

Toward a Classless Society. Studies in Literature, History, and Politics in Honor of Thompson Bradley.

## Chapter One

We offer this volume as a tribute to a man who has led a life of intense, inspiring, and extraordinarily generous engagement.

Thompson Bradley arrived at Swarthmore College some forty years ago, in the fall of 1962. After the political and cultural doldrums of the 1950s, it was a time of hope, renewal, even excitement. Kennedy (*not* Nixon) had recently been elected president; the Civil Rights Movement, under the leadership of Martin Luther King, was gathering momentum; and the Soviet Union of Nikita Khrushchev seemed to be edging, slowly, towards greater freedom in the era known as "the Thaw." Pop Art and the Beatles had begun their rise, and in Moscow and Leningrad, where Tom had spent the previous year, a new generation of daring young poets, with names such as Akhmadulina, Yevtushenko, and Voznesenskii, was drawing huge crowds at impromptu readings.

By all accounts Tom took Swarthmore, quietly Quaker in its tradition of social engagement, somewhat by surprise. Twenty-eight years old, charismatic, and unabashedly leftist, he lost no time in reinvesting the term "professor" with its radical meaning: he professed his strongly held beliefs and his love of literature with an authentic energy and conviction that was no doubt as unsettling to some as it was exhilarating to others. Whether he was thinking out loud on the contemporary relevance of a novel by Goncharov or Tolstoy or Fedin, or reciting, in his uniquely graceful and musical way, one of Akhmatova's poems from memory, or simply teaching the Russian alphabet, students quickly discovered that he possessed a rare power to galvanize, excite, move. They flocked to his classes. He "looked like Lenin and moved like a panther" (to quote one of those students) and he "spoke with so powerful a combination of reason and passion" that he left his audiences "spellbound."

Yet what was and is remarkable about Tom—what several generations of rapt listeners in those lecture halls immediately sensed, and what those who have worked closely with him know for sure—is that there is no contradiction, no disconnect, between that immensely compelling public persona and the private man.

By this I mean, first of all, that Tom Bradley has never, ever, just talked the talk. He truly lives his politics. As another former student of his wrote, "his speaking and doing are one." For Tom teaching and activism were always linked inseparably, and were never just confined to the classroom. Already within his first two years at Swarthmore he was playing a key role in organizing and speaking at teach-ins at the college against the American presence in Vietnam. This was the beginning of an extraordinarily sustained and focused commitment, over the next several decades, to the struggle for social, economic, and political justice at a grass-roots level. Students came and went every four years or so, as did (sometimes) administrations, and the political fortunes of the left waxed and waned (mostly the latter). But when Tom chose his battles—and I have in mind, in particular, his involvement in the antiwar movement, the labor movement, and the fight against urban poverty—his engagement was deep, hands-on, and long-term. The remarkably principled and dedicated stance he has taken for many years against American militarism—not only in Vietnam, but in Central America, the Persian Gulf, and other areas as well—is but one example, among many, of how Tom has continually striven, as his colleague Robert Weinberg puts it, to "bridge the gap between theory and practice." Without exaggeration, we would suggest along with Weinberg that Tom has long been "a moral compass" for Swarthmore College.

But Tom's rare integrity as a teacher and a human being is rooted not only in his political engagement. No less important here (and as memorable to his students as his passion and eloquence in more public arenas)

is the nature of his engagement on a purely personal level: his unstinting kindness and decency; his almost courtly graciousness; the thoughtfulness and wisdom of his advice. In this personal sense (as well as a political one), Tom is one the most truly engaged and engaging people I have ever met. This is also what makes him, in my mind, a real radical and real socialist: he doesn't just love humankind in the abstract (a charge which is often leveled, and sometimes justly enough, against the left). Rather, he really loves people, and this love completely informs everything he does: his teaching, his activism, each and every action and interaction. Those who know Tom will understand what I mean when I say that I have always found it somehow uplifting indeed, almost flattering to talk with him. When he engages you in a conversation he does so fully, completely, with utter generosity. He is the very antithesis of the absent-minded professor: he is unfailingly present. Another former student, Larry Arnstein, put it this way: "It seemed as though when I would come around he had nothing better to do than to talk to me. I know that wasn't true, but he made me feel like it was...I think it was his interest in me as a person which was his greatest gift to me."

Festschrifts are by nature a somewhat hagiographic genre. I know that Tom would recoil at the prospect of being turned into a saint, but he should rest assured on this score: he is much too interesting, too real, and too good a man to bear tidy sanctification.

This volume consists of a series of essays (as well as two poems) by colleagues, friends and former students of Tom Bradley. The essays are wide-ranging in their focus and are intended to reflect the incredible breadth of Tom's interests and influence. The three broad divisions we have come up with (literature, history, and politics) are necessarily somewhat fluid; our arrangement has been dictated in part by considerations of proportion and thematic affinity, rather than just disciplinary boundaries, which are often (happily) not easily demarcated. Certainly in several instances a particular essay could just as easily have been placed in another section.

Roughly half the essays in the volume deal in some way with Russia. These include a number of relatively specialized studies of selected topics in Russian literature and history (Julia Allisandratos on Nikolai Leskov's little known work "Obnischchevantsy"; Christine Holden's brief excursus into American views of early Russian aviation; Ronald Suny's examination of Theda Skocpol's comparative approach to the Russian revolution), as well as two analytical surveys of twentieth-century Russian journalism at key transitional moments (Jane Gary Harris on Russian women's magazines from 1900-26 and Ellen Chances on the thick journal *Novyj Mir* in the year 1988). Many of the essays (some focused on Russia, some not) work explicitly at that nexus of history, literature, and politics that has always so fascinated and engaged Tom Bradley himself. John Hassett's graceful exploration of the writing of exile by the Chilean author Poli D'Ignazio, illuminates a theme in Latin American literature that has strong parallels with the experiences of Russian writers in the twentieth century. Jonathan Mirsky provides a trenchant overview of recent historical, political, and literary accounts of the Viet Nam war, and makes abundantly clear the extent to which the politicians involved whether left-wing or right-wing, American or Vietnamese actively tried (and still try) to skew or airbrush aspects of this "never-ending" conflict. Several other essays likewise deal in some way with the (false) rhetoric of politics: David Gehrenbeck's investigation of the Decembrists' concerted semiotic manipulation of the so-called "Chernov affair"; Maude Meisel's close reading of the tragicomic machinations that lurked backstage from a dull Stalin-era republication of Stanislavsky's memoirs; and Michael Scammell's account of Arthur Koestler's gradual repudiation of Communism in the 1930s (a fascinating kind of reversal of revolutionary "coming into consciousness"). These last three essays along with Richard Schuldenfrei's revisitation of the vexed question of Julius Rosenberg's guilt all work in different ways to foreground a long and very troubling (though at times fascinating) legacy of ethical and moral failure embedded in the practice of revolutionary politics.

On the other hand, a number of other essays (clustered in the final section) convincingly and passionately demonstrate the continued relevance and vitality of leftist thought and leftist activism at the beginning of the twenty-first century and in several instances do so by putting the question of ethics and morality squarely at the center of the table. Barry Schwartz serves up a razor-sharp critique of the underlying immorality driving our vaunted global market economy and of the specious argumentation of capitalism's conservative apologists; and Brad Roth, in answering a question that is by no means just rhetorical "What's Left?" sketches out a possible theoretical roadmap for socialist thought in the wake of the demise of "actually-existing socialism." The last two essays in this section reflect grass-roots activism at its best, outlining concrete plans for effecting specific political and social change and for bridging the ever daunting gap between theory and practice. Hugh Lacey, drawing from his extensive experience with the Chester-Swarthmore College Community Coalition (an initiative with which Tom Bradley has long been deeply involved), makes a case for a truly empirical approach to learning about and addressing the problem of urban poverty. Finally, Vishwanath Lingappa, Krista Farey, and Don Bechler (in a piece that resonates clearly with Barry Schwartz's critique of free-reign capitalism), argue persuasively that single payer health care offers a equitable and eminently practical alternative to our current market-driven system, suggesting a detailed, long-term plan for education and political action that could make this radical idea a reality.

The warm and unstinting support Sibelan Forrester have received from Thompson Bradley's many friends, colleagues and students as we have assembled this volume amply attests, in and of itself, to the immense esteem in which he is held. Many people have sent us personal reminiscences of their contacts with Tom; these have been posted on a web page celebrating his career. In addition to the contributors of the articles and poems included in this volume, we would like to acknowledge the support and assistance of many others: Alan Berkowitz, Marion Faber, Terry Rumsey, Hansjakob Werlen, Robert Weinberg, Swarthmore College Provost (and Professor of Anthropology) Jennie Keith, and, especially, Tom's wife Anne Bradley.

Thomas Newlin  
(Swarthmore College, '82).