

Critics at Work: Interviews 1993-2003

ed. Jeffrey Williams (New York University Press, 2004), 55-71

Only Connect

An Interview with Gerald Graff

Gerald Graff has persistently upbraided literary studies for its disconnections—of literature and criticism from society, of academics from intellectual community, and of students from a coherent curriculum. Countering what he sees as a common American tendency to avoid conflict (as he discusses here), he has famously advocated, in his succinct motto, that we "teach the conflicts." Rather than seeing debates over the canon, theory, "political correctness," or other contentious issues as a problem, in *Beyond the Culture Wars: How Teaching the Conflicts Can Revitalize Higher Education* he argues that they are a pedagogical resource to be exploited rather than hidden.

While he has been a prominent member of the "theory generation," Graff is an iconoclast and does not readily fit into any definable camps. Like Richard Ohmann (interviewed in chapter 4), Graff turns critical theory on the university itself, examining the institutional structures, history, and pedagogy of English departments and forging a historically inflected and polemically charged study of the profession and institution of literature. His *Professing Literature: An Institutional History*, regarded as the standard history of the discipline tracing debates between scholars and critics since the nineteenth century, takes to task the very institutional structure of "field coverage," which essentially quarantines individual scholars.

Like Augie March, Graff is a loyal Chicagoan, born there in 1937, educated at the University of Chicago (B.A., 1959), and, after brief sojourns at Stanford (Ph.D., 1963) and the University of New Mexico (in his first teaching job, 1963-66), carrying out his teaching career at Northwestern (1966-91), the University of Chicago, where he held the Pullman Professorship (1991-98), and the University of Illinois at Chicago, where he is dean of undergraduate curricula (1999-) and where he joined Stanley Fish and Jane Tompkins.

At Stanford, as he recalls here, Graff did graduate work with the New Critic Yvor Winters and the New York Intellectual Irving Howe; his first book, *Poetic Statement and Critical Dogma* (Northwestern UP, 1970), which takes to task the New Criticism and other approaches for undermining "the power of language to connect us with the world," stemmed from his dissertation written under their direction. See also Graff's account, "Yvor Winters at Stanford" (*American Scholar* 44 [1957]; rpt. in *Masters: Portraits of Great Teachers*, ed. Joseph Epstein [Basic, 1981]). In the provocative *Literature against Itself: Literary Ideas in Modern Society* (U of Chicago P, 1979; with a new preface, Ivan Dee, 1995), Graff turned his sights to contemporary theory and its focus on language. A companion collection (coedited with Reginald Gibbons), *Criticism in the University* (Northwestern UP, 1985), focuses on the present divide between literary journalism and academic criticism. Alongside *Professing Literature* (U of Chicago P, 1987), Graff compiled (with Michael Warner) a collection of historical documents, *The Origins of Literary Studies in America: A Documentary History* (Routledge, 1988).

"Criticism since 1940" (coauthored with Evan Carton), in *The Cambridge History of American Literature*, Vol. 8 (1996), synthesizes Graff's views of the cycle of conflicts in and the "academicization" of criticism. Deploying his conflictual model from *Beyond the Culture Wars* (Norton, 1992), Graff has also coedited (with James Phelan) two casebooks, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn: A Case Study in Critical Controversy* (Bedford, 1995) and *The Tempest: A Case Study in Contemporary Controversy* (Bedford, 1999). Most recently, *Clueless in Academe: How Schooling Obscures the Life of the Mind* (Yale UP, 2003) gives his further prescriptions for clarifying academic work and connecting it with the world; an excerpt appears as "Scholars and Sound Bites: The Myth of Academic Difficulty" in *PMLA* 115.5 (2000). See also Graff and Tompkins's dialogue, "Can We Talk?," in *Professions: Conversations on the Future of Literary and Cultural Studies* (ed. Donald E. Hall; U of Illinois P, 2001); Tompkins advocates cooperation rather than confrontation.

This interview took place on 17 June 2001 in Gerald Graff's office at UIC. It was conducted by Jeffrey Williams and transcribed by Laura Rotunno, a Ph.D. student at Missouri and the managing editor of the *minnesota review*. It originally appeared in an issue of the review on "50s Culture."

Williams: Your early work is very polemical, and you generally attack literary critics for their detachment from society. In *Poetic Statement and Critical Dogma*, you take on the New Critics, and in *Literature against Itself*, the new developments in theory. In fact, when I started reading theory in the mid-eighties, you were known as an enemy of theory. But, later on, you became a proponent of theory. How did you come to be a supporter of theory?

Graff: Actually, I was always a supporter of theory, even before it was called "theory." My 1963 doctoral dissertation was on poetics. What I attacked in *Literature against Itself* were certain new forms of theory—deconstruction, postmodernism, poststructuralism, cultural radicalism, etcetera, which after 1975 or so became equated by a lot of people with "theory" *tout court*.

I did revise my views quite sharply in the mid-eighties, though, when I had read more deconstruction and poststructuralist theory and began to realize they were not what I had thought they were. I had mistakenly conflated Derrida, for example, with sixties subjectivist radicalism, relativism, and irrationalism. The turning point was working as editor with Derrida on the Northwestern University Press edition of his *Limited, Inc.*, an experience that made me realize that I'd confused his ideas with vulgarized versions of deconstruction promoted by some of his followers and then attacked by his critics.

Another thing that led me to change my mind was being reviewed favorably by neocons who obviously had no idea what they were talking about when they pontificated about the horrors of current theory. That and going to conferences where I met some of the theorists I had savaged and realized that I found them a lot more interesting than many of those who agreed with me.

On the other hand, I think I was right in some of the objections I made in *Literature against Itself* about some of the uncritical claims of subversiveness made by some forms of theory and how these forms dovetail with the spirit of consumer culture. Most of Alan Sokal's and Allan Bloom's

arguments, for example, are present in *Literature against Itself*, but I don't get credit for that kind of critique anymore since I've moved on to other things.

Williams: To take a couple of steps back, I want to ask about your intellectual formation. You grew up in Chicago, went to the University of Chicago in the fifties, and other than a loop out west to Stanford for grad school and a couple of years in your first job at New Mexico, you've stayed in Chicago. That seems unique; I mean, I doubt many academics end up getting a job where they grew up. What was it like growing up in Chicago? Has it rooted you politically in any particular way?

Graff: As I think of it, my Chicago background, growing up hanging out in the neighborhood, playing sports, and being alienated from school and book culture, gave me a certain "outsider" perspective toward academia and the aestheticism of literature departments that I've cultivated in my work. This perspective has become especially important to me as I've gotten more and more into writing about education, since I think of it as providing a link and a bridge to the many students who feel themselves to be outsiders to the intellectual culture of academia.

I think this "outsiderism" also underlies my ambivalence toward the academic Left, whose causes I tend to identify with but whose styles and attitudes often put me off. But this may be as much a generational as a regional matter. Being born in 1937, I'm part of an in-between generation, I think: too young to have been a New Critic, but too old for the counterculture, poststructuralism, etcetera.

Williams: I was interested to learn, when I wrote about your work for the Norton theory anthology, that while you were at Stanford, you did your graduate work with Yvor Winters and Irving Howe. What was that like? How did they influence you?

Graff: Both provided me with great-though very different-models of "committed" intellectuals, Winters as a moralist, Howe as a political critic. I, a fifties kid, was very apolitical in those days and found Winters easier to get a handle on and imitate than Howe. Both were powerful men who projected great confidence in their views, but Winters was overwhelming, a kind of Dr. Johnson type in the Great Man mold. I became fascinated by him, read everything of his I could get my hands on-his poetry as well as his criticism. At first I felt challenged to try to find a chink in his theoretical arguments about the nature of poetry; it was through Winters that I found out that there were exciting debates about such questions. Gradually, after a period of arguing with him in his office-or of me proposing arguments and he patiently explaining why I was wrong, as he had shown at length in this or that book or essay that I should go back and look at-I succumbed and became a card-carrying Wintersian, as the type was called at Stanford. I wrote an essay about this captivation with Winters and my subsequent efforts to get out from his shadow.

Howe was more strange to me-the first New York Intellectual I had seen up close and personal. I still picture him in his small office at Stanford, his books (mostly paperbacks) in piles on the floor, and him banging away at a little typewriter propped on one of the piles, pounding out his latest piece for *Dissent* or *Partisan Review*, I assume, though I don't think I knew much about those journals then. In any case, having Howe and Winters on my dissertation committee gave me two excellent models of critics who believed above all in the relevance of literature to life,

and in those days (circa 1960), in which literary studies was still under the sway of the New Criticism, that meant a lot. Howe and Winters had assimilated the close reading techniques of the New Critics but extended them in broader political and moral ways. That, I guess, is how I think of their effect on me.

Williams: After *Literature against Itself*, you moved on to do *Professing Literature*. I can see how it's consistent with your earlier work, both in taking a metacritical view (you've rarely written on literature, but primarily on criticism, theory, and our professional practices) and in looking at how the academy affects literature. But, still, it's relatively unique; other than Ohmann's *English in America*, there were not many people focusing on the disciplinary history of English. What prompted you to do it? And what was the state of institutional studies when you took it up?

Graff: There were things like William Riley Parker's fine essay "Where Do English Departments Come From?" which I had stumbled on

through my colleague at Northwestern, the late Wallace Douglas, who also directed me to some histories of English departments. (He also cowrote one of the chapters in Richard Ohmann's *English in America*.) One that was very helpful and that I ended up drawing on a lot was of Indiana University. And there was, of course, Ohmann, even though I didn't praise his book as much as I should have in *Literature against Itself*. What for me was great about Ohmann was that he wrote about department meetings and stuff that would happen in the corridors—the unofficial aspect of academic life that no one was talking about then but that he saw was very important as an index to what was going on in the institutions.

Let me back up. In the early eighties, I began accumulating materials toward some kind of history of English studies, probably as much as anything out of a sense of confusion about why I was doing what I was doing and where this institution had come from. I had the sense the profession must have lost touch with what it was doing at the beginning and I wanted to know what that was. So I had accumulated a lot of information, but I didn't really have a way of telling the story. The initial manuscript that was sent to the University of Chicago Press told the story as one of decline, decline into the incoherence of post-structuralist theory, deconstruction, and so forth. But I didn't have a lot of conviction in that. For one thing I didn't believe that things had been great at some point and then fallen off. But in any case, what held the book together was a story of decline or deterioration into incoherence.

Chicago sent the manuscript to Jonathan Culler, and Culler said in his reader's report that while there's a lot of interesting stuff here, it's unfortunate that Graff uses it all as another stick with which to beat poststructuralism. He also noted that by then a lot of people were already doing that, and we didn't need another pessimistic story. What Culler said was very good; often you get criticism that you agree with but needed someone to say.

Another idea that was swimming around came from Christopher Lasch. He had been at Northwestern in 1966-69, and I became friendly with him and read all his stuff. He was somebody who helped me shape some kind of political perspective, and he was also a very solid academic historian and social thinker. Lasch had always talked about American culture as a

culture that evades conflict. I had noticed this theme in his work, that American culture for various complicated rea

sons fails to come to terms with conflict. This was the Lasch of *The New Radicalism in America* and *The Agony of the American Left*. Anyway, that theme stuck in my mind and somehow, when I got this response from Culler, I got the idea that what I was telling was really a story about conflict that had been evaded. And I began to feel that this failure of our profession to confront our conflicts was connected with the murkiness about what it is we do. We adopt a pluralistic model that lets us study literature in any number of ways, but by not coming to terms with or asking students to come to terms with the conflicting approaches or conflicting readings, we evade questions about what it is we are doing.

Williams: Hence "teaching the conflicts," the phrase you're probably most known for. Hearing you mention pluralism, I can't but think of the Chicago critics and ask whether it was a reaction or an answer to the Chicago school?

Graff: I had never identified with the Chicago school, and I guess I still don't. In a way I can see how there is a certain emphasis on debate and negotiating various pluralistic differences that I might have caught from the Chicago atmosphere. I had read some of R. S. Crane, and he became important to the story. I liked the kind of incisiveness and the kind of argumentative edge that a figure like Crane had.

Williams: *Professing Literature* came out in 1987, but I don't think it's been superseded. Do you have any updates or revisions that you'd make now?

Graff: Well, Chris Baldick and Terry Eagleton were writing good stuff around the time that I published *Professing Literature*. Now, I like David Damrosch's book *We Scholars* a lot. It's a critique of the isolationist individualism of the profession. Guillory's *Cultural Capitalism* is obviously important, and Bérubé's work on public intellectuals, and some of your own essays are important, especially in thinking out the political ramifications of our institution. John Brereton has produced an excellent documentary history of composition studies, *The Origins of Composition Studies in the American College: 1875-1925*.

Williams: Besides "teaching the conflicts," "field coverage" is another phrase that you're known for. It nicely characterizes both the cornucopia and the isolating structure of English departments. Now it seems that everybody claims to be doing cultural studies, and inter-disciplinarity is a buzzword, which promises to break down field divisions. On the other hand, when we hire people, we still apportion them in literary fields in basically the same old ways. Do you see field coverage dissipating under the auspices of cultural studies and inter-disciplinarity, or do you see it as still entrenched?

Graff: No, I don't see it dissipating at all. The idea of coverage is rooted in something more primary, which is the fact that the basic unit of pedagogy is the course, which stands alone and is not connected to any other course. I have a chapter in *Beyond the Culture Wars* called "Other Voices, Other Rooms" about "the course fetish," the tendency to conceive of education as basically a series of courses that aren't connected with each other. I think it's deeply ingrained in

our professional unconscious that teaching is a solo performance done pretty much in isolation. The notion that an education will consist of a series of courses that aren't in dialogue with each other goes hand in hand with the field coverage model.

This is part of my argument that I don't think I've gotten across very well. I'm trying to take another shot at it in the new book that I'm finishing called *Clueless in Academe*. The subtitle is *How Schooling Obscures the Life of the Mind*. I feel my real subject all along has not been conflict but confusion and cluelessness. It's in *Professing Literature* and everything that I've written recently: the gulf between academics and nonacademics, which I think has always been huge and is getting huger. My notion is that the incomprehensibility of academia is not because of jargon or technical language, which is superficial, but because we chop up an intellectual culture into courses and, to some extent, disciplines and subjects. I'm not against courses or disciplines or subjects-there have to be some of these-but when you don't connect them you render the whole thing incomprehensible.

You've written very interestingly in the *Institution of Literature* volume you edited about the famous Kenneth Burke quotation about the conversation. You come to a parlor, you come late, and everyone is arguing about something. At first you don't know what the argument is, but gradually you jump in and then you are part of it. I think that is where intellectual life ultimately is and what a school should look like, a connected conversation. It's the conversation that connects academia ultimately with what's outside academia-the popular media and so forth. A disconnected curriculum wipes that conversation out of view or cuts it up into such disconnected fragments that it's unrecognizable, certainly not visible as a conversation.

Williams: But Burke's room doesn't have much connection to the outside; it's a self-contained conversation. Frequently I hear academics say "academics do this," directed at other academics, when they too are academics in their own rooms. I've had a number of other jobs, and I don't find the academic world any more cut off than if you worked in a hospital or other institution. Each institution has its own internal code, but you still get your coffee at the deli down the street.

Graff: But there's a sense in which academia pushes obscurity to another level. Take a hospital: it's true that we don't know the kind of biochemistry or whatever it is that doctors know about, but we do at least have some working conviction about what a doctor is for. That is, there is a certain commonsense understanding of what doctors do. So while, you're right that academics aren't any more specialized or esoteric than any other modern occupation, there's nevertheless a certain understanding of the function of those occupations, of what a doctor's for, what a linebacker's for, what a policeman is for. By contrast, people don't know what a humanist is for, though they have more of a sense of what a management professor is for.

Williams: I think the same applies to us. We teach verbal skills, as well as the appreciation of culture, in the public view.

Graff: Yes, but our basic practices-the analysis and interpretation of texts, or the rationale for those practices-are not at all understood. And why should they be, since we don't really discuss such questions very publicly?

Williams: I don't think people think our job is the analysis and interpretation of texts, but that we're here to teach writing and to develop an appreciation of great works of literature.

Graff: But that's my point: there's a wide gap between what people think we're about and what we think. Of course, it depends on who the "we" is. There's a kind of nebulosity about what the cultural fields do that makes them more obscure than even the sciences, which have a kind of technical rationale. That's crucial to my argument-that we are qualitatively more incomprehensible than your average garden-variety incomprehensible professional. We don't even think about it; we don't talk about it, or else we assume our incomprehensibility is a normal thing, perhaps even a sign of our distinction.

Williams: Bruce Robbins talks about how professionals project an outside world that they both appeal to but separate themselves from. In more rhetorical terms, what you're saying is a kind of jeremiad, that we've fallen away from our connection to the world.

Graff: Actually, Robbins's work is important to me, and because it's *not* a jeremiad. In *Secular Vocations*, he argues that we've exaggerated the outside-inside distinction, the idea that once professionals have become insiders, they exclude outsiders. That's become one of the common "decline" theories: that we've grown away from the outside public. He argues that, on the contrary, any successful profession has to internalize the outside perspective in order to be useful to its clients. And I argue virtually the same thing, that the work that has most influence on our field among insiders is work that incorporates some outside perspective. Ohmann would be an example. Ohmann decided to look at English studies from the perspective of an outside political critic who was also an insider. So I'm not trying to bash the insiders from the point of view of the outsiders; I'm trying to rethink the institution as a hybrid interplay of insider and outsider.

Williams: I think the problem is a structural one, that we judge ourselves and accrue professional standing based on research rather than teaching. But the teaching rationale has always been our public rationale-I'm sure it's declared to be in our universities' mission statements-and in fact the vast majority of us at state schools experience a more direct idea of teaching.

Graff: Okay, except that we might disagree over how specialized and narrow the research model is now, and therefore how far research really does clash with teaching. I make the argument that successful research now has to have some public impact-in order to get funded, for example-and that this fact makes research far more *teachable* than it once was.

In 1910 or 1920, the basic research topic in an English department was, for example, the syntax of *at* and *ana* in Old Icelandic or something like that, the more specialized the better. If you made broad general claims, you sounded like a journalist or a dilettante. It seems to me that today younger professionals in the humanities are encouraged, sometimes overencouraged, to get at the big picture right away. People ask, how is your research really going to change the way we think about health care or gender or sexuality? While we weren't looking, the model of what counts as successful research changed. In *Clueless in Academe*, I quote a phrase of yours, the "journalization of criticism,"

that nicely describes what is happening. Critics-Eve Sedgwick is a good example whom I cite-write academic criticism, but of a kind that makes big quasi-journalistic kinds of claims. Though academics like Sedgwick are not accessible to wide publics, the kinds of claims they make are much more big-picture claims than the syntax of *at* and *ana*, and they get translated by journalists for news and feature articles. The research model has been blown apart and is being replaced by a public intellectual model. But we don't realize it yet and we still write and operate in ways that don't take into account how these big-picture issues have taken over research. The point about teaching is that, insofar as research is now broad-gauged, the old conflict between research and teaching lessens.

Williams: You've written a lot about teaching-unlike most people who write on theory-and you mentioned to me that you recently wrote a piece with Jane Tompkins and have sat in on each other's classes since coming to UIC. One thing I was struck with in reading "Taking Cover in Coverage" is that your conflicts model is a kind of rough sport model. You like the contact. But if you read Tompkins, she would say this is the model that damaged her and that it has a masculinist bias. Not everybody likes sports. How have you worked it out with Jane Tompkins?

Graff: Jane and I are team-teaching these very issues right now. I have quite a bit in *Clueless in Academe* about them: Is argument male? Is it ethnocentric? In a certain sense it obviously is, but it doesn't need to be. Jane and I talk about this in our dialogue called "Can We Talk?" She argues that, before we can have good talk, we need to create safe zones where we feel enough trust in each other, enough nurturance. We aren't going to have good talk if we feel the person we are talking to is always ready to stick the knife in, in a very gendered way. My response is to ask, "When are we going to have a safe zone? When will we know, are we safe yet?" If we wait until there is a safe zone, we are never going to have good talk, so it becomes circular. I have a long chapter on Deborah Tannen called "Two Cheers for the Argument Culture," in which I grant what Tompkins, Tannen and other feminists have been saying, that the conditions of academic debate and public debate are often deplorably thuggish, more like insult or mud-wrestling than serious attempts to engage with others. But I point out that Tannen and Tompkins themselves performatively show the necessity of entering into debate culture. They themselves are very much polemically engaged, and their gender concerns become part of the debate.

By the way, I've found in teaching my freshman course here at UIC to students who are not sure they want to jump into intellectual life that the question to debate or not to debate is one that really engages them. The ethnic issue emerges: Is there something antidebate about Asian culture? Some Asian students say, "Yeah, I grew up in a home where we did what our parents told us and I think that's the right way." Others, however, reply, "No, to get anywhere in the U.S. you've got to have an argument." So a very interesting argument breaks out about argument. It's generally my tactic to say, "If you think debate is problematic, then we have to make that part of the debate." That, it seems to me, is what a good debate does: reflectively generate a discussion of its own conditions and possibilities (which I take to be one of the messages of poststructuralism). I do think that the challenge from feminists to conflict models is important, but I see the feminists themselves involved in a contestatory-conflictual model of one kind or another. Or maybe they're trying to change the dynamics of contestation from within, which is fine, but some kind of contestation is still part of the game.

Williams: One thing that I admire about your work is that you're actually putting your money down, applying what you think about education to what you do. Maybe you could talk about what you're doing in your program here as a dean at UIC. You also mentioned earlier that you have started sitting in on other people's classes, not to evaluate them but to see what other people do.

Graff: As I've already suggested, my premise-and I said this in *Beyond the Culture Wars*-is that though we like to refer to an "academic conversation," students don't really see a conversation. They see individual profs whom they might have conversations with, but the conversation or interaction among professors and scholars is effaced. I think it's very hard to learn if you are always experiencing authority as a series of monologues or isolated glimpses.

Williams: Students do seem aware that one professor might be utterly different from another professor, and that they have to say different things in class or on a paper to get a good grade.

Graff: Yes, the quicker students not only immediately see that their profs are different. They also see how and what's at stake in the differences. But most can only cope by adopting the strategy of doing whatever each prof "wants" in succession.

I've started to call what I want a comparative curriculum, not so much a conflictual curriculum. When we isolate one course from the next, we shut down the comparisons and contrasts. We not only obscure our conflicts from the students-I have spent a lot of time griping about this-but we also hide our agreements. In fact we ourselves often don't know whether we agree or disagree. How do I know whether I agree with Fish? I don't see what he's saying in his class; he doesn't see what I'm saying in mine. A lot of times it's hard enough to tell whether you agree or disagree with your colleague even when you try to talk about it. So-this is the argument I am pushing-unless we structure education in a way that allows students to perceive (and enter into) the interactions among positions, methods, and assumptions, their chances of entering our conversations-and us entering theirs-are limited. Our isolated dynamic basically perpetuates inclusion and exclusion. The excluded are not going to be able to get in on the game until they have the game represented to them in a way that is more connected and makes sense.

Now, how am I trying to do something about this at UIC? Well, not entirely through my instigation-it has more to do with worries about retention-but we are moving to a learning-community model. Next year for freshmen we're instituting thematic clusters of courses. Jane Tompkins and I are both involved with this project. There will be ten cohorts of twenty-five students each taking the same courses-the same English course, the same communications course, the same chemistry course. I wrote about these learning-community models at the end of *Beyond the Culture Wars*, and we are going to try to put the idea into effect. I think it could help a lot. I have a palpable sense from teaching freshman here-mostly working-class kids, first-generation academics-that they are ground to pieces by having to meet different demands of different courses that aren't correlated, and their whole sense of belonging to an intellectual community is wiped out. The course disjunctions materially impair their ability to make sense of education, and to get through it successfully.

Williams: It's also a material issue; a lot of them are probably working part-time jobs.

Graff: All the more reason to help them integrate their studies. Kids who work thirty to forty hours a week need a more focused curriculum and more help in putting it together. A lot of what I was teaching in English, I think, would have helped them in chemistry or physics or in someplace else. But I was in no position to provide that help because my course was segmented off from the rest. So I think the learning community will help.

Another thing I am promoting at UIC is undergraduate research. We've had two undergraduate research conferences in the year and a half I've been here, and they've been spectacular. I think undergraduate research is going to be one of the big trends in education in the next few decades and will illustrate the obsolescence of the research-versus-teaching opposition that I spoke of a moment ago. It doesn't make any sense to keep undergraduates out of research. One thing I noticed is that, when undergraduates become coresearchers with a professor, the usual adversarial relationship dissolves. We're working on the same team together and it's great. I would love to help bring about a situation here where every UIC undergraduate would be expected, as part of their education, to get involved in a research project with a grad student or professor. The sciences are way ahead of the humanities in this respect. Kids are doing science fairs in high school. In the humanities we are still hiding our research, even though we're doing research on hot-button topics—gender, race, class, and so forth—that are ripe for bringing undergraduates in. That's the real paradigm shift: to wipe out the old idea that research is for graduate students and not for undergraduates.

I think another barrier that is crumbling is the one that has separated the high school and the college. The pressures to improve lower schooling in America and the pressures for greater accountability, whether you like it or not, are bringing the high school and the college closer together. Some younger academics are taking the lead and working with high school students and high school teachers. I think that's a tremendous opportunity. It's also obviously a potential trap, since one could say, "Well, you're no longer going to be able to collect your salary by just teaching four courses or six courses; you're going to have to go out and do more." High school outreach could become a way of squeezing more work out of people for less money and further proletarianizing the professoriate. On balance, though, the collaborations arising between colleges and high schools seem a very promising thing.

Williams: To look backward instead of forward, I'm struck by the fact that the generation of people who brought us the thing called theory—you, Fish, various other people—are coming to the end of their careers. Theory was the name of the game, whereas now it doesn't seem to be. What do you make of what's happened to theory?

Graff: Well, I guess I wouldn't say that it's no longer the name of the game. I suppose what's set in in the last ten or fifteen years is something like what set in with the New Criticism. New Criticism didn't go away; it became part of "normal science." It's the bedrock practice of most teaching; it's still predominant in the schools. I think that something similar happened with theory. If theory no longer seems au courant, it's because it's been naturalized, normalized, so that we take for granted certain notions of interrogating concepts. It's taken for granted that "literature" is no longer seen unproblematically as a thing that isn't in some way produced by institutional conditions and historic variables. But current academic scholarship is still very much operating within the kinds of paradigms that were set by the theorists, don't you think?

Williams: Yes and no. I would agree that theory has permeated our discourse, but, on the other hand, I see a turn to a more belletristic rationale-what I've called "the new belletrism." That isn't quite as positive or celebratory as seeing a turn to the public intellectual.

Graff: I tried to talk you out of calling your essay "The New Belletrism," because "belletrism," it seems to me, invites confusion. I think what you were describing is not belletrism so much as a closing of the gap between academic writing and more publicly accessible kinds of writing-journalism as well as personal writing and autobiography. Your phrase "the journalization of criticism," I think, names the phenomenon a little better. And I have been trying to argue in the new book that professors and journalists are now in the same game. In fact, that's one reason why professors and journalists are often at odds. Whereas at one time they looked at each other from a distance with a kind of mutual scorn, I think now the scorn is rooted in how close they are, as competitors in the cultural explanation business. And this is more or less inevitable once academia took on, in a big way, the business of explaining the contemporary. Scholars

now-even people working on the past, like Greenblatt-reinterpret the past in the light of the contemporary. We are much more involved than academics were fifty or sixty or a hundred years ago in being explainers of contemporary life. And that's why we're quoted so often, why academic research is quoted so often, even by journalists; we're in the same ballpark. That may have been, in some ways, a reaction against the kind of esoteric qualities of theory, but you could also see it as a move toward taking those esoteric theories and turning them into more journalistically accessible terms.

Let me cap off this discussion with one example. *Nightline* did a program a couple of nights ago on an archaeologist, who, through analysis of ancient relics going back millions of years, has come out with the argument that the image we have of prehistoric man-the caveman classically depicted in *National Geographic*-is wrong. The assumption was that their economy and survival were based on the men going out and slaying big animals-throwing their spears into huge mastodons-which meant that male strength was extremely important, and that the women huddled together and raised the babies and did a little farming. Well, these scientists now claim that's nonsense. In fact, the evidence suggests that primitive economies were based on hunting down rabbits, getting them in nets and skinning them, and that women and children were doing this as much as men. They would have been crazy to take on mastodons and huge beasts when they could live quite nicely on rabbits. *National Geographic* wrote them up because it's an important discovery, and they printed this picture which shows the women and the children with the men trapping rabbits, but in the background you still see men throwing spears into mastodons. And the scientist explained, "Well, we went to *National Geographic* and told them, 'Look, the men with the mastodons, they didn't do that; it didn't work that way.'" And *National Geographic* came back and said, "We're sorry, but we have to report it that way, that's what we're all about."

Here's a wonderful example of what theoretically inclined people have been talking about for years: that representation is a site of struggle, that conflicting representations affect the construction of reality and history and make up the fabric of reality and history. I don't know if the archaeologists were influenced by these theories of representation, but, whether they were or not, this is an interesting example of how journalism is beginning to absorb academic theorizing

about the contested nature of representation. The question was quite explicitly posed on *Nightline*: is the myth of the caveman based on a sexist attempt to glorify the old heroic male role? So I see that kind of dissemination of theory as an example of where things are going, and, given the economic plight that universities are in, maybe that's a good reason for going in that direction.