

Williams College Oral History Project Interview with Gene Bell-Villada
May 18, 2004

Interview Length: 53 pages

Gene Bell-Villada (b. 1941) has taught Romance Languages at Williams since 1975, when he came to the College as a visitor for one semester. He was granted tenure in 1981, and has always had two homes—one in Williamstown and one in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

In his interview with Charles Alberti, Bell-Villada talks about his upbringing in the Caribbean and South America, and coming to the United States for college, at the University of Arizona. He describes his graduate school experience at Harvard and his involvement in the anti-war movement.

Bell-Villada talks about his arrival at Williams, during a time when languages were under-enrolled, and states that the threat of cuts to the department was a constant source of worry. He discusses his colleagues, going into some detail about Anson Piper, George Pistorius, Antonio Giménez, and Susan Dunn. He talks about his own writing, both scholarly and fictional.

Bell-Villada describes some of the anti-women sentiment he witnessed at Williams, including an incident in 1977 in which some male students splattered red wine on a female manikin and kicked it around the library while singing anti-women songs.

Bell-Villada talks about how Williams has changed over the years, going from a finishing school for rich boys to a place of intellectual spark at which he is proud to work. He speaks about presidents Chandler, Oakley, Payne, and Schapiro, and goes into some detail about how the College worked to diversify, exploring the topics of Latino/a faculty searches, admissions policies, and curriculum changes.

The transcript of this interview and the accompanying audio file (if available) may be accessed only in the Archives/Chapin Reading Room.