

Patrick Brantlinger

On clear, crisp days Patrick Brantlinger, the James Rudy Professor of English and College Alumni Association Distinguished Professor, can be spotted pedaling his bike between his home in the faculty ghetto and his office in Ballantine Hall. Pat's office is devoid of the paper clutter characteristic of the work spaces of many of his colleagues in the English department (myself included). His organized desk is an appropriate simile for Pat's intellectual ethos: just as he has ordered the array of files on his desk, Pat sorts and processes historical information and cultural trends to arrive at theoretical insights that have informed his research and teaching at Indiana University. Hinting at the intellectual foci of these activities, the graphics on his office door include a picture of Queen Victoria attended by her Indian servant, Abdul Karim, along with a postcard showing the distribution of wealth in the United States depicted as a peanut butter sandwich. As these images suggest, Pat's scholarship and teaching engage the interactions between culture, geopolitics, and economic justice.

A native Hoosier, Pat returned to his regional roots in 1968 as an assistant professor of English at Indiana University, after receiving his doctorate at Harvard University. The department was undergoing an expansion in those days, and Pat was one of eight hires, the others including lifelong friends, Mary Gaither and Chris Lohmann. New Criticism, the belief that literature should be analyzed in isolation from its social context, was the ruling orthodoxy of the period: undergraduate courses sought to teach students "close reading" skills, while graduate courses stressed attention to literary form and the importance of scholarly editing. Pat's doctoral work on the Chartist movement during the 1840s, with its emphasis on the relationship between literature and history, ran counter to such methods. His arrival at Indiana University helped create a climate conducive to studying literature as a social process, a nationally identified strength of many of the department's programs today.

Pat's insistence on connecting cultural production to historical processes represents a continuous theme in his presentations and publications. A prolific scholar, he has penned eight books: *The Spirit of Reform: British Literature and Politics, 1830-1900*; *Bread and Circuses: Theories of Mass Culture as Social Decay*; *Rule of Darkness: British Literature and Imperialism, 1832-1867*; *Crusoe's Footprints: Cultural Studies in Britain and America*; *Fictions of State: Culture and Credit in Britain, 1694-1994*; *The Reading Lesson: The Threat of Mass Literacy in Nineteenth-Century British Fiction*; *Who Killed Shakespeare? What's Happened to English since the Radical Sixties*; and *Dark Vanishings: Discourse on the Extinction of Primitive Races, 1800-1930*. His corpus also includes one edited collection and three co-edited anthologies, as well as scholarly editions of Philip Meadows Taylor's *Confessions of a Thug* and H. Rider Haggard's *She*. He is also the author of 34 articles since 1990 on Victorian culture, contemporary theory, and postcolonial studies. Characterizing himself as a "cultural historian," Pat often analyzes the social construction of ideas and values, and demonstrates how divisions between "high culture" and more popular cultural forms bespeak political agendas that clash with the social well-being of different groups of people such as the working classes, ethnic minorities, and colonized populations.

These intellectual commitments enabled Pat, along with James Naremore, to establish an interdisciplinary Cultural Studies Program at the university in the early nineties. Tom Foster, the current director of cultural studies, notes:

Pat Brantlinger was a pioneer in arguing for the relevance of the British cultural studies movement to literary studies in the U.S. and the humanities generally. As a faculty member in the Cultural Studies Program here at IU, and as someone who often taught the Introduction to Cultural Studies course, Pat's teaching was crucial in opening new possibilities for research and inquiry to a whole generation of graduate students.

Besides working closely with graduate students in the Cultural Studies Program, Pat has directed about 60 Ph.D. dissertations since 1977, and served as a member of approximately 90 other doctoral committees, including those of graduate students from Purdue, Dalhousie, Alberta, Rhodes (South Africa), and Western Australia universities. Pat has taught undergraduate courses on British, American, and postcolonial literatures, in addition to cultural theory, sometimes even donning a bathrobe and wig to dramatize Shakespeare for his students. He credits his students with challenging him intellectually and introducing him to new ideas. Paraphrasing Stanley Aronowitz, Pat comments that this aspect of academia, "continual learning . . . is part of what makes being a professor the last good job in America."

Along with undergraduate and graduate students who have benefited from Pat's mentoring, so too have his colleagues. He is especially generous with his time, often turning over manuscripts for colleagues

within 48 hours and generating letters of recommendation at a moment's notice. "I simply cannot imagine a better model of collegiality than Pat," says his colleague, Janet Sorensen:

He is unfailingly supportive of fellow faculty – particularly junior faculty – often reading their work-in-progress with enthusiasm and tremendous speed. It would be difficult to estimate just how much it meant to me when, in my early years at IU, Pat gave me insightful, detailed, and always encouraging feedback on my research. To be taken so seriously by a scholar of Pat's stature played an enormous role in developing a sense of myself as a scholar.

In addition to being an exemplary colleague, Pat has served as chair of the English department (1990–94), editor of *Victorian Studies*, and as an elected member of the Bloomington Faculty Council. During the mid-seventies, he was also active in the IU chapter of the American Federation of Teachers, which was successful in its drive to get the university to comply with laws guaranteeing public access to information and with improving health benefits for faculty, staff, and graduate students. More recently, Pat has helped organize the Progressive Faculty Coalition's (PFC) weekly forums on globalization and U.S. domestic and foreign policy. Following retirement he looks forward to traveling with his wife Ellen to participate in the Fifth World Social Forum in Brazil as a member of a PFC-sponsored panel on activism and academia.

Purnima Bose