

The Roast Issue

the minnesota review

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Heather Steffen

Festschrift

Jeff Williams doesn't shy away from recognition, but he shines the spotlight on others far more often than he appears in it. Much of his most brilliant work takes place behind the scenes—editing, writing reader's reports and letters of recommendation, commenting on student essays, prepping for interviews, and talking endlessly to those who require his advice, his humor, or a well-meaning kick in the ass to keep them going. When we do see Jeff's work, the writing's deftness and simplicity obscure the hours, days, maybe months of drafting, revising, re-revising, and revising again that it takes to get to his level of polish and panache.

So to partially correct this imbalance between the impact of Jeff's work on all of us and the public thanks and recognition he garners for it, there is this "Roast Issue"—a Festschrift to mark the close of his eighteen-year editorship of *the minnesota review*. The pieces collected here represent critics writing in two modes rarely found in academe: heartfelt, honest, and clear; and quick, devious, and clever. In that many of them do both at once, they fittingly reflect their object of study and celebration.

During a recent installment of our multi-part conversational series, "What to Do with All the Free Time We'll Have after *minnesota review*," Jeff said, only half-jokingly, that without the editorial job he'd be "just like everyone else." Jeff, we've all heard a lot of bullshit from you, but that was by far the worst yet.

Enjoy the roast!

Kevin Dettmar

JW: Five Haiku

I
Whence “minnesota”?
North Carolina, Pittsburgh—
Carnegie Mellon?

II
But seriously
those suits, that hair, stunning specs:
makes a grown man cry

III
He’s made it foolish
to use the word smart; meanwhile
he daily lives it

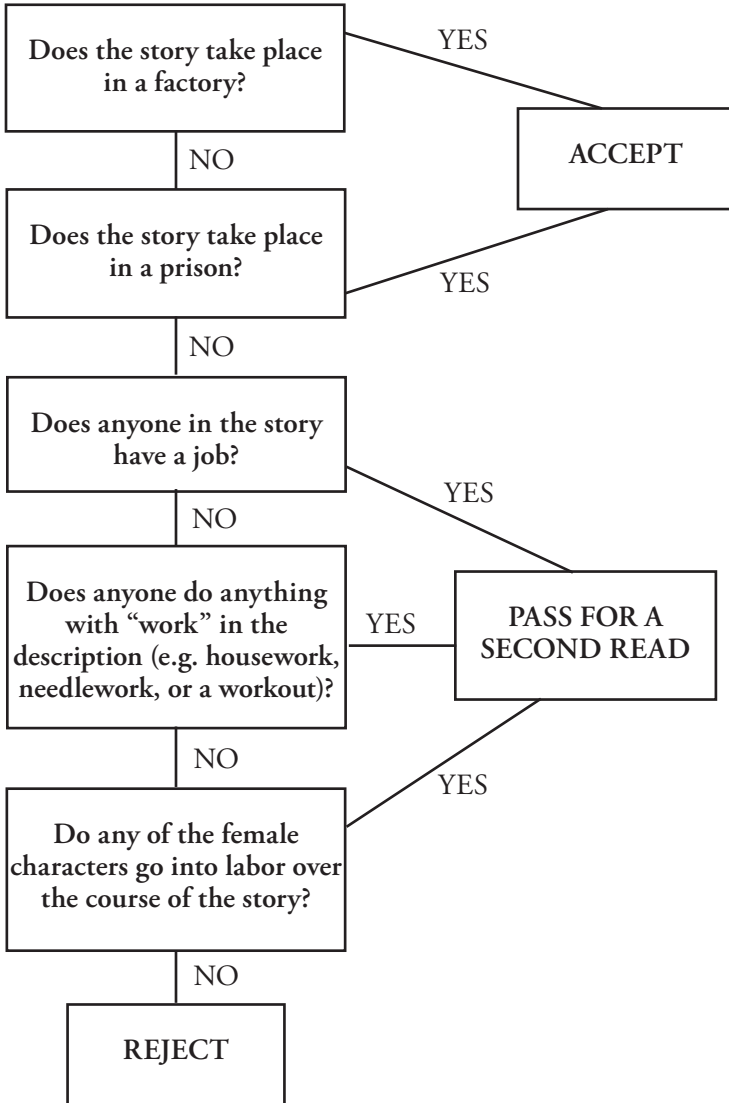
IV
His politics of
generosity and grace
can never grow old

V
We’re better writers
for his loving attention:
that will not “retire.”

Tina May Hall

Fictional Flowchart

After a few years of editing fiction for Jeff, I created this flowchart for my interns.



Robin J. Sowards

The Compleat Editor

A poem in five limerick-shaped fits by Robin, the Sow Herder

There once was a Williams named Jeff
Whose red pencil was dauntless and deft;
So, on following Sprinker, he set out to tinker
With the prolux reviews of the Left.

minnesota review thus was born,
Or re-born, in a state with more corn,
And its name soon was known, among journals alone,
For the piggish it trampled to scorn.

But the labor was certainly hard,
Since all manner of authors will guard
Each of their commas like the souls of their mamas,
Lest their essays without them be marred.

So he drew forth his fiery pen
And said, "Words, as I know, spark a yen,
But your pages aren't scanty—you've mailed me twenty
That say what were best said in ten."

Thus he makes us make sense from the first
Who would otherwise babble 'til burst;
And on balance it's best to admit that we're blessed,
Since alone with foul fluff we'd be cursed.

Eyal Amiran

The Pound Era: The Lost Interview with Snoop Dogg

Snoop Dogg has persistently upbraided the recording industry for its disconnections—of pop songs from society, of music producers from the MC cognoscenti, and of consumers from a coherent cultural agenda—and advocated, in his trademark phrase, that we “drop it like it’s hot,” most notably in *R&G (Rhythm and Gangsta): The Masterpiece* (2004). His other albums include *Doggystyle* (1993), *The Doggfather* (1996), *The Last Meal* (2000), and *Paid tha Cost to Be da Boss* (2002).

This interview took place on 10 December 2009 in Roscoe’s Chicken and Waffle on Gower. It was conducted by channeling Jeffrey J. Williams and S. Doggy Dogg and transcribed by Eyal Amiran while finishing his waffle with a side of biscuits.

Williams Your early work is very polemical, and you seem to attack the music establishment for its detachment from society. In fact when I started listening to your work in the early nineties, you were considered the enemy of the state. But, later on, you got a contract promoting cognac, and Kitty Empire in the *Guardian* says your rap is now incidental to your film and tv career.

Dogg No shit.

Williams Word.

Dogg Actually, I was always a supporter of business. If you’re publishing product that people buy you’re part of the establishment. It’s all there in “The Culture Industry.” The publisher is a gangsta. You say you’re bad, but it’s all good.

Williams It’s a pretty good gig.

Dogg Your mind on your money, and your money on your mind.

Williams I want to ask about your intellectual formation. You grew up in Long Beach, went to the Wayside County Jail, and were a member of the Rollin’ 20 Crips before you recorded for Death Row Records. That seems unique; I mean, I doubt many rappers end up getting a job. Can you talk about the job market for gangsters

growing up? Has your life in Long Beach rooted you politically in any particular way?

Dogg As I think of it, my Long Beach background, growing up hanging out in the hood, playing piano at Golgotha Trinity, and being alienated from school and book culture, gave me a certain “outsider” perspective towards the establishment and the aestheticism of the music business that I’ve cultivated in my work. This perspective has become especially important to me as I’ve gotten more and more into writing music, since I think of it as providing a link and a bridge to the many listeners who feel themselves to be outsiders.

Williams You were just telling me at lunch that your father was a Vietnam vet. That may account for your professional trajectory. Is that why you became obsessed with the kennel?

Dogg That’s when they were working on “The Pound Era.”

Williams Oh really? So you went through all that Pound stuff?

Dogg I got five on the twenty sack.

Williams What does that mean exactly?

Dogg You’ve got to learn how to hold on to your share.

Williams I always say you don’t get born knowing it. Is it a kind of return to what you got into this business for?

Dogg Who can remember?

Williams I was interested to learn, when I wrote about you for the *NRA*, the unpublished *Norton Rap Anthology*, that while you were at Death Row records, you did your work with The D.O.C. and Dr. Dre, who published you in the *Chronicle*. How did they influence you?

Dogg Both The D.O.C. and Dr. Dre provided me with models of the “committed” rapper.

Williams Meaning?

Dogg Ain’t no snitchin, take the deal and get convicted, stay committed.

Williams Kind of like Gramsci and Negri?

Dogg Exactly. Ya know, some of these niggaz is so deceptive, usin your styles like a contraceptive. I hope they get burnt, it seems they havn't learnt. It's the nick nack patty wack. You, Jeff, still got the bigger sack.

Williams If you say so. But twenty years from now, couldn't people say you were in a salon?

Dogg I don't have any problem with being in a circle.

Williams Let's get back to Dr. Dre's genuine article in the *Chronicle*.

Dogg You mean the *Chronic*.

Williams Yikes! We'll edit it out afterwards. So Dr. Dre wasn't really a doctor?

Dogg He was a kind of Dr. Johnson type in the Great Man mould.

Williams That brings up another question. Is what you're doing a new belletrism? That's a little bit of a wiseass phrase.

Dogg I like your tone, your cologne, and the way you roll.

Williams Thanks. I take it your "What's My Name" is about name recognition, the star system. Coming to think of it, Eminem is also working on this in "My Name Is," which sold pretty well. Is that what it's all about in the end? I like to say this profession eats its own. Or is it the game?

Dogg It's all about my money mane, I stay fly and dry, I don't get caught up in the rain. Cuz game recognize game, no matter where you from.

Williams I see your point. You love the Steelers and I'm in Pittsburgh, we both did time in the pen and mined culture, got out and made the bigs. You make it look EZ, from the MLG to the PMC.

Dogg You too, G. Back to the lecture at hand, perfection is perfected, it's what I let 'em understand. It's kinda hard bein snoop

d-o-double-g, but you, somehow, some way, keep comin up with funky ass shit like every single day.

The Multitude It's like this and like that and like this, uh. So tune in to the next episode.

Michael Bérubé and Janet Lyon

The Early Years: An Interview with Jeffrey J. Williams

This interview took place in July 1994 and was conducted by Janet Lyon and Michael Bérubé, while playing pool in a bar on Hatteras Island, North Carolina.

Bérubé Jeff, you've done so much with *the minnesota review* in so little time. How do you manage it?

Williams Jesus fucking Christ, that's how. It's not like my department gives me any time off for this shit.

Bérubé What? But you've published nine issues in three years, taking a once-obscure journal known mainly to a handful of academic Marxists and making it one of the most widely-recognized outlets in literary and cultural studies.

Williams Yeah, well. Like I say, my department basically wishes I would go away and take the journal with me.

Lyon But didn't they hire you to be a "theorist"?

Williams Yes. And then they found out what "theorist" meant, so they decided they didn't want one after all.

Lyon Surely there must be some people in your department who—even if they don't like your work or the work of the journal—are pleased that you've brought national attention to the place, and that the *Chronicle* and the *New York Times* are talking about stuff that you're doing at East Carolina University?

Williams You would think so. But you'd be totally fucking wrong. Let me put it this way. My department building has this "no smoking" policy, right? So every time I want to light up, I have to go outside to do it. At first I thought this was some kind of health concern. Then I found out that the real reason we have a "no smoking" policy is that the department is so full of deadwood that we constitute a fire hazard.

Lyon/ Bérubé ...

Williams Yeah, it's like that.

Bérubé So isn't there anyone in your department who knows anything about scholarly journals?

Williams Funny you should ask that fucking question. Yes, yes there is. We have one guy who edits *The Journal of Advanced Pedantry, Being a Semi-Annual Publication of the Society for Children's Literature of the Early Twentieth Century*.

Bérubé You're kidding me.

Williams I am not fucking kidding you. He gets a two-course release and an office.

Lyon WTF?

Williams It gets worse. I checked out the entry for *The Journal of Advanced Pedantry* in the *MLA Directory of Periodicals*, okay? And according to its own editor, the journal receives ten submissions per year and publishes seven.

Lyon That's...

Williams No, wait—I'm not complaining about the publication rate. That's completely understandable. I'm complaining about the fact that the guy doesn't even have the good sense to lie about the number of submissions he receives. I mean, he could say "fifteen" or "twenty" and it would still be a joke, right? But *ten*?

Bérubé How many submissions did you receive for "The Institution of Literature"?

Williams 385, not counting the nine essays you submitted, eight of which sucked, if you don't mind my saying so.

Bérubé Not at all. I totally respect your opinion when it comes to essays of mine that suck.

Williams Well, they did. As did many of the 65 essays I accepted, 38 of which I had to rewrite.

Lyon That sounds like a lot.

Williams Yeah. I take editing seriously.

Bérubé Well, how much rewriting did you do? We're talking line edits, right?

Williams Fuck no. I rewrote those motherfuckers from scratch.

Bérubé Really? What did their authors say about that?

Williams I didn't ask them. Why?

Bérubé Well, because most of the time, when editors make substantial changes to a manuscript, they run them by the authors, that's why.

Williams Fuck that. If I ran things by people, do you know long it would take me to produce an issue?

Bérubé No, how long?

Williams Too fucking long, that's how long. There's no way I have time to send editorial suggestions back to people who'll only sit on them for four or five months and then get back to me with a bunch of bullshit complaints about what I've cut. Besides, do you think that guys like Leitch and Kumar give a shit either way? It's not like they're going to notice. Hell, I stuck three paragraphs from the *Grundrisse* into your first essay and you didn't say a fucking word.

Bérubé Wait, wait. That whole bit about how "the question of the relation between this production-determining distribution, and production, belongs evidently within production itself"? That wasn't mine?

Williams No. That was Marx.

Bérubé No shit.

Williams No shit.

Bérubé Well, thanks for letting me know.

Williams You're welcome.

Lyon So you're deluged with submissions, you rewrite essays from scratch, and you don't have any material support from your department. What's your publishing arrangement?

Williams What?

Lyon Who publishes the thing, and how do you work with them?

Williams I publish the thing. There aren't any academic presses involved. There aren't *any* presses involved, except of course for the one in my basement....

Lyon You publish *the minnesota review* from your basement?

Williams I have a steam-powered linotype machine and some binding glue, yes.

Lyon And you produce the entire journal yourself, in your basement?

Williams Not always. When it's nice outside I do the binding and envelope-stuffing in my back yard.

Lyon Wow.

Williams Hey, Fred Pfeil did it all with a mimeograph machine. This is a step up.

Lyon That's still pretty impressive.

Williams It's hard work. But I love it.

Bérubé So after *PC Wars* and *The Politics of AIDS*, *The Institution of Literature* will be out next year?

Williams Yes, in three parts.

Bérubé The next issue will come out in three parts?

Williams Yep. We've got "States of Theory," "From Literature to Culture," and finally "Institutional Questions." Each issue is 550 pages long and weighs twelve pounds.

Bérubé Congratulations. That sounds like quite an achievement.

Williams Thank you. I think it is. Of course, I don't have any money to actually *mail* these huge motherfucking things to subscribers, so I'll have to deliver them by hand over the next eight to twelve months.

Bérubé Good luck with that! It sounds difficult.

Williams It is difficult. But I always think of what Mike Sprinker used to say—"If it's not difficult, and if it doesn't involve a lot of rewriting and hand-delivering, fuck it."

Lyon/Bérubé Words to live by. Jeff, thanks for your time.

Williams Any time.

Devoney Looser

Bereft of Copy: An Interview with the *Chronicle of Higher Education*

The *Chronicle of Higher Education* is the premiere source of news, information, and jobs for college and university faculty members and administrators. Making its home in Washington, DC, a bastion of party politics and old historicism, the *Chronicle* has more than seventy full-time writers and editors, as well as seventeen foreign correspondents around the world.

This interview took place on 9 December 2009, via Skype, as many of these editors and writers assembled with long faces and large travel mugs, in a sterile conference room at 1255 Twenty-Third St, NW. The interview was conducted by Devoney Looser, an advisory editor at *the minnesota review* and Professor of English at the University of Missouri. Shockingly, she was also forced to provide her own transcription.

Looser First off, what was your initial response to the news of Jeffrey J. Williams' retiring as editor of *the minnesota review*? What kind of impact do you think this will have?

Chronicle Well, we have to admit that all of us on the editorial team and on the writers' side too were pretty anxious. You know, for years we've been relying on Williams' work at *the minnesota review* to give us that extra "oomph" for so many of our sections: "Faculty," "Research." We've even had several mentions of *mr* in our "Advice" section, believe it or not.

Looser Okay, sure. I want to ask you more later about this question of anxiety. But first, what plans, if any, do you have in place for dealing with Williams' retirement from the journal? How will you go about responding?

Chronicle When we got this news, the first thing we did was contact Jeff to ask if he were planning to retire from writing for the *Chronicle*, period. I have to say, to get back to your question about anxiety, that we were a lot less anxious once we learned that it was just the *journal* he was retiring from. And we were relieved that a new editor had been chosen for the journal and what not.

Looser So then you weren't quite so panicked?

Chronicle That's right. On a scale of one to ten, we were first at about a 9.5, but once Jeff assured us he would still be contributing to the *Chronicle* himself, as a free agent, I would say that our collective anxiety level fell to about a 7.5. For certain, we knew we'd at least be able to continue to count on Jeff to keep the *Chronicle Review* section going.

Looser That must have been some consolation.

Chronicle Exactly. It was, as you say, a consolation. Still, we suspect we will continue to live in pretty much constant low-level fear about the impact that his retirement from editing the journal could have on a lot of our other sections, from "In Brief" to "People." I mean, we're a weekly publication. We have to have copy. Things have to happen.

Looser Tell me a bit more about what you mean when you say "things." Off the top of your head.

Chronicle Things like academic labor struggles, the crisis in the humanities, the latest scholarly trends in literary and cultural studies, editorial trends. You know, these central "things" that our readers rely on scholars like Jeff to tell them about. Jeff has been at the center of so many of these issues for so many years, with his finger really pretty much on the pulse of them. As you know, he's been describing them for *mr's* readers and for our *Chronicle* readers in colorful, sensitive, intelligent prose.

Looser Is your reaction tied into the current scene of criticism and theory?

Chronicle Yes, we think so. But to be honest, we have very little idea. If Scott McLemee were still here, we would probably ask him.

Looser Why do you think *minnesota review* was so at the center of the *Chronicle* for so many years? What made the relationship so mutually beneficial—maybe even symbiotic?

Chronicle Ah, that's a good question. One is always so tempted to say "zeitgeist" at moments like this, right?

Looser When was this?

Chronicle When was what?

Looser Oh, sorry. That's just one of our stock questions.

Chronicle But to get back to the previous question. "Zeitgeist" really only goes part of the way toward crafting a convincing answer about the *mr-Chronicle* relationship. Finally, when it comes down to it, the only way to explain the importance of *mr* to the *Chronicle* over the past two decades is with the Great Man Theory.

Looser A lot of people working in critical theory now are under the impression that the Great Man Theory doesn't hold up anymore—that it's been refuted. Had you thought about that before?

Chronicle Our position is that there is no need to think about it very deeply, because it's pretty self-evident. Jeffrey J. Williams is that Great Man. He's an intellectual and editorial force to be reckoned with. And as anyone who knows him knows, he's got scholarly *and* sartorial fashion on his side, in spades. The new editor has mighty large—and stylish—shoes to fill.

Richard Ohmann

Gaming the Star System: An Interview with Jeff Williams

This interview took place on 23 December 2009, in the office of the President of CMU, where Jeff was seeking support for his new series of *minnesota review* interviews; see *infra*. It was conducted and transcribed by Richard Ohmann, Benjamin Waite Professor of English, Emeritus, at Wesleyan University.

Ohmann Jeff, you've edited *mr* for eighteen years, a Herculean task—and by general agreement, brilliantly executed. How did you manage it, alongside all your own writing and your heavy load of teaching and institutional work? In particular, how were you able to conduct so many deep and learned interviews?

Williams It was a bit of a stretch, at first. I trained in speed reading and power writing. I took megadoses of vitamin C. I practiced Vipasanna breathing and meditation. I gradually extended my work day to 22 hours. But it wasn't enough. When I reached four interviews a week, I hit the "wall," in marathon parlance. I had to try a fresh approach. See you later—I have an interview with Ralph Cohen and Noam Chomsky in fifteen minutes, and the last seven years' worth of *NLH* to review, along with Chomsky's MA thesis on the grammar of Hebrew.

Ohmann But wait—can't you give your admirers just a quick run-down on the strategy you devised?

Williams: Okay. I looked up a guy named L. Ron Hubbard, who could write fiction or philosophy at seventy words per minute, and who published over ten million words in his lifetime. I thought he could help with my problem, maybe via hypnopaedia. He hooked me up to his E-meter—short for electropsychometer—a device for getting rid of the mental "masses" that occlude most people's channels of creativity. After a few hours on the E-meter, I became what the scientologists call a "clear," and began to understand where my new capabilities might take me. The next day, I read the complete works of Toril Moi and Michael Bérubé, and the morning after that, I interviewed them simultaneously.

Ohmann That is, you had a three-way conversation and later edited it into two interviews?

Williams No. Using the “forked-tongue” method, I put questions to Michael from the left side of my mouth, and at the same time I questioned Toril from the right side. They answered in a noisy babble, which I disaggregated and simultaneously entered into two computers as two texts—Toril’s with my left hand, Michael’s with my right.

Ohmann Good heavens.

Williams Yes. This technique eliminated the need to tape interviews, then laboriously transcribe them. Also, when I put two expansive talkers like Cohen and Chomsky together in the same interview, I can frame just one question for each, and let them rip for a few hours, while I read two or three volumes of *À la recherche du temps perdu* on my Kindle.

Ohmann Holy shit.

Williams Tomorrow I’m doing a joint interview of Fidel Castro and Marcel Proust himself. I know, you’re probably thinking, “but Proust is dead.” Well, the thing is, a little extra time on the E-meter and you can re-enter your previous lives. One of mine was as Roland Barthes.

Ohmann Didn’t Proust die when Barthes was about seven?

Williams In previous lives, time is more flexible than now. For instance, as T. S. Eliot, I’m going to interview Matthew Arnold, who died five months before the historical Eliot’s birth. (Some think Arnold was reborn as Eliot—I’ll ask Arnold about that idea.) A really neat interview I’m planning: as William Blake I’ll talk with Northrop Frye. Blake can’t wait to hear Frye explain how he adapted Blake’s cosmology to reorganize literary criticism. And as Coleridge, I’m going to snort a little horse and interview William Burroughs. The possibilities are endless.

Marc Bousquet

“You Want Half of This?”: An Interview with Jeffrey J. Williams¹

I can still remember the first time I received a copy of *minnesota review*, the 1995-1996 “Institutional Questions” issue. It arrived unsolicited, addressed to me care of my graduate school, with a brief note, compliments of the editor. I didn’t realize it at the time, but this was a typical Williams move, using the journal as a calling card, cultivating people he found interesting, especially junior faculty and graduate students. It might surprise some observers that Williams, most recognized for editing theorists and interviewing academostars, is more interested in, and spends more time on, the as-yet little known or unknowns still writing dissertations and first books, on activists, organizers, committed teachers, and burrs on the trousers of power. (If the academy were baseball, Williams would be a sports journalist who paid the bills by listening to Barry Bonds talk about himself but whose real love was sitting in the sun at a sparsely-attended double-A game in Toledo.) There are a generation of people like me who owe serious debts of time and attention to Williams and his long stewardship of *mr*.

This short, fugitive fraction of an interview hardly covers that debt. Originally recorded for a series of clips for a YouTube channel, the raw footage runs just 22 minutes and is focused on academic labor, the topic of the series for which it was filmed. Unlike the unhurried and elegant conversations that Williams mastered and made his signature at *mr*, this video was shot on the run in a noisy airport café. It was the second attempt, the first take ruined by my failure to properly connect microphone and camera. I’d had to re-record half a dozen other interviews similarly bungled in the preceding couple of days; the only reason we had twenty minutes to talk was that each of our planes were boarding late.

Despite the narrow focus, the hurry, and the circumstances, the whole Williams comes across in the footage: his generosity of spirit; his devotion to the journal, the profession, and his comrades; his honesty and willingness to talk about things that most of us leave under the rug.

Nonetheless this lightly-edited and condensed transcript conceals at least one unsurprising truth, that he wasn’t an easy interview subject: friends won’t be surprised to learn of his efforts

1. Editor’s Note: Unlike the other interviews in the “Roast Issue,” I can confirm this one actually happened, since I was present. –HS

to direct the video from his side of the camera—using several of our precious airport-stolen minutes to tell me why I should have miked both of us and not just him, then stubbornly repeating each of my questions into the camera for the record. The video is packed with digressions and jokes, but also his motherly worrying that I'd miss my plane or not eat enough before flying over the Rockies, offering his plate, "You want half of this?" *minnesota review* managing editor Heather Steffen was present. The beginning of the raw footage sounds like a Mamet play:

Bousquet We're going straight to live, there's no fucking around here.

Williams We're going straight to live?

Bousquet We're recording everything you say now.

Williams So I think that you have to—you're still not heard on this?

Bousquet You're good, you're perfect.

Williams But are you—nobody can hear your questions.

Bousquet Actually, that's not true. I can turn up the gain and pick up my—

Williams Your questions.

Bousquet Yeah. We'll be fine. [Looks at notes.]

Williams You have to ask me a question.

Bousquet [To Steffen] He's ready for his close-up.

Williams C'mon Cecil, Cecil B. Bousquet.

Apart from the jokes, the digressions, and the directing, the heart of why Williams makes a difficult interview subject is the depth of his interest in other people—in the broadest possible sense, his willingness to turn over his time to others: not just the airtime of an interview, but his work time and his life time, the time of his care, wisdom, and consideration.

Like many who are so interested in others, Williams is also a bit of a private person, so even some of the details he shares, such as his admiration for Orwell, invite some elaboration. For instance, Williams speaks of Orwell's socialism, his honesty, and his talent—but leaves unsaid what I find most evocative, that at about the same age that Williams served as a corrections officer in an upstate New York prison, for example, Orwell served in the Indian Imperial Police. It's hard not to credit this detail with at least some of Williams' ability to run a live wire between the campus and the prison, between education, the professoriate, and our willing production of unfreedom.

Bousquet You devoted an extraordinary amount of ink during the 1990s and the early part of this century to academic labor issues in various numbers of *mr.* What motivated that choice?

Williams It's somewhat predisposition on my part, but it's also simply that there's a social, a political charge to the magazine, and what are the politics that are the most immediate if you're in academe?

I always found it odd that academics frequently can talk about politics in foreign climes—they might know French politics in 1867 or Indian politics now—but they know nothing about the place where they are. And that's where they actually matter. I'm not against knowing those other kinds of politics, but academic labor seemed the most pressing issue. It's simply that it would be hard to be in this profession and not realize there was a serious problem.

I was fortunate enough to get a job. I didn't the first year I was on the market, but I did get a job. All of my friends were going through this too. You see all of your generation, the best minds of your generation, going through this travail after getting a PhD—how can you deal with this? You can talk about post-Fordism. Obviously this is an effect of that, in larger terms, but the more specific questions are the ones we live with, about the job system.

Bousquet Tell me how your predisposition shaped the choice to feature academic labor in the journal.

Williams It would be easy to say simply, it's because I had a working-class background. But that's a very mediated relation—some people might do the opposite, they might go running away from their background.

I know many people that went away to Ivies, to Chicago, or wherever, and they became anything but academic activists. They start wearing tweed coats, and they start trying to act as if they are to the manner born. I went the opposite route. I have been in unions before, I grew up in that culture, so I was much more sympathetic to labor issues.

This is actually, finally, just a job. I think there are good things about seeing this profession as a vocation, but the bad thing is it gets sacralized, as if it were this magical thing, rather than a job. I am a professor at Carnegie Mellon. They do not own me, though sometimes they think they do. It's a job.

Bousquet Your current work is really fascinating. You're making the argument that student debt is not just “like” indenture but truly is a

contemporary form of indenture. Perhaps you could talk about that in connection with your interest in academic labor.

Williams Student debt is part and parcel of academic labor. If you see it systematically, it affects teachers, and it affects graduate students. Our friend Katie Hogan wrote an essay called “Superserviceable Feminism” in *minnesota review* showing that it affects faculty—the service expectations are up, there’s much more pressure. I can see that from my job; you can probably tell it from yours. As far as the graduate students, as you’ve written, they’re screwed and then they’re spewed out. The lucky ones get jobs, but still.

The one thing I think people have missed is talking about undergrads. It’s part because these other problems are important, and we’re living them. My complaint before was that people don’t reflect on their own situation, but a swath of our profession, a group of us, have talked about academic labor. We haven’t talked as much about students because that’s not our position.

The statistics are stunning. In 1984 the average student debt was around \$2,000; in ‘94 it was about \$9,000. Ten years later it was about \$20,000. That doesn’t count private debt, for which we don’t have such reliable statistics. The other statistic that’s really damning is that a quarter of people who graduate now have debt over \$30,000.

Bousquet Can you say something about the consequences of debt?

Williams It makes people have a different relation to their world. If you have a lot of debt, I think it affects you from the spiritual to the material. I say “spiritual” with irony, of course, but still we do live in a metaphysical as well as a physical realm. Debt affects what you feel like you can do in your life. It affects career chances and choices. Students know before they even come to college that they have to go to business school rather than get a degree in poetry unless they have rich parents.

I think debt also affects how you see society. When I went to Stony Brook, it was relatively cheap. Five or ten years before when my sister went, fifteen years before when my uncle went, it was almost free: a couple hundred dollars, very cheap. I think then you see the state in a good relation to you—the state provides education, just like high school. That’s what the state should do. It’s good for everybody: you take advantage of all the talent that you have and you grow it. You fertilize it.

I’ve written about indenture and also about governability. The Trilateral Commission in the seventies had a report that said you

have all these people getting college degrees, but only 25 percent of our jobs require college degrees. So they wrote that student numbers should be reduced, that people became ungovernable if they're educated and then don't get jobs and are unhappy. So I think with debt people become more governable. It's like, you get with the program. You can't protest not having health insurance if you're working three jobs.

Bousquet In what sense have you experienced the pressure to be more governable in your own life?

Williams I think that maybe, because of a certain irascibility or a certain stubbornness (it's true, when you have a little white in your hair you admit these characteristics in yourself), there's no way those pressures would make me do the opposite of my inclination. But not everybody is as irascible as I am. When you see it inflicted on other people around you, the people you care about—I am allergic to that kind of injustice.

Bousquet You're unusual in academic circles in that you combine left analysis with a labor sensibility. Holding left and labor together was particularly difficult in the latter part of the last century. How'd you manage it?

Williams I always hated seeing my father, as a working-class person, condescended to. I saw that; I still remember it, and that's something I won't forget, something that I would still fight, even now. It would piss me off, and I don't get riled by all that much. So that was probably a factor.

Bousquet I wonder about your experience of starting out at an Ivy League college—seemingly moving smoothly up the “merit” ladder to Columbia—but then dropping out to work as a prison guard for family reasons. Does that experience shape your approach to academic work today?

Williams I was a scholarship boy from Long Island who went to Columbia, which I loved. I wanted to be a man of letters. But a man of letters like George Orwell, who was a man of letters and a socialist and wrote very brilliantly about it. He was irascible and very honest, and wrote damn well. So I went to Columbia, and then I left.

For various family reasons, I needed to get a job. I didn't think it would go on nearly as long as it did, but I worked as a corrections officer. I thought it would be short term, and I thought it would be

interesting. That definitely gave me a sense of unions. They went on strike once, and there was somebody who was a scab. They burnt the person's car, a brand-new car, burnt it in the parking lot.

I like the union feel. In some ways I liked working as a corrections officer better than I've ever liked working as an academic. Insofar as people didn't fuck you over, they didn't stab you in the back, they didn't do all these passive aggressive things. The pressure was pretty straight up and open, if there was aggression. People helped you out. It was just normal, not a big fancy thing; if people could help you, they did. It was a different feeling, being in a union like that. Everybody's in the struggle.

Part of it, too, was that I think I scrapped a lot. I would always pick up jobs. A lot of people I knew where I came from scrapped a lot. You weren't bothered by the kind of jobs you had to take. It's only now, in the past five years of my life, do I not have to do that.

Bousquet When you wrote about this, you said that in many ways the prison was more collegial than academia.

Williams In part it's the hypocrisy of academe. This is probably a digression, but people talk about mentorship, but having a mentor, it's not like somebody assigns it to you, it just happens. It has to be organic. I feel the same about enforced collegiality. I found the prison more organically collegial, which is not to lionize corrections officers.

To go back to scrapping for jobs, if you grow up like that, it's not bad, it's honorable, because you're trying to work to get ahead. You're always trying to improve things. Now I run a journal. You work, you scrap together to do it, and it seems to me that it's a good ethic. You feel you're moving something in a good direction, and you're doing it with other people.

I think that's why I'm more sympathetic, also, to academic labor. It seems to me there's something honorable to people trying to scrap, to make things better.

Bousquet We talked about the economic, systematic relationship of faculty and student labor, but do you think that relationship suggests some possibilities for a practical politics?

Williams That's a hard one. Because of course the answer is yes. It calls for a political organization or a movement, an alliance between faculty and students. On the one hand, we should be unapologetic to people who think that because we write we're ineffectual, that

we're effete aesthetes. We write, and we should be unapologetic about that.

On the other hand, there's a certain hubris in our business that, politically, we create the revolution because we write certain things. I think that's what I want to avoid. I don't have any big prescriptions. I do the writing I do, the work I do, whether it be on the journal, as a teacher, various other things—in a way it's narrow. I think you have to be humble and realistic about what the effect is.

Jason Arthur

Brisk and Snappy

Jeff is the most giving mentor I ever had. My first day on the job as editorial assistant at *the minnesota review* came with this free sartorial insight: “You’re not a longshoreman; you don’t need that wool cap in here.” He also gave me the shirt off his back. More specifically, a couple Brooks Brothers sweaters and a pair of pants in a paper bag, hand-me-downs either too big or too black for the managing editor.

Then there were all the comments about my writing, writing he’d offered, no, demanded, to read. No one under his employ was spared his stylistic reeducation, a program that began with a prohibition (I should say *ban*) on any Latinate word that has an Anglo-Saxon equivalent. Of all the comments (or *marks*) on all the drafts of things he’s looked at over the years, I remember one by heart. I’m still not sure whether to consider it a criticism or a compliment: “Your writing is a hybrid of beat and academic; not a natural color.”

When I forwarded him my dissertation prospectus, I did so not out of obligation—despite my best efforts, Jeff wouldn’t join my committee—but out of stylistic dependency. His initial comments included a rewrite of both my dissertation title and the first sentence of my prospectus, followed by this metacomment: “See, much crisper.”

I probably never satisfied his hunger for, what was it, *brio*? I did, however, once get credit for being “brisk” and sometimes “direct and snappy.” High praise.

I’ve always marveled at how willing Jeff is to involve himself in my development. His investment in the professionalization of one whose slim chances of even modest success would have no direct impact on Jeff’s own career is unprecedented. (Jeff will totally hate that previous sentence, by the way. I leave it unedited, in case he gets bored.)¹

I started to see where this behavior came from when I researched Jeff’s predecessor at *mr*, Michael Sprinker, for a special issue commemorating Sprinker’s editorship and life (ns 58-60). Reading remembrances of Sprinker, I realized Jeff came from a tradition of critical collegueship. Sprinker stayed up nights fighting against sloppy grad student thinking. He’d likely missed meals so he could respond to young writers trying to find their way into the

1. Editor’s Note: I’m not slacking. I left it too. –HS

parlor of criticism. He'd rolled up his sleeves for the next generation, and I think Jeff does the same.

Jeff used to talk about writing a book called *Letters to a Young Editor*, modeled on Rilke's slim volume. I hope he remembers to do that.

Since he's not editing this, I can end with a longish non sequitur: The first time I ever saw Jeff (at a department happy hour), he was staring down a deer-hunting adjunct who'd been razzing Jeff's choice of meal (a sun-dried tomato wrap, I think). "Is that a cheese log? That looks like a cheese log!" the deer hunter bellowed. Jeff answered quietly, quoting the menu. I couldn't think of two people more unlike one another than this well-dressed socialist and this guffawing camouflage-enthusiast. I wondered, must academia be so predictably polarized? Sometime later, I noticed a fishing magazine on the deer hunter's desk, which was adjacent to my desk. The magazine shone atop an ebbing pile of student papers. I snuck a peek at the post-it note on the cover. It was from Jeff, thanking the deer hunter for once again sharing his magazine. That post-it note was my first editing lesson from Jeff. With a brisk and snappy "thanks," he excised so many of my preconceptions.

Jim Cocola

“You’ll Know Him When You See Him”

At a certain point in graduate school, without a single publication to my name, one of my mentors suggested that I should write something for *the minnesota review*. Being oriented toward questions of place, the name of this journal piqued my interest, and upon further investigation I was fascinated to learn that it hadn’t been housed within three days’ walking distance of Minnesota in over thirty years.

I subsequently learned that *minnesota* functioned as a topos for that which it defined as “committed writing.” In this sense, although the journal had traveled widely since its inception, the tag remained apposite in its overtones: if Minnesota has given us Al Franken, Jesse Ventura, and Paul Wellstone, then *minnesota* has given us Fredric Jameson, Michael Sprinker, and Jeff Williams.

Resolving to join this tradition of committed writing, I drafted a review essay on the university as an institution. The fact that this work came from the perspective of a PhD candidate proved crucial to the value of its own contribution. Through Jeff’s example, and on the strength of his careful editing, it grew into a piece that was decidedly in the vein of the *minnesota* Farmer-Labor party.

Insofar as the profession has returned its attention to the public sphere, Jeff has done much to hasten that homecoming. I learned this lesson in person at my first MLA convention, when I thought to make an appearance at the *mr* cash bar, in order to introduce myself to the man who had been serious enough to take a serious newcomer seriously.

I wasn’t sure I would be able to make such an introduction on the fly, but I was reassured that it would be no problem at all. “You’ll know him when you see him,” my mentor explained. “He’s a very handsome, very well-dressed man.”

Jeff’s generosity and graciousness were on full display that evening. When he asked me for an encore contribution I was delighted to follow through. It might even be said that everything I’ve published since has been a sort of encore to this first experience, for each of my successive efforts has been imbued with the same spirit of commitment that underwrote this first attempt.

Thank you, then, Jeff: not only on my own behalf, but on behalf of the many emerging voices you’ve supported in your two decades of service to the commonwealth of *minnesota*.

Victor Cohen

Revaluations

The first few times I met Jeff, I had him typecast as a quintessential academic. What a dud, I thought. As it turned out, I had him mostly all wrong. Certainly, he wouldn't be caught dead in a pair of sweatpants and tube socks, and he's never let up on a writing and editing schedule that defies explanation. He can also be something of a rough customer when he fears his filing system has been subject to careless disregard (as anyone who's worked for him on *minnesota review* can attest to). And his ability to order wine in the most challenging of bars is legendary.

But crack that dapper exterior of the polished scholar and you'll find the equivalent of a kid in a candy shop. Read back issues of *the minnesota review* and listen closely—you'll hear him chuckling with barely-concealed joy. Granted, it's a scholarly, well-crafted, politically-committed, highly-organized, and even literary laughter, but it's there, and you'll hear it in the background of everything else he works on, from his teaching and writing to his mentoring and editing.

In fact, I can usually hear him laughing whenever I've passed him something to read. I generally hear a manic giggle, particularly when he's asked me to hammer out a sixth revision of whatever it is I'm working on. But even then, it's a rare pleasure to cackle along with him.

Lennard Davis

An Institution in the Best Sense of the Word

the minnesota review is the only journal I read on a regular basis, not merely because it is sent to me, but because its mix of creative writing and academic essays is a rare and refreshing combination; the topics of the special issues are always so presciently telling about what is new, hot, and interesting in critical thinking. The interviews have always lent a human dimension to an often impersonal kind of writing and afford an insight into a critic's current work in advance of his or her next book. All of which success I attribute of Jeff, who has put so much time and much of his life into this journal. My encounters with him from an editorial perspective have always been easy, and collegial with just the right amount of editorial direction and heft to make my work, and the work of colleagues who I have recommended, rise to the level of the general excellence of the journal as a whole. So what I want to say to you Jeff is just "Thank You" for making an institution and in the course of that becoming an institution, in the best possible sense of that word.

David Downing

The Roast-A-Way: Giving It to Jeff

Now is a time when we all have a good occasion to celebrate: the profession is a better place because of Jeff Williams and *the minnesota review*. The evidence can be found all around us in literary and cultural studies, but especially between the covers of *mr*, so no one reading this appreciation will need me to repeat it. But when Jeff arrived in town about five years ago, my personal life also got better. So I'll begin the roast with the toast: Thanks, Jeff, for all that you give us!

Imagine the likelihood of these circumstances ever happening to any academic in the humanities: a writer and scholar who shares intellectual interests, political orientations, personal values; who enjoys white wine (and red) and good food (with the exception of seafood, and I gave up trying to improve him on that score); and (the clincher) who has, like me, lived many years of his professional life as an editor—that such a human being would move within a few blocks of where I live? Well, most of you can dream away, but in my case that amazing good fortune is exactly what happened.

Our editorship and friendship link up pretty well, but back to the professional. Try as I might, I cannot think of anyone who knows more about the history of the profession, the university, and the disciplines of literary and cultural studies than Jeff. And, as we all know, *mr* is the best place to access that wealth of valuable resources and good judgment. As the subtitle says, it's a journal of "committed writing," and Jeff is a committed scholar and person, in the best sense of those words. His clarity and precision in his editing, his writing, and his interviewing mirrors his care and thoughtfulness in his personal life.

Now, I admit, it can be tough when the razor-edge goes to work on language that you composed: I mean, my god, for any of us who have ever published in *mr*, think how much we have suffered under this man's hatchet/pen. But after the dust settles, I bet not a one of us would return to our old ways because Jeff simply makes what we are trying to say better, more compact, less jargon-ridden, more "crisp," as he would put it. And, truth be told, I have tried to get him back when it is my turn to play editor, but it has never worked: I can't seem to edit the pieces Jeff has published in *Works and Days* because his essays always come so well written there's never been anything for me to do but publish them. Rats for the roast. You learn quickly when working with Jeff that ordinary language

can be a powerful vehicle for translating complex ideas so they can reach a broader public. For that purpose, Jeff is a master and *mr* the model for us all.

Jeff's teaching, writing, and editing are committed to the difficult tasks of translating between different discourses, persons, histories, and contexts. And the goal of all those translations is at root pretty simple: to make a difference, to make things better, with an especial eye for the most vulnerable among us, like students in debt. Just recall how many of his essays that first appeared in *mr* capture a time, a place, a movement. Recall also the many terms he gives us to translate some of our shared professional experiences into language: posttheory generation, academostars, brave new university, post-welfare state university, academic bondage, the "hit parade" vs. the "food groups" way of organizing theory anthologies. The list goes on, but in short, who has described us academics and what we do better than Jeff and the contributors to *mr*?

But certainly the monumental task that he has sustained throughout his eighteen-year stewardship of *the minnesota review*, and for which he will long be recognized, is the remarkable set of 44 interviews with some of the very people most responsible for the changes in our intellectual and institutional lives. No one has given us such an informed, insider view of how the personal is the professional, and vice versa. I would say that these many interviews have taught me more about the profession, and the links between theory, criticism, politics, persons, and institutions, than just about anything else I have read. There is no better resource to learn how professional identity is socially constructed. I have also taught several of these interviews in my graduate courses, and I have yet to find a student who does not appreciate their lively engagement with the issues we have been discussing in class.

I haven't yet quite adjusted to the idea that Jeff is no longer the *mr* editor (and how CMU let this one go continues to baffle me, even though he has repeatedly told me the story of what happened). But I know there's a lot of other things he will be doing, and we will all be the beneficiaries of the best of what he has yet to give us. On that note, I raise my glass at this year's MLA cash bar not just for his work on *mr*, but also because Jeff has become for me both a personal and professional brother. That's a lot to celebrate.

John Eperjesi

Project Minnesota Review

When I first entered Jeff Williams' office, I was struck by how impossibly neat the room was. I felt like I was standing in a model "Literary Critique Office" at Ikea. There was not one object out of place, no towering piles of papers or books, no disjointed rainbows of Post-It notes. Everything appeared in measured, calm, clean rows. Like his office space, Jeff was smartly dressed, just stylish enough to warrant attention without transgressing into vanity. I also noticed a clean scent in the room, a carefully edited amount of cologne announcing his presence, not overwhelming you with it. The cologne, Clinique for Men as I later learned, offers a fitting metaphor for Jeff's scholarly life, neither too clinically pragmatic, nor too French, rather just the right blend of the two traditions.

Jeff reminded me of the warm, detail-oriented task-master of *Project Runway*, Tim Gunn. I imagine Jeff as the host of a new reality show, *Project Minnesota Review*, where he glides around a room, reading the work of young scholars, telling them, "This worries me," "Make it work," "Carry on," "This needs editing."

Shortly after Jeff arrived at CMU, he said he would like to read my book. I was flattered. Of course he finished it in a couple of days and got right back to me, pointing out that I got the titles of books by David Harvey and Fredric Jameson mixed up in the footnotes. It was nice of him to read it. Unlike Jeff, I've never been accused of being detail-oriented. Like the fashion guru Tim Gunn, Jeff's efficient, spot-on comments always help young scholars create a final product that possesses quality, taste, and style.

Gerald Graff

Jeff as Writer, Editor, and Friend

I first heard of Jeff years ago when a colleague showed me a manuscript copy Jeff had written—I don't recall how the colleague had got it—on histories of the profession. I found Jeff's work arresting not just because he was interested in a topic I had written about, but because he wrote both with clarity and the kind of critical acumen that forced me to rethink my own ideas. He has subsequently written with great flair and wide influence on many aspects of our profession, from trends in criticism and theory to the much-neglected problems students have trying to afford a college education.

A few years after that incident I met Jeff and we've been friends and frequent correspondents ever since. When Jeff took over *mrr* I knew he would be as terrific an editor as he has turned out to be, and I've often been the beneficiary of his editing. Jeff has written amusingly about his lack of tolerance for bad writing, and that's certainly one of the things that have made him a great editor, but unlike some tough-minded editors and many others in our fault-finding profession, Jeff is also very generous with praise when he thinks you've done something good. I'll personally miss him a lot as editor, but I'm delighted to be able to look forward to many more years reading his work and being his friend.

Noah Heringman

Why I Don't Read Journals (Except *mr*)

Jeff Williams and I started teaching at the University of Missouri together in August of 1998. I was fresh out of graduate school and Jeff was a seasoned veteran coming from a tenured position at East Carolina. When the chair introduced us at a departmental get-together, Jeff mentioned that he was editing a journal called *the minnesota review*. “I never read journals,” I replied, arch little greenhorn that I was. Instead of writing me off as an arrogant Harvard PhD—which I certainly would have done in his place—Jeff became my mentor and my friend. We sparred a little over the relevance of journals and moved on to other topics of mutual interest, which proved to be numerous. The next Monday I found a copy of the most recent issue of *mr* in my mailbox. I never contributed to the journal, but became a loyal reader and was delighted to see work by my friends appear in it as the years went by.

None of my professors at Harvard were journal editors, and for all its virtues my education there did not instill in me any clear sense of the journal as a vital network of our profession. I hadn't reflected at all on what it meant to construct my scholarly identity, like my professors, around the book (which I hadn't written) rather than the journal article (which got me my job). It would be inaccurate to say that Jeff used *mr* and his own example to steer me away from autopoiesis and toward the public sphere as the theoretical paradigm for my scholarly identity, but only because our relationship was never dryly pedagogical. While he was at Missouri, we talked about Kantian aesthetics, Marxist ecology, New Criticism, the history of the discipline, and everything under the sun. We also came close enough to sampling all the restaurants in Columbia that we talked about coauthoring a guidebook.

The pleasure of talking about ideas with Jeff, more than any pedagogical intervention or formal critique could have done, alerted me to the professional character of our work. Take institutional difference, for example—fortunately the nickname “Harvard boy” didn't stick for too long. Likewise (for good and ill) departmental politics and its interface with the state, and the economics of departmental hierarchy. Surely “teach the university” will appear somewhere near the top, if there's a list of Jeff's top ten mantras in this issue; I don't live up to it every day myself, but it's to his credit and the journal's that I went from resisting to respecting that position over a few years of argument. Much of this transpired

on a personal level. Jeff's intense historical interest in my father's career as a literary academic was a powerful argument and gave me a new sense of the meaning reposing in seemingly small relics, such as inscriptions in scholarly books by their authors, and of the power of social constellations in a scholar's career. Coming to the *London Review of Books* and the *Chronicle of Higher Education* in the wake of *mr* I found myself scrutinizing the contributors' handling of their own professionalism and examining the workings of the "star system" that Jeff was always talking about. (For the first several weeks I thought it was "historicism" he was talking about, a confusion that may have something to do with the phonological map of Long Island.)

I can't say that reading *mr* has given me a much greater appreciation for journals like *Studies in Romanticism*, which provide the meat and potatoes of my bibliographies and my students'. I confess that I still have never read one of those issues cover to cover, or even read pieces from any given specialist journal in back-to-back issues. I do appreciate much more the work these editors do and—far from bragging about it—am now somewhat loth to make this confession. But *mr* is a very different kind of journal. It brings together literary intellectuals. It's the only journal I read—though again this may reveal more about my own shortcomings than about the journal—in which good academic literary criticism, and theory, and creative work (in quantity) appear together. I know, from my own failure to contribute the review essay that Jeff from time to time urged me to write, that the journal does not merely aim at a romantic reconstruction of a literary past in which criticism and theory were not yet so rarefied that they couldn't speak to a general and *literary* readership. Writing for *mr* (it seems to me) requires a commitment not only in politics but in professional allegiance to a dissenting type of forum. I have to confess (again) that apart from timidity what stopped me mainly was the provincial idea that writing for *mr* wouldn't gain me any credit as a scholar in my field. And I knew that Jeff was a tough editor.

When I was too busy talking and indulging in the vice of the moment (for us, in those years, it was wine and cigarettes, or when possible single-malt and cigars), Jeff was busy getting up the next morning and producing the incredible array of writerly and editorial labor that sets him apart. His editorial commitment to my own writing, when we exchanged work, was a part of that. Part of what I want to say is that friendship and scholarship are of a piece for Jeff. Friends and colleagues and students all benefit alike from this overarching zest for the literary life, and will continue to do so after the editorship of *mr* moves on. The major scholarly projects that

Jeff is bringing to fruition now will be part of the journal's legacy in that sense, part of a literary gestalt that might be called a critical affirmation of contemporary literary culture, to risk a clever paradox of the kind that Jeff will probably underline and question in the margin.

Katie Hogan

Student Debt

While a graduate student at Rutgers in the early 1990s, I lost two family members to AIDS, and my sister was living with the virus. I decided to switch my dissertation topic from Emily Dickinson as a proto-poststructuralist to a gender and race analysis of the culture of AIDS. My new dissertation advisor handed me a call for papers entitled “The Politics of AIDS.” The flier indicated that manuscripts should be sent to Jeffrey J. Williams, editor of *the minnesota review*.

I sent the essay, “Speculations on Women and AIDS,” and waited. It is difficult to convey the shock and elation I felt when I received Jeff’s acceptance letter. As a first-generation college student from a modest background, I felt insecure in graduate school. The acceptance signaled recognition of my project, but more importantly, it demonstrated Jeff’s commitment to bringing literary criticism and critical analysis to bear on the silent topic of women and AIDS.

While most editors would have moved on after the “Politics of AIDS” issue appeared, Jeff continued to encourage me and suggested that I edit a book collection on the topic of women, gender, and HIV/AIDS. He offered to help by contacting editors at Routledge and NYU Press. In 1998, Routledge published my co-edited collection, *Gendered Epidemic: Representations of Women in the Age of AIDS*. In 2001, my book, based on my dissertation and on the essay I wrote for *the minnesota review*, was published by Cornell University Press. Jeff’s consistent support pushed me to pursue publication. To this day, Jeff continues to encourage my scholarship and professional development, and I consider him a friend as well as a colleague.

Numerous people in the profession could tell a story similar to mine. So many of us have been altered by Jeff’s unusual intellectual gifts, editorial wisdom, and kindness. After Marc Bousquet’s blog post in which he analyzed Carnegie Mellon University’s decision to withdraw financial support for *the minnesota review*, many wrote in detailing how Jeff has contributed to their education and career—teaching them how to write better, how to do academic editing, how to negotiate book deals, or how to prepare a tenure or promotion application. At the MLA conference, a graduate student and Delegate Assembly member who represents disability issues in the profession told me that Jeff Williams was one of the most accomplished, helpful, and approachable professors he had ever met. And this project focused on recognizing Jeff, which was initiated and organized by his graduate students at CMU, is another

vivid example of Jeff's influence and passion for people, intellectual culture, the profession, and social justice in our institutions.

Of course, Jeff's scholarship is another compelling demonstration of his generosity, brilliance, and commitments. His two essays on student debt in *Dissent* elegantly delineate parallels between colonial America's indentured labor system and the current student debt crisis curtailing young Americans. These essays are quintessential Jeff: gracefully written, weaving together history, statistics, argument, and a call to action, and closing with solutions of what can be done. Jeff is unusual in that he not only diagnoses a problem, he has the courage to offer solutions based in research, reason, and ethical/political commitments. It seems we are all students of Jeff's. Whether undergraduate or graduate student, assistant or full professor, independent scholar or adjunct, we are lucky to be in his debt.

Amitava Kumar

At the MLA with Jeff

This isn't by far my worst MLA moment. But it is something that has happened more than once. It involves being in the elevator with Jeff Williams.

There is a particularly maddening ritual that gets enacted in the elevators at the more crowded hotels during the MLA. People enter and do the quick scan, reading the name tags, or simply checking faces. Talk is muted. Everything you've hated about academia can be found pressed in that one-minute ride in the elevator: excruciating status consciousness, clash of fashions, bad conversation, lack of air.

But all of this vanishes with Jeff. Over the course of the last decade and a half, I have seen Jeff at his home or mine only about three or four times. But I can't count the number of times we have hung out at conferences. Or used to, when I was single and without kids. And, of course, such meetings have involved travel in elevators. This is what happens. Once the elevator gets moving, Jeff will continue talking in an unchecked voice about whatever we have been discussing between ourselves: a friend's alcoholism, a new romance, the difference between Andrew Ross and Michael Bérubé, pieces in the *Chronicle*, the asshole who was his Chair, the asshole who wasn't his Chair, a Hugo Boss suit that someone was wearing, where good food can be found, what wine will go with it, etc. He will share his opinions frankly and without inhibition.

On one occasion, the doors opened and a crowd tried to get in but retreated because there was no space. A woman, a bit older than me, and also a bit shorter, came close but then shrugged her shoulders and drew back. Jeff said, even as the doors were closing, "That was Elaine Showalter. Did you read her article in the *TLS* last month?" As the elevator rose, he offered a neat little disquisition on Showalter's recent academic output. If I remember correctly, he was disappointed. The ten people behind me—or was it thirty—comprised his silent audience. I certainly was silent. And probably staring at the floor because I didn't want to look at the faces reflected in the metal.

Why does he do it? I don't believe he is even conscious of doing this, and who knows whether better friends than me have pointed this out to him. But I think his behavior can be linked straightforwardly to his editorial practice. Even at the level of the sentence, and certainly in the overall structure of the essays that he writes, his words always lean toward conclusiveness. His fully

declarative starting lines are often, in fact, conclusions of one sort or another. The rest of the piece is just a journey into clarity.

If you were looking for a theory of elevator behavior, this would be it: an editor who is capable of writing “blah-blah” in the margins of your prose would like to get to the point quickly. He isn’t going to hide behind polite, meaningless phrases. He is riding on his certain judgment, and has nothing to hide from anyone. The elevator will get to its destination when it will, but our editor will make sure we get there first, even if it embarrasses the hell out of you.

Note

Amitava Kumar was for several years a member of the *minnesota review* advisory board even though one of his first pieces for the journal was rejected by Mike Sprinker with the words “This ain’t MTV Unzipped.”

Doran Larson

Corrections Officers Weigh in on Pantless Professor

Four beefy prison guards, toting nightsticks, watch a coeditor of *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism* drop his drawers and don a lab coat. A new eroto-literary hunger among the enforcement class? No, this is Jeff Williams, trying to get through a metal detector to meet recent contributors to *the minnesota review*.

Wherever they are, no matter how naked he has to get, Jeff will be there, ready to meet his writers on their own turf. As they will tell you themselves, for at least four men inside Attica Correctional Facility, Jeff Williams is the finest former CO on this merciless earth (and proof that the species can indeed evolve).

Clifford T. Manlove

Williams' Trope of the Profession and Other Counter-Narratives

First of all, I would like to extend my deepest personal thanks to Jeff Williams for the opportunity he afforded me to work as a managing editor for *mr* during the late 1990s. While I would like to think that the dissertation chapter I published in *SAR* as a graduate student is what landed me a tenure-line job with Penn State, I also recognize that what really helped me get the job was learning about what Jeff has called the “academics of publishing” from the inside. This involved much more than simply learning how a “finished” work is published. More crucially, I experienced the publishing process from “soup to nuts,” the role of editors in establishing a finished essay, demystifying something that can seem baffling and arbitrary to the uninitiated. Just as I was learning how to write academic essays that might have the opportunity to be published I was also learning—thanks to Jeff—something of what it is that editors want (didn't Freud talk about this?). Learning this has not only helped me continue to publish, but it also was instrumental in initiating me into the discourses and practices of academia that are so crucial to any successful job search. I am especially thankful to Jeff for choosing me—when he did not know me—from among a number of possible candidates to work for him when I was ABD at the University of Missouri. This gave me a confidence that no “A” on a seminar paper or passing of an exam (written or oral) could possibly give.

I first met Jeff when he was invited to Missouri to give a job talk for a position calling for a specialization in the novel. (When Jeff arrived at Missouri, I was in the midst of a full-on existential period—after comps, having finished a few chapters of my dissertation—a sort of slow-motion panic about the job market and my chances of getting a job having seen so many of my fellow “lit” ABDs at Missouri languish on the market for years, lucky to land a 4/4 fixed term sort of job after two, three, four years on the market; many leaving the profession altogether or being under-employed/over-worked as adjuncts. Needless to say, morale was low for the lit folk.) Jeff chose to give a talk from a chapter of his first book on Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, focusing on the role of the professional and professionalism in the novel. Perhaps it is the fact that Jeff chose to give a talk on the very novel that made me—when I read it as a high school senior—want to become an English professor in the first place that inspired me to ask him the first question after

his presentation; but, more likely, it was Jeff's novel argument that Conrad's novel implicates the professions in African colonialism that led to my query about whether Conrad meant to condemn professionals and the notion of expertise for colonialism. After the lecture, the department chair asked if I would join them for dinner. I later found out from the chair that Jeff had asked for me to join the dinner, and that he wanted me to work for *mr*. It would have been easy enough for Jeff to have a nice dinner with the senior professors, to hire a graduate student they would recommend (likely not me; I was no "star," held no fellowship, and was not a creative writer—the "elect" at Missouri), but instead he reached out to an undistinguished graduate student he thought might engage with his work on the strength of one meeting.

Yet, while I am thankful for the opportunity to have worked with Jeff—and, by extension, the professional opportunities this facilitated—what I find most interesting and amazing about Jeff from a professional standpoint is that my story is but one of many. At each institution where he has spent time, many graduate students and junior faculty have benefitted from working with Jeff, as students, editorial assistants, and colleagues. While many active scholars avoid editorial work, neglect their teaching, and refuse to mentor junior colleagues, Jeff has always embraced each of these professional responsibilities. The reason active scholars avoid these things is time—most reason that more can be published by leaving editing to others, by teaching as little as possible (and then only the grad students!), and leaving junior colleagues to their own devices. Jeff has taken the exact opposite approach to becoming a senior scholar, seeing each of these "drudgeries" as opportunities to produce work.

On this point, one of the qualities of Jeff's work as an editor/scholar that I admire most, and something that is at the heart of his political sensibility, is his attention to the *counter*-narrative, the counterintuitive rejection of what passes, in a host of academic fields and human discourses, as the "conventional wisdom." I try to emulate this useful sensibility in my own work. Here are a few notable examples of this narrative move as Jeff employs it in print and in daily conversations that have made an impression on me over the years:

- There are *not* too many PhDs being produced in English. While academic jobs are limited, there are many other possible careers for English PhDs—especially in publishing and NGOs. In any case, limitations on academic, particularly tenure-line jobs are purely artificial, driven by economics rather than real need.

- “Pre-professionalization” not only does *not* hurt graduate students, it is necessary for the best possible chance of success on the job market. As such, the best way to become a tenure-line faculty member is to adopt the practices of one, to learn the discourse and to actively practice the discipline.
- Increasing the availability of student loans is not good. While it is good to open opportunities to middle- and lower-income students, even undergraduate loans are creating a certain indentured servitude. The increase of student loans—as result of Bush’s “ownership society” is but an abdication of (what had been) a public responsibility to educate its youth.
- Teaching freshman composition is *not* a waste of time for active scholars. Nor is teaching, for that matter. Teaching and scholarship must not be mutually exclusive activities.
- Forcing universities to enter the economic marketplace, to raise capital, develop business plans, and to cultivate a clientele are *not* for the good. Increasingly, Americans expect that universities will simultaneously find ways to fund themselves, not increase tuition, and lower public financial support. These contradictions cannot be sustained.
- Books and paper are good technology. Jeff always has expressed optimism about the future of the book—especially in its print/paper form—that I always draw on when the future of the book is called into question. I suppose he means this to extend to print media generally. Print/paper media does not need to be plugged in or wired. Print/paper allows readers freedom of movement, the opportunity to share/lend texts, and ownership.

Finally, what I most appreciate about my association with Jeff Williams is his willingness to share, to reject hierarchy and prestige as a matter of course. Thank you, Jeff, not only for what you have done for me, but also for letting me be a small part of your long, distinguished run with *mr*. I look forward to extending this work you have started—the practice of a committed academic publishing and a belief that it can change students, individuals, and worlds—and making it a part of my own institution.

Michelle Massé

Jeff Williams' Third Act

In Jeff Williams' essay, "Andrew Ross's Second Act" (*Chronicle* 31 Aug. 2009), Jeff notes that "Reputations tend to take the form of the bildungsroman: Much of the action occurs during the initial rise.... It's not nearly as striking to tell the middle story." Not nearly as striking to the average undergraduate reader, perhaps, but certainly so to a generation still buying tickets to Rolling Stones concerts. Baby boomers applaud not only second, but third acts, aware—even in the case of such precocious performers as Jeff—that it takes a lot of Bildung to make a professional life worth talking about. Jeff has done that work.

A maven of institutions, Jeff has moved from those whose boundaries are concrete (See "The Professor Was a Prison Guard" [*Chronicle* 6 April 2007]) to those whose limits are marked by invisible walls or the bound covers of a journal. Despite Jeff's productivity in the traditional academic sense, it's his work as the editor of *the minnesota review* that I see as his second act, sure that his third will be on a still larger stage.

An historian, editor, and analyst of other theoreticians' work, Jeff's range and acumen make him a formidable critic. One thread that runs through everything he's done is his recognition and honoring of work, in whatever context he finds it. Universities not honoring contracts, students being "indentured" as docile workforces, unfair labor practices: Jeff unflinchingly addresses injustice where he finds it. Whatever Orwellian enthusiasm brought him to Downstate Correctional Facility, he continues to act upon the hope of rehabilitation. He comments that "I miss the clarity of it and, as with single malt, prefer my aggression straight." He's turned that aggression to good use through his editorial tasks, which he's made into a praxis of truths that all too often remain only theoretical.

It's hard to imagine *the minnesota review* without Jeff Williams; it's easy to imagine Jeff's third stage without *the minnesota review*. As a splendid example of what he once called "prodigal critics," Jeff is returning to no sheep-like fold. His vulpine sharpness—and prodigal generosity—will continue to make him chief among equals in the group he once called in a note "all the cranky ones of criticism." In another note, Jeff once asked me, "Do you ever wish to read a longer article?" As I look forward to Jeff's third act, the answer is "yes"—if the article's written by Jeff.

Louis Menand

Jeff the Obscure

When the weather is warm, they wheel us out to the yard, where we sit in the shade under the wall and tell stories about the early days of the profession, about how the one they called Norton disappeared for twenty years, and then one day returned with his great Anthology, and about how Ebenezer Stencil invented the mimeograph machine and started the Ditto Revolution, so that the first thing every student did when handed a new poem in class was lift it to their face and smell it. (The practice is now banned for health reasons, but so is driving without a seatbelt, and is the world truly a better place?) And some of us recall the man who was once the face the discipline, Alfred E. Neuman. He is today completely forgotten, but we are all, in some real sense, his children.

A tale that no one tires of hearing is the story of how I discovered Jeff Williams. This occurred at Columbia College, in the late 1970s. In Jeff's own account, which has become part of the legend, he had walked all the way into Manhattan from Ronkonkoma, a journey that took him three days and, in his words, "at least as many nights," drawn to the light of learning like a moth to an old sweater. I later learned, though, from Officer Krupke of Campus Security, that what really happened was that when the truck from the turnip farm made a sharp turn from Broadway onto 116th street, Jeff, who had been asleep in the back, rolled out. In any event, he found his way to my Freshman Composition class.

I had by then risen to the rank of Preceptor. How proud we were of our little Preceptor badges, a mirror crossed with a lamp. I saw that there was something distinctive about Jeff the minute he walked into class, something that set him apart from the other students. At the time, it was mysterious, the Williams difference, a little vague and atmospheric, but I now realize it was probably the white socks. I also noticed a tic that would later become beloved by colleagues and, ultimately, the whole profession—the tendency to respond to every remark with a sentence that begins, "But don't you think . . .?" "Jeff, it's a nice day." "But don't you think conversations about the weather are surrogates for a true feeling of community?" "Jeff, this pronoun doesn't have an antecedent." "But don't you think I should get credit anyway?"

I realized, with that celerity of apprehension that would earn me the nickname Swiftly, that this degree of attitude would be toxic in a group of young people actually hoping to learn something from

my class. I could see that the concept of learning something from me was just not on Williams' radar. So after the first week, I drew him aside and told him that he didn't have to attend class, just meet with me every week for office hours.

How often I have replayed that decision over in my head in the many years since, always ending with a sharp agenbite of inwit! I think that perhaps T. S. Eliot puts it best when he remarks, in his poem "The Waste Land," "Weialala leia, Wallala leialala." Often, of an evening, and after a glass or two of a decent mid-priced rosé, I have repeated the story to one or another of my many girlfriends, wives, and mistresses, who invariably ask, after I have finished pouring out the tale, "Sorry, who is this guy again?" This was my chance to teach discipline to a man who would one day leave his intellectual and editorial impress on an entire continent. Well, okay, the entire Midwest. Instead, I gave him, gratuitously, the sense of entitlement that, in our business, can lead to only one result: a career as an academic Marxist.

True to our agreement, Jeff did show up for office hours, where he quizzed every statement I made and insisted that I read his poems. I took the poems, but I could not bring myself to read them. I was training to become an English professor. What was I going to do with a bunch of poems? After the semester was over, I lost track of Jeff. At first, I didn't notice that something was missing from my life, but then, about a year later, I was sitting with the poet W. H. Auden in one of the dives on 114th street (actually, now that I am remembering it, Auden wasn't there), when Jeff suddenly appeared and sat down beside me. I recognized him right away, because of the socks, and asked him what he was up to. He had left college, he informed me, and taken work as a prison guard.

Ouch. That arrow found its mark! How humiliating for a Columbia ABD to learn that a person who only a year before was just another snot-nosed wannabe now had a real job in the real world, performing full-body frisks, slapping bad-ass dudes into solitary for looking at you cross-eyed, that kind of stuff. I was insane with jealousy, though I betrayed nothing. I said, "Better than the prison-house of language," or some such, showing the knack for phrase-turning that would earn me the nickname Phrase Turner, and asked whether he cared for a cappuccino. I figured he was doing pretty well, he could pick up the tab. He saw that one coming, and said he had to run. He rose and twitched. His mantle blew. And he was off.

I figured that was that. Not for the last time in a long career, I figured too soon. Many years later, I was sitting in my office, deftly filleting a second-rate term paper on *Tender Buttons*, when the phone

rang. It was Jeff. He was now working for Routledge (the publisher, not the candy), he explained. The outfit was being run by idiots, he told me. He had plans to take it over and turn it into something decent, but at the moment he was an editorial assistant, assigned to read slush. He asked whether I might have any slush on hand I could send him. I was embarrassed to say that I did not, but that I hoped we might be in touch. He said we would, and, I have to admit, he has been every bit as good as his word.

Jeffrey T. Nealon

My Messianic Life with Jeff Williams

I first met Jeff Williams on page 1165 of the 1993 run of *PMLA*—where he accused me, somewhat rudely, of having a deconstructive “true messiah” complex. Jesus H. Christ, I thought, just what I need my first year on the job. At the end of the day, though, it seems he was mostly pissed off because I was beating up on Paul de Man (guilty as charged on that). So when I first met him in person several years later, I was somewhat surprised that, aside from the Europhile eyewear (which Williams sported long before every academic Tom, Dick, and Harriette began wearing Gramsci glasses), Jeff wasn’t like the other de Manians from whom I got regular hate mail. Most of them had a bad case of affluenza—second-generation Ivy Leaguers who existed mostly on sushi and pretension, their Comp Lit creds earned largely from their childhood summers abroad and/or a live-in Italian maid on the Upper West Side. In short, Jeff (happily) never quite fit the profile—I’m sure he heard his share of Italian growing up, but most of it insults and mobtalk. And despite this inauspicious beginning, we’ve become friends in the years since.

Though I’ll have to say that, while I’ve shared several conference panels and closed a dozen taverns with Williams in the meantime, he still resolutely refuses to say anything nice about what I write. And would he ever publish anything I sent him? In Long Island Italian, “forgeddaboutit.” I’ve sent him several things over the years, and they all came back (quickly, I’ll say to his credit) stamped “return to sender.” One particularly memorable rejected piece, on the corporate university, was (I thought) tailor-made for *minnesota review*—my ticket to finally getting published in its storied pages. Nope—he suggested it wasn’t enough about labor and its discontents to speak to the readers of *mr*.

Ironic then that *Rethinking Marxism* ended up publishing the essay. Not Marxist enough for Jeff and *minnesota review*; only Marxist enough for Marxists. But, hey—somebody has to maintain standards, and weed out the infidels. Thank the messiah (for) Jeff Williams.

So I offer this brief tribute first to recall the invaluable hard work Jeff did for many years at the helm of *minnesota review* – the immense debt owed to him by all of us who work on this mongrel thing called “theory.” Also, I write to mark our friendship – born, as all friendship must be, from contestation. And finally, most importantly, I write so that I might fucking sneak through something—anything—that he can’t reject!

Cary Nelson

It Could Be Fargo

I never heard anyone say *the minnesota review* was the prettiest magazine available. It was never the leading edge of Bauhaus style. More like a Maytag washing machine manual left over from the Coen brothers' filming in Fargo.

It was just a good read. Consistently. And there were nagging mysteries. Like how on earth did Jeff do so many good interviews? How did he prepare himself that well so many times? He always treats such questions matter-of-factly, colorlessly, as if anyone who set half their mind to it could do as well. Hardly. The whole enterprise of editing the mag seemed daunting after a decade. But eighteen years? By then it was scary.

But my experience of Jeff as a peerless editor and reader is not confined to the *review*. Early in 2009 I was having dinner with him in Pittsburgh, and he asked me what I was up to. I told him I was revising a book, *No University Is an Island: Saving Academic Freedom* (NYU P), based on a terrific reader's report I'd received. "Tell me a little more about the report," he replied. So I went through it from memory point-by-point. I described not only how right and useful each suggestion was, but also how generous the reader was in raising a problem and then offering not one, but two, ways of dealing with each issue. I went through this enlightened Chinese-menu-style reader's report and for each category picked one answer from either column A or column B. Jeff sat patiently, expressionlessly, and when I was finally finished with my detailed summary, he mentioned that he had written the report!

Bruce Robbins

For Jeff— An Undone Roast

Nothing very clever and oblique and roast-like is coming to mind. I went back through my files and made a list of editorial comments and suggestions I've received from Jeff over the years, fully prepared to be embarrassed myself as long as the list also allowed me to embarrass him. But all I got from the exercise was a picture that will be familiar to everyone who has been worked over by Jeff in his editorial capacity: extreme clarity, intellectual forcefulness, an imaginative vision of someone else's potential project as a whole, on the one hand, and on the other a remarkable tendency to spare delicate authorial feelings, a tendency that seems to come not from spinelessness or squeamishness but from the sense of being engaged in a common project of genuine existential significance.

Talent, intellectual generosity, political solidarity—not easy things to make a roast out of.

I'm glad to see from Heather Steffen's conspiratorial directions that the idea of interviewing Jeff has occurred to any number of people besides myself. It's natural that it would. But what I'd really like to see would be an interview with him composed entirely of questions and cues and comments he's offered other people while interviewing *them*. "What kind of family did you come from?" ("Your father was a TV repairman." "You were a cab driver in Chicago when you were 18?") "It's also a material issue; a lot of them are probably working part-time jobs." "I'm interested in careers and intellectual formation, and how you came to do a project like X." "So, to fill in more of the timeline..." "It seems to me that your work is contrarian, in a good sense..." "Your discipline is X, but people who come upon your work would probably know you through Y..." "One thing that I admire about your work is that you're actually putting your money down, applying what you think of education to what you do." "If I put your career in narrative terms...I could say that the first predicate was working on A, but the move to B marked a new predicate. Did your project change?" "Or people might have realized that governments, contrary to the conservative litany, actually do some good." "Could you tell me surprises you've had that changed the way you saw things, perhaps disappointments on the one hand, and good surprises on the other?" "If you were asked what you do it for..."

Notice that at some point in the course of his interviews, the people interviewed often end up asking Jeff a question, which he

then answers in the most natural way in the world, as if he were not the one supposed to be asking the questions. That reversal says something about the intellectual seriousness of the interview, or what he makes of it.

In this company, I don't have to insist on how much sheer labor has gone into building, sustaining, and maintaining *minnesota review*. One thing that may be worth emphasizing about the interview as a successful form is the work (a multi-sided Williams motif) that goes into coming to his subject with an analysis already developed, a coherent if provisional sense of someone's achievement. "One way to characterize your work is that you apply X to Y." "I can see how A is consistent with your earlier work, both in taking a B view...and in C. But still, it's relatively unique..." This means knowing—that is, finding out—a staggering amount about the backdrop against which the achievement emerged. But another and contrary thing that is also worth emphasizing is that, having done all this work, you have to be (and Jeff is) able to let it go:

Williams Is there any advice that you'd give to people who'd want to do this kind of project?

Radway I guess it would be: Listen. You have to learn how to listen.

Williams How do you train yourself to listen?"

Radway That's a really good question.

If you read Jeff's interviews, you see that although he's done an enormous quantity of homework for each one, his game plan never seems to hinder him from listening very closely to what he's being told and, depending on what gets said, spontaneously and confidently striking off on a tangent. This is what permits, among many other things, the wonderful *mano-a-mano* moments, like the following with Bush-appointee Mark Bauerlein: "You were criticizing the academic world before for being cut off and insular, but now you're saying that its being cut off as an enclave is precisely its virtue."

Confident spontaneity that results from lots of hard work: it's not just a model of how to conduct an interview, but a model of how to model intellectual confidence for young aspiring writers, as Jeff has been doing for twelve years, and a model of how to live an intellectual life that's worthy of the name.

Laura Rotunno

!?!?!--*\$&@,

Or How I Learned to Love Jeff Williams

Nobody said the managing editor gig was going to be easy. In fact, they said the opposite. But it all started out quite cordially. Jeff and I met at the coffee shop down from the campus at 9:30 pm one Thursday (which is actually 10 pm Jeff-time), and we discussed what my duties would be as managing editor. They seemed straightforward enough: keeping the fiction and poetry readers on task, maintaining correspondence with contributors, proofing and formatting manuscripts, working with the printer. I was wrong about the straightforward part. Working for *mr* was anything but straightforward. And, as blunt as Jeff is, “straightforward” is not an apt way to encapsulate his “managing” of managing editors.

While Jeff may not yet be a Nike spokesperson (though it seems that job may be opening up), he is a believer in the “Just Do It” system—at least, with a managing editor like me. So learning by a sort of trial and error (and error) system was my way. It didn’t always go over well for me or for him. And so it went until I recognized that, along with his “Just Do It” air—or sometimes rather loud directives—he was always showing me what to do. Previous correspondence filled files. An editorial history (a trajectory of revisions and decisions, if you will) was at my fingertips. The actual printing business was...okay, I’ll admit that I never understood that part of the work too clearly. The materials were there, and, as I learned to read them and to read Jeff, I became a managing editor.

Reading Jeff and learning from him—how to deal with writers and colleagues, how to meet scholars, and to enter meaningful and fun conversations with them, how to edit my own writing so that it captured what I really meant—is also how I became the professor and writer I am.

We joked around with a “WWJD” sign revised to “WWJJWD” in the *mr* office for a while. Now, obviously, if that question pops to mind, it is always followed by “that sonofabitch” (out of love, you know). It pops to mind. Often.

David R. Shumway

Jeffrey Williams: An Appreciation

While I have contributed a number of pieces to *mr* and have found Jeff to be a very helpful editor, his best advice to me concerned an essay published elsewhere. Unfortunately, I didn't get the advice until it had already appeared. The essay in question concerned the failure of cultural studies to recognize film director John Sayles as a kindred spirit, someone whose critique of American society had much in common with practitioners of that academic movement. As written, my essay's focus was divided between criticizing cultural studies for ignoring cultural production that shared its politics, and making a case for the value and interest of Sayles' films. I think both of those arguments are worth making, but in the short space I had, I could not do justice to them. I mentioned to Jeff that I was dissatisfied with the piece, and he allowed he didn't think it was one of my best. His advice was that I should have written "an appreciation."

Not only was that advice spot on in regard to my own essay, but I have come to think of it as a reflection of Jeff's own stance as a critic and of one of the enduring values of his writing. A great deal of the work he has published could be said to be in appreciation of the work of other critics. Included would be not only the many interviews, which are characterized by generosity and genuine interest in the projects of his subjects, but also many essays that deal with theory and criticism. This is all the more remarkable because appreciation has not for many years been a common stance in the discipline. Indeed, most of us who were educated under the influence of Theory or cultural studies—that is to say, after the decline of New Critical hegemony—learned that it was not our task to make judgments of taste or value. That was a task for belle-lettrists; we were called upon to engage in social analysis and critique of ideology. While this injunction applied mainly to literature, our stance toward our colleagues' work was also meant to be rigorously critical. But perhaps more important, fellow critics were not what we were supposed to write about unless they could be made to demonstrate some larger theoretical point, usually as an example of some error that the new theory allowed us to see.

Theory wasn't especially culpable for this state of affairs. Earlier scholars may have been less critical of each other, but only because they were even more focused on what they regarded as their subject matter, be it history, biography, language, or the text itself.

While certain theoretical works, such as Northrop Frye's *Anatomy* had a long shelf life, works of literary history or criticism tended to have a relatively short period of influence, or to remain required reading for graduate students while seldom being mentioned in contemporary scholarship. Certainly few scholars saw it as their task to explain or demonstrate the value or interest of other scholars' contributions. While theory did produce a reflexive turn that led to new investigations of the discipline's own practices, such studies seldom took their task to be appreciation. Today, reflexivity has become to some extent a habit, but we still do not very often write about other critics, and especially not appreciatively.

Perhaps this should not be surprising since it may seem natural to see other critics as competitors. Practitioners in all disciplines are in competition with each other, and open hostilities among them are probably more common in the sciences than in literary or cultural studies. The tendency in our field has been rather to ignore one's competitors. We don't regard their work as worthy even of serious disagreement. We may use it as a point of departure for our own intervention, but that is a different matter. Even when we do explicitly criticize each other, it is usually not to directly address the other's argument, but to use the failings of the argument to illustrate our own point.

In this context, Jeff's work must be seen as genuinely extraordinary. He has repeatedly helped to show why the work of other critics matters. He leads us to appreciate their contributions while retaining a critical perspective on them. Even though Jeff will no longer have *mr* as a venue for interviews, one must assume that that kind of critical appreciation will continue to be a defining quality of Jeff's writing in the future. We should also hope that others will follow his example, and that as a profession we can begin to appreciate other critics and criticism as a normal part of our practice.

H. Aram Veesper

The Disquieting Jeff Williams

Jeff Williams has many fine qualities, and one of them is generosity. I felt it the first time at around 1 am, when I parked in front of his house in Greensville, North Carolina, a comfortable house where I planned to crash for the night. Let me confess my misgivings. He was a little younger than me—no more than a couple of decades—but even so slightly younger a man always feels like a standing reproach for all that I myself have failed to accomplish. Worse, this one was funny, athletic, and brilliant. His features could express many thoughts and moods, and his smile was dangerously winning. I suspected him of conquests, and it was with unease that I walked up to his white front door.

He seemed really happy to see me. The kitchen looked like a rebel's den. An underground newspaper was being laid out on the formica table and countertops. This turned out to be the galleys of the forthcoming *minnesota review*. Two people even younger than him were toiling over fresh copy. "Do you guys know Hap Veesper?" Jeff asked them. "He's one of the great writers in the *mr* stable and he is the author of *The New Historicism*." I weakly protested against these lies while inwardly basking in his mendacious light. In this way was I introduced both to his daughter Virginia and to his disarming and natural generosity. Instead of competing with this awesome Young Turk, I began to consider him as a friend.

Many other acts of kindness ensued but the greatest one was the most recent one. March 14 of this year, a Sunday night, I got a call.

"Hap? This is Jeff Williams. Hey, Routledge sent me your manuscript for the Edward Said book."

Jeff had received the MS the previous Thursday. Not only did he read it cover to cover, but now he was also ready to spend two hours talking me through it. He told me he was sending a positive reader's report to the publisher and that he wanted to send the copyedited MS directly to me.

The copyedit that I got two days later went through the whole 304 pages line by line. It was house-to-house fighting: every phrase stood for his scrutiny and many were tagged. "Necessary?" he would write, or, "You need simple, if pithy, guideposts for the reader—say in ten years in a library." Often he wrote some version of "Too deflected—you need to stay on point," or else, more frequently than I like to admit, at the end of my paragraphs, "Draw the point."

This phrase struck a chord, and now I use it on other people all the time.

But there were also lots of comments that only someone of his stature could provide. Jeff knows more or less everything about Edward Said. He'd bio'd him for the Norton theory anthology. When Jeff wrote, "Wow—this is a real scoop that I'd not heard," I blushed and thought, Well if *he* thinks so it's gotta be true. He had bad things to say: "This seems desultory" appeared often, as did his occasional note, "totally peripheral." Readers of the *Chronicle* know he is a chaste plain stylist himself, a writer to whom grace and clarity come with infuriating ease. So he often wrote in my margins, "OK, but a bit of a flourish" or "a flourish, but its yours"—this comment was a generous licensing of my own incorrigible bad taste. And, Jesus, the man even edited my footnotes. He detailed which were to be cut, which condensed, which incorporated in the text. The other anonymous readers were good, but neither of them had devoured the whole MS at two sittings. His willingness to read every word empowered him to say with real authority: "I think you say this too many times." He dug deep and prodded me to theorize about charisma, the book's central conceit, and he sent me to the writers who might help me do it. On top of all these beyond-the-call-of-duty edits, he also provided a stunningly complimentary reader's report. At the end of it, he came up with the title that now appears on the jacket. His canny persuasions left Routledge few options. After the Williams assault, they had to publish my book.

Why then the addition of that two hour phone call? One cannot know what passes through the mind of another. But I now believe he called me that same Sunday night to make sure I'd actually do it. He knew just how long I'd been ruminating this book. An onward-spurring pep talk was called for. The conversation was all about the book and the ideas, but its hidden purpose was to fire me up and push through to the end. The combining shoving of him and my toughest editor, Hertha Schulze, finally got me over the finish line. Funny, brilliant, forceful, and young: the man, I tell you, is an incomparable menace.

Jess Wilton

The Editor Hits the Court

Among graduate students at Carnegie Mellon, Jeff's squash game is legendary. Few have seen him play, but he clearly thinks a great deal about the game, and has matched racquets with some formidable opponents. The sheer amount of time devoted to discussion of Edward Said's squash game in Jeff's Said seminar indexes the seriousness with which he approaches the game. Granted, the legend of Jeff's squash skills is in some sense self-created. But my purpose here is not to evaluate his game—a task I'm wholly unqualified to perform, given my extreme inadequacy on the squash court. As one of the lucky few who have played squash with Jeff, however, I'd like to point out some of the more telling similarities and differences between Jeff's squash game and his editing style.

For starters, Jeff won't turn down a squash game just because the other player is incompetent. He simply wants to play, regardless of how embarrassing it might be for the other person. In fact, he seems to take as much delight in taking apart a hapless squash novice as he does in ripping apart a poorly-written essay. He doesn't pull any punches, whether he's aiming a squash ball at my back for that extra point or running a blue pen across an entire page of my writing. Whether he's shutting me out for the fourth game in a row or upbraiding me for my persistent lack of concision and focus, Jeff is always good-natured with his critiques. On the court and in his editorial comments, he never fails to build me up after he takes me down. With Jeff, any novice writer or squash player will improve by leaps and bounds, despite the occasional sense of humiliation and defeat they might feel along the way.

The differences between Jeff's squash game and his editing style are more trivial than the similarities. For instance, he doesn't keep score when editing, as far as I know, although a running tally of his victories over sloppy bits of writing in a given essay would probably not be out of place. The editing scores would be higher though, because squash games end after only nine points. He most likely sweats less while editing, though it's hard to know for sure. And he certainly spends less time discussing the various merits of different pens than of different racquets. Ultimately the differences are few and insignificant. In squash as in editing, Jeff measures my strengths and weaknesses with speed and precision, and serves them back to me in a series of character-building defeats. It may

not always be pleasant, but I always walk away with a sense of hope and determination—the knowledge that with a lot of sweat and concentration, I can produce better work in the future.

Joel Woller

Jeff's "*Métier*"

I'm happy that Jeff is retiring as editor of *mr.* Now he can stop making excuses about his contributions to the long-awaited *Norton Anthology of Thought*. More importantly, he can finally pursue his true *métier* and edit that much-needed trilogy: *The Norton Anthology of Knock-Knock Jokes*, *The Norton Anthology of Jokes Beginning "A Man Walks into a Bar,"* and *The Norton Anthology of Obscene Jokes*. We know he can be relied upon to discover all the forgotten punch lines. I'm especially looking forward to the one about the nun, the preacher, and the rabbi who let loose at the annual convention of the Modern Moralists Association. After drinks, ready for debauchery and in search of the local sex clubs, they stumble by chance into a college financial aid office...

The ARG Collective

Top Ten Jeff Williams Editorial Comments

Organized, perhaps, in the order in which you're most likely to encounter them: first the email notification of the present location of your now battle-scarred manuscript, then a frantic first glance through all that blue, and finally an only-slightly-calmer perusal of the report attached to the front.

10) Sorry to take so unconscionably long in getting this back to you; as you'll see, I read it with some care, and wanted to give you a full set of comments, but finally realized that would probably entail a counter-paper of similar length.

9) You write in a lively way, but I think this can still be pared a bit.

8) It's useful, no doubt, but I think you can put it more briskly.

7) I'm sorry, but this seems banal to me.

6) Blah, blah. Too twisty.

5) You must be reading too much James.

4) I'm glazing over.

3) I think you should stop writing about rocks and write about the assholery of the profession.

2) Make it both incisive and mocking—not just an exposé, but an institutional analysis.

1) I have made a number of comments on the hard copy; I hope they are more helpful than rude.

The ARG Collective

A Mad Lib

Fill in the blanks in this unedited Williams interview question:

Williams So back to... We were talking about your book, TITLE. So I said I was EMOTION when I looked at it, I mean, I had a lot of NOUN about it, I mean in a way you talk about NOUN in a way before FAMOUS CRITIC'S NAME does, you talk about NOUN ASSOCIATED WITH CRITIC insofar as you talk about how critics have PLURAL NOUN. I mean a ADJECTIVE thing I think you say in one passage... It's ADJECTIVE that there's actually so much agreement. And the other key thing is LITERARY TERM—it strikes me that you VERB CRITIC'S NAME, which deals with the change in ANOTHER LITERARY TERM, but you have been VERB with change in A DIFFERENT LITERARY TERM, I suppose, as well as in NOUN the whole time. And, you know what I mean, if I think of key words, that organize on nodal points of what you do, they would be KEY WORD and KEY WORD. That wouldn't be a surprise, I guess, to tell most people. But applying them to GENRE is where it gets interesting.

So, that was my little preamble. Now I should ask a better question. So talking about BOOK TITLE, and what NOUN was at that point. Oh, I know what I wanted to ask. The thing is a lot of your work deals with THEORETICAL CONCEPT, obviously. I mean we talked about the GROUP OF CRITICS, the ANOTHER GROUP OF CRITICS. In the ORDINAL NUMBER century and certainly in earlier periods, my sense is that it wasn't even ADJECTIVE. A lot of the work was different even than that. So what were the other kinds of NOUN when you were writing this, when you were thinking about all these things? What was the status of MLA JOB LIST CATEGORY, or...?

Jeffrey R. Di Leo

Top Ten Reasons that Jeff Williams Should Continue to Edit *mr*

- 10) He has yet to edit a triple issue.
- 9) The Marxists are concerned that he has yet to edit an issue devoted to the color “red.”
- 8) Will miss complaining to us about the lack of support from CMU for *mr*.
- 7) So that he still has a good excuse not to spend time with his family over the holidays.
- 6) So that future generations of grad students can continue to kiss his ring at the *mr* cash bar.
- 5) Still needs to interview himself interviewing himself for *mr*.
- 4) *symploke* would have no place to send its rejected articles.
- 3) Still has not edited a 1,000-plus page issue.
- 2) He’s finally getting somewhat good at it.
- 1) He’s irreplaceable.

As Spinoza said, “All things excellent are as difficult as they are rare.” Jeff, you are one of the finest journal editors in America. Thanks for all of your many contributions to American letters through your editorial work with *mr*.

Frank Farmer

Towards a Geo-Phenomenological Understanding of Jeff Williams, or the Top Ten Reasons Why He Left Greenville, NC

10) Could not find enough students to enroll in his seminar, "Abjection, Spatiality, and Detournement: Rethinking *Beavis and Butthead*."

9) Disappointed he was not named Master of Ceremonies for the Greenville Cotillion, an event he had selected to launch his long-planned karaoke career.

8) Was asked to leave local movie theatre for yelling obscenities during a showing of *PCU*.

7) Could not find a responsive audience for his underground gossip column, "A Cultural Materialist about Town."

6) Exposed in bribery scandal: Accepted an espresso maker on condition that he use the phrase "Easy-Bake Oven" in a published interview.

5) Could not bear to answer any more questions about why *the minnesota review* was in North Carolina.

4) Reputation suffered when forced to request funding from NASCAR for the continuation of his Theory Forum. Eyebrows raised when Dale Earnhardt, Jr. named keynote speaker.

3) Gave impromptu lecture on globalization at International House of Pancakes. Once again, asked to leave the premises. While being led away, was heard muttering something that sounded like "I am Cornholio!"

2) Tired quickly of having to teach certain colleagues how to pronounce specialized terms like *aporia*, *Gevalia*, *hegemony*, *Ikea*, *futon*, *desultory*, and *Brooks Brothers*.

1) To supplement income, unveiled a line of men's biodegradable fashions, "Tobacco Robe," but failed miserably at this entrepreneurial adventure. Eventually persuaded by right-thinking citizens to leave town for good.

Vincent B. Leitch

A Most True Portrait of Jeffrey Williams: A Dozen Little-Known Things about the Man

1) Jeff Williams' secret desire is to write for the *New Yorker*. His frequent scribbling for the *Chronicle of Higher Education* is merely a stop on the grand road to future authentic "academostardom." By the way, the letter coinage is Jeff's, and he is more than eager to tell anyone and everyone so.

2) What most offends Jeff's sensibilities as a long-time journal editor is a pile of compound complex sentences. Simple and snappy is his mantra. Snappy. Mind you, this comes from a self-proclaimed champion of thoroughly obscure theories.

3) The man is severely brand conscious, especially about clothes and comestibles. He believes, parroting Bloch and Jameson, this is evidence of utopian desire in his life. No sense resisting it. Might as well give in. And so he repeatedly does with gusto.

4) Jeff likes fly-fishing for trout, but only with high-quality, preferably antique, poles. He believes it's all in the "feel." He insists his fishing preferences have nothing to do with cultural capital. Uh huh, sure.

5) The right look. Don't go into an eyeglass frame shop with Jeff, unless you have plenty of time to spare. Lots. You've heard of *le mot juste*, well, Jeff is on a lifelong compulsive quest for the right eyeglass frame, *la monture juste* as the friendly Francophile Jeff might say.

6) To tell the truth, Jeff is a big Francophile. Since his early college days he has very discreetly been practicing the correct pronunciation of a certain French phrase: *le train train de la vie quotidienne*. It's mainly the trilled "r" that's in question as well as the pesky final "n" sound. And, guess what, he's inching closer every day to getting the damn thing right. *Oui, le train train de la vie quotidienne*.

7) It's true Jeff religiously works out and jogs. For him it's really all about the "look." Of course, we know that Jesus, Western Culture's Most Gentle Lord and Our Most Beloved Tortured Savior, labeled this vanity.

8) Here's a rigorous spiritual exercise customized for Jeff Williams: "Listen to someone else talk for an hour without any interruption on your part. None." This will strike him as cruel and inhuman punishment. (Friends, you've been warned.)

9) Jeff is a former prison guard (yes, really) who worked in the big yard at Sing Sing Correctional Facility. He could drop you on your ass in a flash. Those in the trade call it a "sweep." So don't let his sweet smile and boyish charm beguile you, the man's a powder keg ready to blow in a very thin second.

10) Over the past two decades Jeff has interviewed fifty literary and cultural critics and written detailed headnotes for each one. He's also penned forty additional headnotes as editor for the *Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism* (1st and 2nd editions). He's closing in on a hundred in all. And, yes, he's counting. Not surprisingly, he considers himself a master of this intricate, if minor, genre and justifiably so. But there's more: he secretly pictures himself nowadays in retrospect as comparable to a Michelin three-star chef consecrated for his exquisite confections. While Jeff's headnote syndrome appears a clear case of a nasty fixation, it's actually a displaced sexual fetish with narcissistic *amour proper* behind it all.

11) Jeff Williams likes graduate students. Genuinely, truly. It's damn odd behavior for a university professor of his longevity and stature. Professors usually start out liking 'em, but soon see the light. Not him. Something is obviously wrong. Our suspicion: deep down Jeff unconsciously suffers a Peter Pan complex.

12) Jeff regards himself as a wine enthusiast. But he's so working-class that he can't sip fine spirits, only guzzle them while mumbling something about fruit. (He mumbles a lot, truth be told.) Anyway, on this guy don't waste fine wine, the kind with three or more delicate aromas and flavors. You see, Jeff's in a hardhat's hurry to chug 'er down. But what we actually have with Jeff is an upgrading old-time frat house beer drinker in the guise of an aspiring *très raffiné* wine aficionado. The whole thing is pathetic.

Kathy M. Newman

An Entry from Jeff Williams' Day Planner

Date: Sometime in the last five years.

- 5:00 am Wake up suddenly with brilliant idea for new piece for the *Chronicle* on student debt/smart people/my past work as a prison guard/my past work in bookstore gulag/interview with Important Academic.
- 5:15 am Fall back asleep.
- 8:00 Rise and shine.
- 8:10 Smoke cigarette on the balcony.
- 8:15 Go on a four-mile run.
- 8:50 Shower.
- 9:00 Eat breakfast, make coffee.
- 9:15 Write brilliant *Chronicle* article. Pitch a slightly different version of it to *Dissent*.
- 10:00 Write 2,000 words on University Book.
- 11:00 Write 2,000 words on Criticism Book.
- 12:00 pm Write 2,000 words on Theory Book
- 1:00 Eat lunch, make more coffee.
- 1:15 Read Mario's dissertation chapter. Write two-page response.
- 1:30 Read Sheila's exam petition. Write two-page response.
- 1:45 Read Geoff's prospectus. Write two-page response.
- 2:00 Skim new submissions to *minnesota review*. Make pile with the ones that might work.

- 2:15 Edit three articles for next issue. Mutter and grumble things like “blah blah blah” and “did you read this before you sent it?” and “criminy!”
- 3:00 Call Marc Bousquet. Mutter and grumble things like “welfare state university,” “indentured servitude,” and “company store.”
- 3:15 Edit interviews conducted with Abrams/Ross/Haraway/Bérubé/Zinner, etc.
- 3:30 Go to café across the street to check the internet.
- 3:35 Send Carnegie Mellon colleagues copy of latest *Chronicle* article.
- 3:40 Send feedback to Mario/Sheila/Geoff and to each faculty person on their committees.
- 3:45 Email Kathy Newman to thank her for organizing an effective meeting last week. Remember to tell her in person that cultural studies has lost its way. Also, what is her work really about? What does she stand for?
- 4:00 Enjoy cup of coffee and *New York Times*.
- 4:15 Make comments on LCS I student papers.
- 5:00 Read college novel, *Stoner*, for class.
- 5:30 Eat dinner.
- 6:00 Drive to CMU.
- 6:30 Teach class.
- 7:50 Dismiss class for break. Smoke one cigarette. Get tea from department office.
- 8:00 Resume class. Berate students for not looking more alert and awake. Scoff at them, especially considering their relative youth.
- 9:50 Finish class.

- 10:00 Have a beer with students. Continue to berate them for not being able to keep up with me.
- 11:30 Read Jhumpa Lahiri's *Unaccustomed Earth*.
- 12:00 Lights out. Tomorrow I will be more productive.

Salita N. Seibert

The Lost Issue

While cleaning out the file cabinets of *the minnesota review*, this lowly editorial assistant found documents pertaining to a lost issue—"The Academic Fashion Issue"—talked about in whispers at conferences. There is now proof of its existence. With the help of several colleagues (Heather Steffen, Eric Vazquez, and Jess Wilton), I was able to reconstruct a damaged portion of the table of contents. There weren't any details except a small note in the margin about the possibility of an academic fashion show at that year's *minnesota review* cash bar.

Poetry/*Fiction*

Józef Korzeniowski Fedora in the Wind

John B. Shelley Ode on a Grecian Sandal

Ellis Bell The Professor Wears Prada

Interviews

Tailoring Said: An Interview with **Edward Said's Tailor***

Burgundy Two Ways: An Interview with **Vincent B. Leitch**

Provocations

Jeffrey J. Williams Debt to the Spirit of Jameson Irish Whiskey

Charles Marlow Debt Becomes Her

Miles Bly Lavender Is the New Black

Joseph Andrews A Day Late and a Jacket Vent Short

Revaluations

Michel Poitiers The Order of Paisley Things

The ARG Collective Vichyssoise in Context

Jude Fawley The Institution of the Interview Suit

Surveying the Field

Larry Sterne Fashion and the Novel (on Fielding's *Bridget Jones's Diary* and Bushnell's *Sex and the City*)

Paula de Man Clotheshorse Intellectual (on Said's *Fashion and Imperialism* and Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Pinstripes*)

Note

* This interview was granted by Said's tailor on condition of anonymity, due to a reasonable fear of being flooded with fashion questions from poorly-dressed academics overwhelmed with student debt.

Elizabeth Hornbeck

The Dark Underbelly of the Star System

