably by now 26 is too few, since throughput is still increasing. Why do scholarly books go begging? Because creating knowledge is not comparable to producing widgets, and because the logic of cutthroat corporate management is toxic to the

ecosystem of scholarship.

I don't want you to think I'm bashing university administrators or big business. I'm bashing a particular kind of administrator and a particular kind of big business thinking. The best minds in corporate management are investing in what can only be called progressive, qualitative, "soft" ideas. Of course, they watch the bottom line; who doesn't? But they think of the corporation as an organism, not a machine (de Geus); they are hiring staff members to be keepers of the corporation memory, to be storytellers for the community that a business is. They create work environments that reward long-term thinking over short-term profits; they want their work to last for centuries, not for just a few profitable quarters (Senge).

By contrast, we academics have decided what will save us is more widgets—something we can count now and next week—and we're not even sure anymore why we're producing them, except that counting makes us feel we're doing accountability. But let me tell you, when books become widgets, scholars are in trouble.

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Accountability is not a new concept. Marland (1972) notes that in 1649, the Massachusetts Bay Colony required each town to teach children to read the scriptures. Furthermore, as Sciara and Jantz (1972) note, in Ontario, from 1876–1882, high schools' financial budgets were dependent on the number of students who passed the intermediate exam. Interestingly, they note that teachers centered their instructional efforts on the average or slightly below average student for getting maximum gains (on the assumption that "lows" couldn't learn, and top students would pass the test no matter what the teacher did). The practice was dropped in 1883 because teachers were fixed on preparing students for end-of-year tests and had abandoned other goals. (Good, Biddle, and Brophy 137)

"Accountability is not a new concept." Guess when that was written: 1975. I can't say the paragraph fits seamlessly here, but it did suggest a couple of connections that I enjoyed. For one thing, I loved finding a way to associate accountability with the Puritans. Reading goals, learning benchmarks, productivity outcomes, test scores, are all about preventing evil from overtaking the world. You probably knew that. And the other thing is that we can see ourselves in those average or slightly below average Ontario students. You're never so conscious of your "junior" status as you are

at P&T time.

When the audit mentality settles in over academe, it's not only test scores or publications that become widgets; we all become widgets.

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As part of the tenure/promotion process, you submit a portfolio of work—a “box of blood” is what a friend of mine calls it. This includes your book and journal publications first of all, of course, plus copies of grant reports, conference papers, awards, reviews of your work, a description of your committee service, interim appointments, teaching evaluations, anything at all that responds to your role description and that can be counted. It's your life as a scholar widgetized, true, but one great thing this process does is to give evidence (to you as well as others) of the scope and depth of your knowledge work.

I know I don't get out much, but I have never heard of a P&T committee that spent much time actively reading and discussing the ideational content of the candidate's portfolio with the candidate. Generally, the committee members confirm that the work is what it appears to be, and they verify that the published work was peer reviewed (say, through a university press). And of course, they solicit reviews of the candidate's work from specialists outside the university, neutral folk in the candidate's field. But do they interact with the candidate's work, themselves? Not so much. What they discuss is what's missing. Can you get a letter of commitment out of that journal? Ask that press if they will send a book contract before we go to the dean. Reviewer #2 has missed the deadline. See you at the next meeting. The issue for P&T is usually not substance but productivity and strategy. Your publication, “on which you lavish such care,” as Annie Dillard reminds us, “knows you not”; it is only a widget on a checklist of widgets.

A few years ago, our provost established a wonderful series of lectures at which successful candidates for promotion to full professor take an hour to give a summary presentation of their recent work to an invited audience of thirty or forty colleagues. (Then drinks and dinner at the president's place.) Certain of our departments or colleges have analogous series for folks who have recently published a book or finished some other large project. I imagine you've been involved in similar events. I think series like these are terrific, and they embody so much of what is best about a culture like academe where we're all committed to active and ongoing pursuits of knowledge.

But they're not the same as peer review. They're not the same as sitting down with colleagues

over a manuscript one of us has written, and engaging in response, praise, and critique. Actually reading it, I mean, with a view toward judging its substance and value for its field. Imagine your P&T committee actually reading all of your published work and all of your conference presentations, observing you in the classroom (more than that one time years ago), and then meeting in retreat for a day with you solely to describe and debate what you stand for as a worker in the world of higher education. Imagine yourself participating in that kind of process for the benefit of one of your colleagues. Why is this impossible in the American university? Because we're too busy producing and counting widgets.

Lindsay Waters sees it this way: "We are experiencing a generalized crisis of judgment that results from unreasonable expectations about how many publications a scholar should publish" (18). I know people with criminally long vitae—a dozen books before they're out of their fifties, a hundred articles and chapters. I just read a book called *Publish or Perish: the Educator's Imperative* (Glatthorn), in which the author claims, over 25 years in teaching writing, to have "written more than fifty texts on writing, and more than thirty professional books." That's absurd. I'm not saying it's untrue; I'm saying it's absurd. Okay, there are some overachievers among us, but in most cases, you know a vita like this is not what it seems; it's rehashing, repackaging, double-dipping, rebundling, and claiming credit for some pieces with 14 other authors to which each one contributed very little. The author of *Publish or Perish* has no doubt been very productive. Still, and here I don't want to be rude to an emeritus professor, but having read *Publish or Perish: The Educator's Imperative*, I can testify as an editor—which is to say as a professional reader—that this particular book is PowerPoint thin.

Don't you go that way. Don't you say on your deathbed, "Damn, I should have retracked that conference paper into one more article."

We tell ourselves that we don't read each other's stuff because there's too much of it—which is true, but we should try anyway—and because we're not experts in each other's field—which is true but bogus. Acquisitions editors know it's bogus, believe me: we've built entire careers on judging work beyond our ken. The truth is that academics have grown afraid to evaluate. We've become obsessed with risk management along with counting. We've come to believe that if we hazard a guess on incomplete evidence, we'll expose ourselves to charges of subjectivity or worse (say, ignorance), so we seek cover in the proxy of peer review. If the piece has made it through the gates of a university press or a refereed journal, we don't have to read it: we'll call it certified.

I find it wild that this kind of logic still works in the third decade of postmodernism. We're willing

to believe that a scholarly press under extraordinary pressure to increase its throughput each year can manage a review of our colleagues' work that will be un-self-interested and fully informed, where our own departments cannot. I'm not suggesting that departments abandon external review. I'm saying we don't read each other's stuff, and that's a shame. Because certification and productivity is all we're after, we tend to stop thinking right there; that is, ironically, once the article or the book is published, our P&T committees no longer *need* to read it.

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The one activity that most clearly stands as a representative anecdote for what we do as scholars is the exercise of judgment, yet in the promotion and tenure process, departments have ceded a great deal of that activity to outsiders—like the scholarly presses. They have, in Waters's phrase, "outsourced judgment" (24).

There were certain advantages to this way of doing things. One did not need to look directly at a colleague and say that the group of us read your work and found it wanting in the following ways, so please rebut us or you must go, despite the fact that you are a wonderful person. One could say [instead] something like this: although we all know you are a wonderful person, unfortunately the university presses of America have decided that your work is not significant for reasons they know and have no doubt shared with you; therefore, you must go. (24)

I don't see a way around his argument. We can soften it. We can say that university presses have merely become agents or deputies of the department, and that the responsibility for P&T decisions hasn't actually moved to them. But I don't see how that goes far enough. Given how much weight is carried by publication in the P&T decision, then you have to persuade me that most tenure committees are actually reading and evaluating the publications of the candidate. You have to persuade me that the norm is not what I think it is. Here's a quiz question for you: There is plenty of good, substantial scholarship in various forms out on the Web, but if an assistant professor offered only the work she had published on her personal website, how strong a tenure case would you say she had? That you can answer this question without even reading her work simply proves my point.

The average P&T committee has come to depend so completely on the fact that a certifiable referee process has occurred *somewhere* that it no longer matters *where* that process has occurred or how it was certified, as long as the committee itself doesn't have to handle it. Instead of assuming that the candidate's own department already employs the true and obvious and most-invested authorities on a tenure case, we assume the opposite. This is abdication of judgment.

Our situation is difficult, but we're playing games instead of behaving responsibly toward junior colleagues and toward our mission as educators. We've thrown our eyes into the tree too many times, and something we won't like is starting to happen.

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There's a scene in *Seinfeld* where Newman, the passive-aggressive postal carrier, leans back with a knowing leer and says, "I'll tell you a little secret: zip codes—they're meaningless!" Well, let me tell you a little secret about peer review. . . .

Things are changing. The market for scholarly books has always been small, and it has been shrinking for most of two decades. The universities that host presses used to feel it suited their mission to subsidize the shortcomings of the scholarly market, but this is a stance they now find more and more difficult to maintain. (Why shouldn't the authors' own school subsidize the book? they ask. If there's so small a market, why shouldn't the author or someone else cover costs?) Libraries used to feel it was their mission to collect books, but they are using their book budgets now to pay outrageous subscription rates for journals and to invest in electronic gear.

Things are changing. We presses are eliminating monograph series; reducing coverage of certain disciplines; turning toward trade books and textbooks and books that look scholarly but might have a crossover audience in the regional market. More than ever, we're looking for books that come with dollars attached. In short, we are responding to the same influences in our common social ecology that departments are responding to. It's just that while departments are requiring more publication than ever, because they think it will attract funding and students, we presses are more than ever rejecting good solid scholarship simply because without a market, we can't afford to publish it. We're publishing more books, but not so many are scholarly monographs. In a context like this, peer review takes a back seat to financial review; it doesn't match the traditional picture we have of it.

A quick report from the trenches: In the past week, I've heard from two extremely well-

respected scholars, each of whom serves as field editor for a monograph series at a scholarly press. They're stunned at how their relation to the marketing department has changed in the last five years. Suddenly, it seems, they're being overruled. They're acquiring brilliant work by brilliant scholars, but the market-smart publisher won't touch it. And I wouldn't either.

Do you see what I'm saying? You cannot assume that rejection or acceptance by a university press is a reliable indicator of scholarly value. Your colleague's work might be unique, original, and substantial, might be wholly worthy of publication, but still might not be published anywhere except on her website. If it is published, you can be sure that peer reviewers did endorse it, but you can't know how much the publisher's short-term financial hopes overpowered their judgment of the book's long-term contribution to knowledge. You have to take into account that peer review is becoming a mechanism through which a publisher confirms its own marketing goals.

If this is so, then your relation to your proxy, the refereed press, has to change. Not to be obvious, but when departments abdicated judgment, they forgot to ask the presses to take it on. If they had done so, we would have said of course . . . but it will cost you.

THINKING THE UNTHINKABLE

White Man cried to his eyes again and again. He stumbled around in the trees, weeping and crashing into things. Finally, he lay down and slept. As he slept, some mice came by, and began to clip his hair for their nest. White Man woke up and caught one little mouse in his teeth.

—Mouse, he said. Do you see my eyes up in the tree?

—Oh yes, I see them, White Man, but they don't look so good. They're swollen from the sun. They're all cracked and oozing. Do you want me to get them for you?

But White Man didn't trust her.

—What will you trade to let me go? asked Mouse.

—Give me one of your eyes.

Why do I chafe so at the discourse of the market smart? I'm not naive about this. I'm tempted to say some of my best friends are MBAs. In fact, I do have a fundamental respect for the pragmatism of the market and for those who study it. I'm still paying for a remark I made years ago to some author friends in a particular subdiscipline I actually admire. "But these books," I complained, "have the

shelf-life of a ripe tomato.” That’s a market-orientation. In every acquisitions meeting with my staff, I play the gruff show-me-the-money guy. I think there’s great wisdom in American pragmatism and in the good old Puritan work ethic. But we cannot commit ourselves wholly to this way of knowing without sacrificing great wisdom that comes from other places. It’s a question of balance.

At its root, one could say, to be market smart is to be materialistic. We need some of that, certainly, or the academy will go begging. But materialism also tends to be anti-intellectual, and it is always going to suggest that we jettison pursuits that cannot be measured by some version of a productivity index. “Show me the money” will always be its standard of value. If we go that way in academe, we stand to lose a great deal, because the pursuit of knowledge and the pursuit of product are not natural allies. We cannot measure the value of experiencing a scholarly book, and we cannot say that if a research project is useful to only several hundred scientists, instead of to a pharmaceutical company, it doesn’t merit funding.

It’s a question of balance. I’m an idealist, of course, but I acknowledge the excesses of idealism. My favorite example is Professor Causabon in the novel *Middlemarch*. Causabon is a classic Victorian geezer philologist who spends the entire book hunched over his desk compiling an encyclopedia of minor mythological themes, never quite making the progress he’d like, and the author lets him die without finishing. The media often discover absurdly trivial projects like Causabon’s that those crazy academics are spending taxpayers’ money on. But if we crazy academics do not defend the wisdom of basic research, of free inquiry, creative thinking, and exemplary teaching, we will impoverish ourselves in more ways than one.

I’m most familiar with how things work in the humanities, but you can see the dangers of market logic emerging with even more frightening consequences in science disciplines. You’ll recall the editor of a major medical journal recently resigned rather than give up his own judgment. He would not cave in to pressure from certain pharmaceutical concerns who advertised heavily in his journal. Pressure from them to publish research that showed their products in a favorable light. Research they had bought and paid for. Here we see that market smarts can go both ways—one published research report is worth a thousand image ads. We know it happens, too, in education fields, in computer science fields, in the life sciences. Corporate and federal funding tends to flow to research that favors the market or the politics du jour. This is market intelligence enacting its most natural instincts, and, in scholarship, to unstring Martha Stewart, it is not a good thing.

In a paper called “Six Challenges to the American University,” Vartan Gregorian (former

president of Brown University and Carnegie Corporation) numbers both the new dominance of technical / preprofessional education and the commercialization of research among the serious challenges for contemporary higher education. Neither of these deserve to be demonized, but Gregorian points out how they both contribute to a more narrow, more skill-oriented concept of education. Why do you think that the so-called “career colleges” focus on programs in business, nursing, IT, and such? Because programs in the liberal arts and sciences are not easy to deliver in a highly structured, behavioristic, choose-the-right-answer format. Instead, they require synthetic thinking, critical analysis, experimentation, and dialogue. Such things are expensive to teach. Liberal arts and sciences also take the student/customer out of their comfort zone (never a good marketing idea); their goals are hard to make concrete; and they don’t pay off in a guaranteed job offer. You never hear radio ads like: “Tired of your deadend job at the auto parts counter? Become a biology major at St Cloud State, and we’ll get you on track for a high-powered new career in just eighteen months.”

The traditional liberal arts and sciences approach to education, Gregorian says, was conceived “to enhance students’ powers of rational analysis, intellectual precision, independent judgment, and mental adaptability,” as understood in the context of complex societal issues that adults must take up if they’re to become responsible citizens in a democracy. These are long-term broad-based goals whose purpose, in Gregorian’s words, is to “make us more than well-ordered puppets in the passing show . . . moved only by the strings that tie us to material things” (80). However, even setting aside the blatant misuses of market power like those I mentioned above, the natural inertia of a market-driven idea of education is toward specialization, since what it teaches is a “skill set”—one skill set at a time—instead of a growing, adaptable, independence of mind. And what this tends to create in society is dependency on supposed experts. “With that trend,” says Gregorian, “comes an ever greater temptation to abdicate judgment” (81) and generally a disintegration of our awareness of historical, ethical, and social context. This is not where we want to find ourselves or our students in the next generation.

In the same volume of essays, Carol Schneider (president of the Association of American Colleges and Universities), offers a new vision of liberal education that aims to address the challenges pointed out by Gregorian. She implies that the momentum building toward specialization can be seen as a practical response to just the sort of pragmatic ignorance that we see in poor old Causabon. Liberal education has brought much of it on itself, but this is not simply a wound self-inflicted by

humanists. As Schneider sees it,

Many analysts and policy leaders are very comfortable with the marginalization of liberal education. They declare without apology that markets are keyed to short-term outcomes and have no patience for forms of learning that pay off over a lifetime. Practical studies that prepare students for specific jobs will sell; the rest will just wither away at all but a small set of “elite” institutions. . . . [T]hese higher education realists are content to provide “elite” education to elites and vocational skills to everyone else. (74)

These are the folks who have the ear of government, and they want to privilege an education that “sells.” Liberal education therefore, Schneider suggests, must shift its balance to account for that surge of demand for practical studies. She proposes an inclusive vision that takes the deep contextual values we’ve always associated with liberal education and articulates them to the changing ecology of learning that we now see around us. Teach practical learning in a rich context, in other words. I’m not giving her thoughts the attention they deserve, but I do find them principled, serious, and specific.

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Where does this take us as we think about scholarly publishing and its role in the American academy?

Any ethical acquisitions editor will tell you that the most important—and in Lindsay Waters’s word, most “delicate” (53)—part of scholarly publishing is reviewing submissions. When market smarts overtake the academy, so that well-intentioned senior colleagues abdicate their responsibility for judgment and mentoring, and resort to counting instead—a centripetal momentum can set in. The market, after all, wants more of the same: nothing succeeds like excess.

It begins to look like censorship to Lindsay Waters, and censorship is where peer review actually started, as I understand it, sometime soon after Gutenberg made publishing a little easier. But I’m not so worried about censorship—at least not in the sense of an orthodoxy imposing itself through limiting access to the presses. I do think we need to worry about sameness, however, and the tendency not to see the value in fields where things don’t sell.

Every editor has favorite acquisitions. Waters can claim Bruno Latour as one of “his” authors. James Laughlin had Ezra Pound. Someone else landed Margaret Mead, Thomas Kuhn, bell hooks. I

have my own fish in a much smaller pond—of whom however I am no less proud than others are of their big fish. It's no surprise, of course, that the books and articles that make editors proud are the ones with a vision of a larger stream, whatever it may be for their discipline. One of my own recent favorites is a small monograph in a small field, but it challenges some of our largest and most secure assumptions about the need for order and stability. What Jimi Hendrix found in the squeal of electronic feedback, this scholar, Elizabeth Boquet, finds in the fertile chaos of her work with student writing tutors (2003). Noise, Boquet tells us, is what we need. Excess, though not in the sense that the market loves it. Her idea is that we must live and work and think at the edge of our abilities; we must risk ourselves in connecting dots and in hazarding guesses. We must open a groove in the way that Jimi did, the way Coltrane did—even the way that Bach did—and play it over and over until we almost can't take it, until it releases us into a higher plane of understanding.

Of course, I realize that in this era, an allusion to Jimi Hendrix is air guitar for the elderly, but it's in that process of cultivating fertile noise, Boquet says, that we emerge into our best thinking and our better selves, because unlike repackaging, it pushes us to the edge where risk pays off in knowledge.

This sets us against the status quo, against the received knowledge of those who have gone before us, but in some ways I think the need for it is greater than it has been in decades. It's what liberal education is supposed to be all about. And the status quo in liberal education right now is a trend that requires junior scholars to publish far more than either they, or the markets, or their schools, need.

I shared a draft of this paper with several friends in a writing group, and I was quite surprised by their reactions. At least five of them are facing tenure committees in the next few years. These are wonderful scholars each in their own field, brilliant folks; none of them (unless I completely miss my guess) has any chance of blowing it with their tenure committees, yet they're all running scared. The so-called standards are so high for productivity that their role statements cannot begin to capture all they have to take on. They're writing articles and books, editing collections and journals, publishing multimodal work on the Web, they're presenting at conferences. They carry heavy teaching loads and service responsibilities. They're building huge portfolios, monuments to overachievement, yet they know that these will go largely unread by their senior colleagues in our Research I institution, and they are (modestly) furious about it. The senior folk in my writing group are serious and good-hearted; they sincerely want to help their junior colleagues succeed, but, in the words of one, there are no rewards for engaging with tenure portfolios beyond the level of counting scholarly widgets.

That's it, isn't it. The current structure does not accommodate the sort of investment in mentoring junior colleagues that you and I are imagining here. There's almost no way to make the structure even think about it. Listen to this note from one of my readers. "As junior faculty, I have no means to make this argument or save my life. Might as well shoot myself."

This is the pass to which we've come. Not only have we debased scholarship by confusing it with productivity, but we have trapped the younger generation of scholars on a churning treadmill from which suicide, failure, and desertion are three of the only four escapes. Fourth is to suck it up and reinforce the status quo. And if you're senior faculty, look what it's done to you: you have been trapped in a position where you must suffer two astonishing indignities. First, you must outsource judgment—judgment, a faculty of mind you have deliberately and successfully cultivated over your entire career and which you need cede to no one. And second, you are told to enforce higher productivity goals on your junior colleagues than your seniors required of you for the same tenure and promotion; in other words, you've been made a hypocrite.

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"Youth," your dear old dad used to sigh. "It's wasted on the young." (And age is wasted on the old, you would mutter.) There is something of the war between the generations in these inflating productivity standards, isn't there. Lindsay Waters is reminded of the myth of Chronos, god of Time, who devoured his children out of fear that one day they would displace him. The god's wife, you recall, eventually got wise, instead of a baby gave him a stone in a blanket, and that's how Zeus escaped—to displace his father Chronos, just as he'd predicted. Myths were composed to express and purge our most earnest anxieties, and you can see some big ones in this story: the fear of time, generational conflict, displacement of the old, child abuse, tenure committees. Gobbling assistant professors is how the old guard get their revenge for salary compression.

Still, it's clear that we have to make this argument to senior faculty, because my friend is right: when you're an assistant professor, you are in no position to change the system. Might as well shoot yourself. However, evidently, professional ethics alone doesn't carry the weight with senior folk that it should, what with all the pressure of the audit culture leaning on them from the other side. And evidently, they've had their eyes in the tree so many times now that they can no longer see what's happening in the world around them. If this is the case, then maybe we should try a simple pragmatic

appeal. Because it is simple and pragmatic: inflating the publication benchmark for tenure and promotion doesn't work. It has unintended consequences. It is a bad idea. The MLA Ad Hoc Committee on the crisis in scholarly publication issued a report three years ago, and made essentially the same argument. This inflation has to stop, they said (only, they put it in far more words, being an MLA committee): "Departments should work vigorously against the tendency toward increasing expectations with regard to quantity of publications in tenure and promotion decisions" (MLA Ad Hoc Committee 183). They're not talking to junior faculty.

Departments should work vigorously against this trend by reviewing their own standards, and their interpretations of the guidelines that come from central administrators. Senior faculty should work vigorously against this trend by reconsidering current standards in the context of historical standards and ethical standards, in light of the practical impact on scholarly publishing, and in light of the increasing importance of practical studies to the university and its constituencies. They should work vigorously against this trend that robs them of the exercise and responsibility of judgment and that paints them into the corner of hypocrisy. Senior faculty should work against this trend because we are out of balance, and they are the only ones who can put things right again.

What the MLA committee doesn't suggest is that we take it the other direction: toward requiring less publication. I think there's an argument there. Why is it unthinkable for senior folk to rebalance the reward system? Maybe they should establish alternative tracks to tenure: keep the traditional but invent a few that give more weight to teaching and other forms of scholarship. Maybe they should keep one track and simply give more weight to teaching and less to publication. Ernest Boyer gave us more than adequate grounds for this approach in his Carnegie report (1990), and if the academy weren't so afraid of students, Boyer's ideas would have been adopted years ago. The current structure rewards faculty for avoiding students, has made us narrow and too dependent on publication—which depends on research (what Boyer calls "scholarship of discovery"), which in turn puts one at a greater distance from the classroom. If we took Boyer—and Aristotle—seriously, we'd know that teaching is a deeply profound form of scholarship, for it requires one not only to understand but to convey. We forget that the work of a scholar becomes consequential only as it is understood by others, yet even as we see the audience for published scholarship riding into the sunset of specialization, departments and administrators are asking for more and more publication.

If we're resolving to address, adapt to, and ameliorate the sociopolitical changes that move us toward technical and preprofessional studies, as Schneider, Gregorian, and many others who study

the macro-view of higher education urge us to do, it's going to take a smarter kind of market smarts than just requiring more publication. We should let go of a reward structure that isolates us from those changes and from students. If we know that scholarly publication—on which we all depend one way or another—is in four kinds of trouble, we should address what we're doing that is adding to the problem.

Rewards for publishing should decrease, and for these things should increase: for teaching itself; for curriculum and program development; program administration; developing locally intelligent assessment programs; faculty development; outreach/articulation with K-12 educators; legislative initiatives (policy/politics); for publishing works that are now less-rewarded, like textbooks, professional books, pieces in so-called "instructional journals," and other journals where teachers, administrators, and/or policymakers are the main audience.

We should encourage research and publication, of course, but within reason. We should honor the publications of a scholar enough to actually buy and read them. Especially when we give so much weight to publication, we should absolutely require those who assess a scholar to read and understand and discuss what that scholar has written. We must reward tenure committees for doing so, and we must create venues through which they can express the results of such a discussion. This task wouldn't seem so daunting if we didn't require so much publication in the first place, and if mentoring junior faculty were seen to bring the institution a value equivalent to publication.

To manage this, departmental structures need to be created that reward collaboration and mentoring more than they reward isolation and specialization, structures that do not reward senior faculty for avoiding the classroom, but that encourage them instead to engage with colleagues and students in the hard work of conveying the richness of their own study to those who know them in their own departments.

If one advocates, as I do, rebalancing the reward structure away from publication and toward education, then it seems obvious that the measures currently used for evaluating a teacher in the classroom must be more sophisticated. Gathering student responses on a standard evaluation form isn't a sophisticated assessment measure, but in many departments, this is the single effort made to evaluate a faculty member doing the largest piece of their job. To increase the reward for teaching, we'll need to invest some time in regular classroom observation, in reviewing and responding to syllabi, class websites, to the use of other classroom software programs (Blackboard, WebCT, Syllabase). Student evaluations alone simply don't give us much to go on.

I'm a publisher, and I'm really not trying to commit career suicide with this critique of the role of publication in academe. I'm not against research and writing, obviously—far from it. I simply maintain that quaint but powerful belief that people should write when they want to, when their own interests, instead of institutional ones, compel them. And that's just pragmatic. Because look, we know from decades of research in education and psychology that external rewards are ineffective incentives for learners, and that, in education, external rewards actually correlate with *diminished* interest and *diminished* quality of work over time; and this is especially true when mere productivity is rewarded and quality is ignored (see for example Loveland and Olley). Tenure and promotion, one could say, does not even stand as an external reward to be gained, so much as failing to gain it looms as a negative consequence toward which we have a visceral aversion. But when we are impelled by our own interest to work at the edge of our abilities, when we are affirmed for doing so, that is when we learn the most and garner the most to convey to our readers.

It seems preposterous then, in building a career ladder for people whose job is to be intellectuals, that we would include adverse consequences for missing arbitrary productivity goals, and then to add insult to injury, we would offer no mechanism for judging, let alone affirming, the value of what those intellectuals have created in the process of reaching those goals. We've positioned ourselves like the Pentagon, insisting that where an invasion army couldn't do the job, an occupation army will.

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Now White Man could see from one side, but the little mouse eye rolled around in the socket, and he had to tip his head so it wouldn't fall out. White Man stumbled away and came across Buffalo.

—What's the matter with you, White Man? You've lost your eyes.

White Man told him the whole story, and begged Buffalo to help. Finally, Buffalo gave White Man his left eye. It was very hard to squeeze Buffalo's big eye into the socket. It weighed him down to the other side, and some of it bulged out.

One eye too small and one eye too large, his neck twisted and his back bent, White Man went on his way.

The work of an academic must involve ongoing research and occasional publishing, but as an

academic community, we have lost our balance and our bearings. We must reclaim our noblest rights and responsibilities: to inquire, to teach, to judge, to write, and to do all of these without Coyote/White Man's self-disfigurement, without shooting ourselves like Annie Dillard, and without becoming widgets in the grand game of accountability.

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