

Peter C. Herman, ed.

*Day Late, Dollar Short: The Next Generation and the New Academy.*

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The collection of thirteen essays edited by Peter C. Herman in *Day Late, Dollar Short: The Next Generation and the New Academy* is bound to become required reading for graduate students in English studies. The closely woven together essays embark on devising a better understanding of what Jeffrey Williams coins the "Posttheory Generation," which he defines as "the generation of intellectual workers who have entered the literary field and attained professional positions in the late 1980s and through the 1990s" (25). The members of this generation did not receive their theory first-hand, but rather "received the various approaches and epistemologies signified by the shorthand term *Theory*, second-, if not thirdhand. Theory is something we [...] are taught in graduate school, not something that we discovered for ourselves as its originary moment" (Herman 1). The scholars in this book find "most of the next generation has uncritically and unproblematically accepted these theoretical paradigms" and base the reasoning for accepting such theories without question on the uncertain job market that lies ahead for these Posttheory academics (2). Herman finds there is an "increasing, if subtle, pressure to write not what we feel, but what we think we ought to say," so we may land a decent (e.g. tenure-track) job and an acceptable (e.g. research-based) institution with a livable (e.g. less than 4/4) teaching load in an ever-increasingly difficult job market where the corporatization of the academy is pushing the envelope on its members' academic freedom (4). Much of what the book states is not good news. The Next Generation has a bumpy road ahead of itself for those who seek employment in the New Academy.

After Herman's introduction, Jeffrey Williams writes at length on the "Posttheory Generation" and the challenges they face in this new academy. He begins with a history of the post WWII academy where almost all who received doctorates, "no matter how dumb they were, got at least three job offers" based on the high supply and demand of academic positions (27). Today, however, the stakes have changed. With the dismal job market as it stands, what it took for our predecessors to get tenure (a number of articles, a book/monograph, conferences presentations, and the like) is now required for the first MLA interview for a current job candidate. He argues how "Trickle-Down Theory," which turned jargon-laden prose few could understand into a more common language which was better accessible to others, transformed into "'bitsizing' theory, making our research more popular, easier to digest, and more marketable to a broader audience," has moved us to a Happy Meal approach to teaching theory, where scholars shift from writing for theoretical journals to more mainstream, popular culture venues like *The*

*New Yorker* and *Harper's*. In the end, he calls for literary critics to "reinvent the institution of literature in ways that truly permit public access, reconfiguring the jobs and employment conditions of those who work in that institution more equitably and humanely, and restructuring the university as a place of education and opportunity for all rather than as a darwinist finishing school for the nascent professional-managerial and ruling classes" (38).

One of the most controversial chapters is Sharon O'Dair's "Stars, Tenure, and the Death of Ambition," which examines how few in English studies become stars who find their dream jobs teaching graduate classes in Ivy League universities with low teaching loads and research assistants. Instead, many highly qualified people, "discover their delusion only when they spend four years or eight driving the freeways of Los Angeles or New Jersey teaching composition classes for a small paycheck and little else - no recognition, no respect, no possibilities of advancement" (46). O'Dair argues, "stars are born in the academy out of the necessity to publish and the necessity to publish is born out of a contracting job market, worsened by the effects of tenure and the (wasteful and immoral) overproduction of Ph.D.'s. Publication becomes for use the commodities we can sell and that can sell us as stars or stars-to-be" (46). Part of the problem stems from the fact "we are not listening to what the market is saying, and neither are our graduate students," she says, "for if we were, more of our graduate students would be doing dissertations in rhetoric and composition, or in other ways of preparing to obtain tenurable positions [...]" (47). To prove her point, she details MLA joblists from the mid 1970s to the early 1990s and examines the types of jobs that are available. She places part of the blame on the overproduction of Ph.D.s without viable job options on "literary and cultural critics [who] would have fewer graduate students to work with and to supervise, or even to take our classes. [Without whom] we might find ourselves, occasionally, teaching composition" (50). No one, apparently, would want to teach composition she argues, as "teaching composition isn't fun or challenging or respected or rewarded. (After all, even our colleagues who specialize in rhetoric and composition rarely teach it; mostly they supervise others who teach it)" - a point which will cause debate among those who teach composition - some of whom may actually enjoy it and find it "fun" and "challenging" (51). She cites an "enormous gap [...] between the assistant professor and her students," where, in order to land a job, the assistant professor had to have a number of publications, perhaps a book, and her freshman composition students had to do very little to end up in her class, as "remediation is the norm, and often they cannot construct a coherent sentence" (51). When we first began as teaching assistants, many of us thought it ironic that the very courses we placed out of were the ones we taught the most. "Graduate students enabled stars to become stars" by giving star faculty opportunities to teach graduate courses, research, and write, yet this road leads the lucky people in the next generation to the possibility of a 4/4 instructorship, which may come with the possibility of tenure, at institutions these stellar students would have never considered going to in the first place (52). She concludes with three responses to the situation: the "liberal optimistic" who "insist[s] that important work can be done and is found anywhere nowadays" (e.g. even in the first-year composition classroom); the "cynic" who concludes, once she is tenured "she is never going anywhere else, no matter how often and how well she publishes.

Never. Going. Anywhere. Else"; and the "pre-slackers" who are the lucky ones who hold "tenured or tenure-track positions and have access to (limited) institutional support for the research and writing that they do" and more importantly, have escaped the "McJobs" and "McStructorships" many of their colleagues did not under the current market conditions (55-57). O'Dair's chapter comes off a bit elitist in her treatment of those who teach composition rather than literature, but she is brave to state that the glut in the job market is directly related to the graduate faculty in literature who lure students into taking their courses so they don't have to teach courses like freshman composition.

Terry Caesar's "Phantom Narratives: Travel, Jobs, and the Next Generation," further examines the star system in academia but ties it more closely to the frequent flyers in the field. "The dimmest lights are those who stay on the ground," he argues, and "nothing for past generations has represented the rewards of a career more handsomely and expansively than travel" (64). The rules have changed, according to Caesar. No longer do academics get large travel stipends to attend conferences and workshops which would impact their teaching and research. In the new job market, "the rules will not include travel," he worries, especially for those on year-to-year contracts and even for non-promotable tenure-track positions (67). Instead, travel has become "an elite activity" for only its highest stars (68). One reason it is difficult for many faculty to travel, he argues, is that most of us end up at the non-elitist institutions where we have high teaching loads (4, 5 or even 6 courses a term), stacks of papers to grade, office hours, and service work on countless committees that we don't have time or energy to travel, and, even if we wanted to do so, institutional support for travel is not something that receives much funding. In light of "freeway flyers" and "gypsy scholars" who travel to multiple campuses adjuncting a course here and a course there for insulting wages, he ponders "what is a 'good' job?" not as a rhetorical question but as one that has a hopeful answer. "One that affords security, pays well, and just as significant, enables some real measure of ambition, defined not only in terms of autonomy in the workplace but the opportunity to travel away from it for perfectly professional reasons. Such travel, in turn, renews the freedom by which an individual chose the profession in the first place" (70). However, he believes these type of "good jobs" are becoming less attainable for the next generation, many of whom will have long stints as "freeway flyers" and "gypsy scholars."

Crystal Bartolovich attempts "To Boldly Go Where No MLA Has Gone Before" in her examination of academic communities by scrutinizing the hierarchy of institutions "for our lives after graduate school should we manage to get a job at all" by studying the Yale strikes of 1995-96 and the way the MLA handled the situation (78). Through tracing the strikes, Bartolovich juxtaposes the academic community opposed to the corporate community she feels many post-secondary institutions are becoming. From her examination of the Yale strike, she proposes that "the next generation think about what 'academic community,' as we wish to have it, means in explicit terms, without assuming that academic community is some timeless, obvious and perfect thing that we already have [...]. Community is, rather, what its potential members must imagine and work *for*" (88, her emphasis). She also warns that the next generation "cannot permit

the MLA to give in to a fear of taking stands becomes powerful groups (such as the Yale administration) might be unhappy about it and threaten lawsuits" (88).

On the threat of a lawsuit, Kalí Tal's "'It's a Beastly Rough Crowd I Run With': Theory and the 'New University'" gives a first-person account of her beginning career at Arizona International Campus [AIC], a new experimental nontenure college of the University of Arizona system, which calls into question whether we should dismantle the tenure system without a fight. In this chapter, she focuses on the unfair treatment universities give to faculty when there is no guarantee of a contract beyond a year-to-year basis. Such universities are turning more and more into corporate business designs where academic freedom wavers in the wind. Using statistics from the MLA, the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, and other source books, Tal finds that while over a quarter of a million faculty are expected to retire between 1995 and 2010, many of these positions will be replaced not on tenure-track lines but on adjunct and non-tenured ones because the bottom line is that institutions are driven by costs (104). Corporatization of the academy is blamed for much of what happened to her in her non-renewal case. In such a corporate model, both students and faculty are treated as numbers, and some of the numbers equal bad math. She tallied the amount of time faculty spent in their jobs: twelve hours of teaching, two hours of preparation/grading for each hour in the classroom, six hours advising/mentoring, plus committee work, course development, search committees and the like totaled over fifty hour work weeks. She states the corporatists "interest is the bottom line, who resent faculty powers in university governance, and want to eliminate them from the decision-making process" and warns that "the elimination of faculty power is essential for the smooth operations of for-profit institutions" that put the dollar before the student or the instructor (107).

Following Tal's line of reasoning, Jesse G. Swan's "Breaking the Monopoly: The Next Generation and the Corporate Academy" furthers the discussion of how "the university as a corporation" will challenge those in the next generation (113). Swan argues that "no longer are professors to teach, they are to turn a profit" and this scares him (113). Swan warns if we stay silent on the corporatization of the academy, "we reify the discourses, dehumanize students, and make ourselves inessential" (114). One of the evil culprits of corporatization is distance education, in which, Swan argues, "education is reduced to trafficking, credit is made into property, and educators are made into venders. There's no sense of the social - never mind spiritual - dimensions of education" (114). Using a retail model of education, the university turns into Wal-Mart where "students are sale hounds, faculty are customer-service representatives, and administrators are managers and manager-trainees whose primary job is to keep an exploited and disgruntled workforce smiling and accommodating" (114). Under such a model, the intellectual climate universities were known for is eliminated as CEOs, rather than presidents and chancellors, turn institutions from faculty- to student-centered configurations which praise "customer-oriented efficiency of 'cyberprograms,'" which cost less to run, over traditional class lectures and seminars (115). Swan fears direct contact with a live professor may become a thing of the past. He proposes that we fight against this discount store model of education and

hold on tight to academic freedom and tenure while moving away from the over-reliance of adjunct faculty in order to ensure that the next generation is not the last generation to enjoy such luxuries.

Continuing the discussion on the corporatization of the academy, David Galet's "Words, Words, Words," likens the halls of academia to Wall Street where he traces the development of composition/rhetoric programs to the growing number of creative writing programs, which he calls the new "cash cow, a popular offering with low overhead and a big return [...]. [for] 'all you need to start is a copy machine and an instructor with a few poetry publications under his belt'" (171). Other essays in this collection include Jeffrey R. DiLeo's "New Technology and the Dilemmas of the Posttheory Generation: On the Use and Abuse of Computer and Information Technology in Higher Education Today," Neil Larsen's "Theory After the 'Theorists?'" Barbara Reibling's "Contextualizing Contexts: Cultural Studies, Theory, and the Profession-Past and Future," and Susan Johnston's "After the Deluge: Rethinking Ethical Interpretive Claims."

The book ends with Peter C. Herman's "Conversation with Gerald Graff" and an epilogue by Michael Bérubé. Graff suggests the next generation should "identify itself with the realization of democratic mass education" and offers the possibility of collaboration with college and high school faculty as a way of professionalizing both entities (211). Graff's conversation examines many elements mentioned in the book: the proliferation of journals no one really reads, the threat of the Internet and technology on the academic world, the corporatization of the academy, and the fear that tenure going the way of dinosaurs. Bérubé concludes that we must take steps to ensure that the next generation is not the last generation who "generally expect or hope to earn a living wage, to enjoy good working and teaching conditions, and to be protected from laissez-faire, right-to-work economics (and economists) by the institution of tenure" (224). In order to ensure the survival of the species, Bérubé demands we think of ourselves as college teachers, as well as citizens, who support such organizations as the AAUP and "the unionization of graduate students as *college teachers*" to ensure the future generations benefit from the next generation as we have from the previous ones (224, his emphasis).

In short, Herman's *Day Late, Dollar Short: The Next Generation and the New Academy* is an important, readable book. It is sure to spark much debate between the complacent past, frustrated current, and uncertain future professorate who follow the climate of life in the academy. Graduate students and faculty in English studies should carefully examine this book to gain insight into the theory wars of the past and the looming storms on the horizon, especially in light of the turbulent job markets and the possibility of corporatization of the academy. While the book does not sugar-coat the current or future academic conditions, it offers constructive ways of examining the fate of literary criticism's place in the academy so we may become active agents in shaping its future.

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