An Interview with Dr. Andrew Osborn

Rachel Mohr

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.udallas.edu/oralhistory

Part of the Education Commons
RM: I am here with Dr. Osborn at the University of Dallas. First of all, thank you for taking the time to interview with me. Once again is this okay that I interview you and that this interview will be housed in the University of Dallas Oral History Repository?

AO: I’m honored, yes.

RM: Alright wonderful! Okay, so my first question involves your own educational background. Can you tell me a little more about your own education?

AO: Yes, how far back should I go? Do you want high school? College?

RM: Even as far back as elementary if you wish.

AO: Oh, okay. I think I went to Milldam Nursery School in Concord Massachusetts, for a couple of years…had blanket time. And then I marched up through public elementary and high school in Massachusetts, and then in the state of Maine, what is known as Mid-Maine - the population center of the state of Maine – it’s mostly in the Southern-most tip of it so you don’t have to go that many hours drive from Boston to be in Mid-Maine.

I went to a high school called Maranacook Community School, which sounds like it might be private, but it was public. It was very small, it took four towns feeding into it to have a class of a hundred for each of the classes seventh grade through twelfth grade. Although it was primarily a high school, it did include seventh and eighth grade. And I attended there, excelled in pretty much every area that I was interested in, and played sports. And on the basis of that, was accepted early admission to Stanford, MIT, and Harvard. I went to the last of those three, in part because I was starting to transition in my education from being solely devoted to math and science. And I had become interested in more broadly ranging liberal arts and especially literature and creative writing, writing poetry. Part of what had conditioned that change was that having spent my summer as a sophomore, the post sophomore high school summer, doing genetics research at the Jackson Laboratory off the coast of Maine. During my post junior high school year, I was invited, as were 60 high school students from public schools in Maine, to do a two-week course at Bowdoin College, which is one of the small liberal arts colleges in Maine. A number of presidents went there, it is a very good college. I took a course in Latin-American literature and at that point in my life, I didn’t know really what Latin America was, and although I had been an English student and taken English classes in high school, I didn’t really know what literature was. I mean, I knew what books were, and I read books, and I liked stories and novels and poems, but I didn’t understand that there was a realm of reading that others would call “capital ‘I’ literature” and that there were novels that were maybe not as highly esteemed and wouldn’t be taught in colleges. So, this was an adventure for me to have just two weeks of reading mostly what was known as magical realism - experimental prose from Colombia, Mexico, and Argentina. And it expanded my mind and got me excited about just a whole new discipline…

(phone goes off…) Sorry … beeps.

Um, And I was also starting to write poems when I got into college so, although I took in my freshman year at Harvard the curriculum you would expect of a likely-to-declare-physics-or-
math major, I was pretty quickly seduced by my Shakespeare class, by my expository writing course in which I was also writing short fiction, and by my interest in the literary magazine at Harvard called *The Harvard Advocate* which had started to publish my poems by the end of freshman year, I just…I moved over into English studies, I pursued an English degree, got permission to be the first person in, perhaps forever, but at least for six or seven years to write a creative thesis instead of a critical thesis for honors credit. So, I wrote basically a book of poetry for my thesis. Then I went from there to the Iowa writer’s workshop after a year of working to gain tuition money, and so moved to Iowa City, Iowa for a couple of years and studied with, among others, Jorie Graham, who is one of the people I now write about as a scholar. And then again, after a year of just working odd jobs to make ends meet, I had moved to Austin, Texas and then I got my PhD. I had entered a PhD program at UT Austin, and unlike the MFA I did at Iowa, which was creative writing, this was a standard scholarly PhD program reading writing by other people and writing critical essays about it. The next stage, this is bringing us up to 2001 is when I finished my PhD? I applied for post-docs and got a Woodrow Wilson Postdoctoral Fellowship which placed me at Miami University of Ohio for a couple of years, and that was wonderful because it was a teaching opportunity, but with fewer teaching obligations than would have been normal. Now I teach three courses every semester as do most of my colleagues, and that’s not onerous, in fact at many community colleges one would be teaching four classes a semester and you’d have more students and much too much grading. But here I was teaching for four semesters, a single class each semester.

RM: Wow!

AO: And when you’re starting up as an educator, it’s really wonderful to have the opportunity to devote maybe even more than sufficient time to thinking out all your lesson plans and sculpting your syllabi and how you’re going to really make it work well so that you, you don’t promise yourself a success, but you have more chance of having educative success instead of needing to make compromises or not getting to what you wish you could because you need to sleep every now and then… And it was very good for me and it was also… Miami University of Ohio recognized that I was a poet as well as a scholar and one of the four semesters I was teaching a graduate creative-writing class which was just a great opportunity. So that worked well. And then I went from there to teach initially as a one-year substitute at Whitman College in Walla Walla, Washington. So, the husband and wife team who shared a position and made up two-thirds of the American Lit program at this small liberal arts college, they hired me to take over for the year, but it was understood to be just a one-year position…but I loved it so much there that I parlayed it to four years. This was not on the tenure track and..

(phone beeps)

…If you are an academic you need to be on the tenure track to have a permanent home…to feel like you can set down roots, and buy a house, and continue to have a family, and just devote yourself to an institution. So, after four years I started looking seriously to move elsewhere and was invited to the University of Dallas, and that was a curiosity because the University of Dallas is a Catholic institution and I am not Catholic and in fact did not know much about Catholicism before coming here…but learned from a colleague at Whitman that I should take this job
opportunity very seriously. The wife of the head of the math department, who was a Harvard PHD in history and a devout Catholic, knew the University of Dallas and said “it is a serious academic institution.” She knew me, that I was seriously academic, and she intuited that I would like it. So she said, “You should take that interview very seriously,” not that I wouldn’t have, and what really won me over at the University of Dallas in part was that when I got here and I was teaching and then seeing what was happening between classes among my students, I learned that people were having discussions in literature and their academics, and that they weren’t just going to class and then talking about completely non-academic things, they seemed to want to spend their down time thinking and conversing. And then in many ways the more fortuitous thing that led me to find my home here was that I had somehow, despite the fact that I am devoted entirely to poetry as my scholarly focus, I had never read Dante. And I needed to give a teaching exhibition… of Dante! I was asked to come into a classroom where they were reading the Commedia and teach six cantos of the Inferno. So, I had to lickety-split read the Commedia and get myself in a position where I could do that convincingly. But it wasn’t hard to want to give it my all because I was discovering Dante! And Dante is… The Commedia is the greatest work of art perhaps ever written by, or ever made by any human in any artform. It is arguably that. I feel it’s that good! And I hadn’t encountered it and so it was a lovefest to be reading it for the first time and thinking about how to teach it.

So, I’ve moved, without being asked to move from my educational background to my teaching experience….and I see that that’s one of the possible questions…

RM: Yes, that’s perfect…

AO: …And the way to make that more excusable is, as one of my colleagues said when I was about to be hired on here, he said “Andrew, being a professor at the University of Dallas would be a wonderful education for you.” Which was ironic or seemed odd because you’re supposed to be the educator if you’re the professor, not getting an education. But teaching is an education, you never know a work of literature as well when you are learning it as a student as when you are figuring out how to teach it. You need to know it from many different angles, you need to be able to anticipate what many different minds might see in it, Even if you think that it’s wrong-headed or right-headed… you have to be ready for so much more than you have to be responsible for when you are merely a student. So, it has been a remarkable education to teach here for, I think this is my twelfth year.

RM: Wonderful, so going off of that, have you noticed many changes in education from the time that you were a student - I know that you say that being a student kind of never ends, even as an educator you’re always learning as you’re teaching - but just in the field of education in general, from the time you first entered it, have you noticed any major changes and what might those be?

AO: Hmm…This will take a bit of thinking…So…some of the changes just have to do with the educational level, certainly literature is taught differently at the high school level differently from at the college level, even here as a professor I am teaching freshman differently from the way I teach my grad students, but I think your question probably is more interestingly answered if we talk about larger styles of pedagogy and even of focus. That, you know, they do come in periods,
there are fads in collegiate academia. When I was a college student – I don’t think this is true only of Harvard, but it wouldn’t have been true across all the colleges of the United States – there was a distinction made between two different majors or concentrations that were both devoted to the interpretation of literature. We had English, and then we had Comp Lit, and Comp Lit was for people who were focused on literature written in non-English languages in which you already had to be fluent, but because it was comparative, and because of what was common to different national literatures, was the theory of reading it really was a course and a discipline or a major that was devoted to theory. So, this is in the 80s, and especially French theory, and especially instruction was still fairly new, extremely influential, especially among the generation of younger professors in the academy at the time. And I did not have a fluent second language, so I chose English but I…as my major, but I was aware that there was a prestige, a cache to French theory. And I certainly didn’t want to seem to be studying English because I was less smart or somehow less than some of my ostensible peers. And so I would audit those courses. And I think that the devotion that Comp Lit at Harvard had to, especially deconstruction, post-structuarlism, without being “fadish” had partly gone by the wayside. There is, I perceive that there has been kind of a flow away from prioritizing philosophical accounts, linguistic accounts, theoretical/conceptual accounts of literature back towards a devotion to ordinary language, to so-called close reading, even towards a certain formalism. Now some of that has been obscured for me because I ended up teaching at an institution, UD, which is more conservative pedagogically and never went over to deconstruction and high theory, always defined its English department, or its take on literature, against that. So if I had stayed here throughout those decades, I probably wouldn’t have seen many changes, but I think I understand from reading journals, academic journals, and from talking to colleagues at other schools and just being aware of what is presented about it at various conferences, that there’s been a retreat from devotion primarily to theoretical accounts of literature and that would be one of the major changes…Let’s push on a little bit and I may come back to that.

RM: Okay, another question that I had for . . . is what do you see to be the main goal of teaching literature or just education in general? What do you perceive to be the main goal?

AO: So that’s a key question, and it’s one that isn’t maybe either of educators or of students sufficiently. I like etymologies, word histories, and my mind immediately goes to the etymology of the word education, which is from ‘educere’ - ‘ex’ means out, ‘ducere’ is to lead - so in some ways education must have to do with a leading out and if you push on that a little bit, you realize that what an educator is trying to do is to help the student, or younger person, more ignorant person, not only be led out but lead his or herself out of, not just ignorance, but the conventions, the instinctive behavior, the limitations that one has when one doesn’t know more ways of doing things or the kind of questions that might lead one, not off the straight and narrow, but to have more liberal latitude in the direction one can go, even with regard to inquiry. Many people do not ask interesting questions that lead upon interesting experiences, or new insights, or new fields of investigation because the questions just haven’t even occurred to them. And one of the ways you lead someone out of their ruts, often out of their prejudices – and I don’t just mean heinous or racial prejudices – I mean you will pre-judge the opportunities you have for thinking and doing in your life, unless you know more about what there is possibly to be done. And the educator of
literature especially introduces other people’s stories, which very seldom coincide with the experiences of the reader and help the reader learn that oh! This is a way to live! This is a way to think! I’m teaching the *Odyssey* right now – Odysseus is the man of many ways, of many turns; in part because he was so experienced, he was so travelled, and met so many different peoples, and he came to be able to understand in his own mind how many different opportunities there are at any given moment. How many ways to think about something there are. As a poet, I have a vocation, I have a responsibility to help the readers of my work understand just how flexible the mind and the common mind that we each inherit with the mother tongue is. Language is often used as if it were a coinage that is well-thumbed and kind of trite and, you know, any coin is as good as the next, any word is as good as the next, but no! A poet shows that words can be made to have new meaning or to reconnect themselves with their old meaning as I was doing with the etymology of ‘educere’… And that there is something almost living in its vitality, and its robustness, and its capacity for bringing new things into the world that we have available in our language. So, I believe education is not just, you know, something that we often speak of in relation to the liberal arts, but that it is literally liberating – it frees us up from the shackles of prejudice, and triteness, and conventionality, and imagining that the way things we’ve done before are the only way they can be done in the future.

RM: So, going off of that, how would you suggest the ideal way to put that into practice?! (both laugh). The goal of education being liberating, how would you, as an educator, go about putting that into practice?

AO: So, here I just have to admit that are differences between what I imagine should be the ideal and what I actually do (laughs). And I’m self-critical to that extent, although it may be that the ideal doesn’t always work as well as one would wish in practice, and that’s why I retreat to what I tend to do. If the ideal is to help lead the student out of the rut, out of just thinking along the same lines, walking the same path, over and over again until its down in its deep ruin of erosion (laughs) or until his brain furrows are completely rutted, it seems like the ideal would be to have very participatory form of education – a lot of give and take, a lot of conversation where the student was always expected to be speaking her mind and then sometimes being gently corrected if it’s too much like the last thing she said…Pedagogy and education would always be heuristic, in the sense that heuristic is a word related to eureka, it’s a mode of discovery where you’re actually not letting the student get away with not discovering something new by retreating to the old, and that’s something that cannot be done merely by lecturing. If I…I could be exposing my students in a lecture to avant-garde poems, or a reading of a canonical text, that they’re already familiar with, but I’ve got some new take on it, that should disturb them or just disrupt their complacency as a reader, that’s already educative, but until I hear their response to it, until I know that they are changing their own reading methods, until they say something about how they would read the next sentence or read the next text that shows that work has been done, that they are now thinking with a new mind in a new direction, I have no idea whether it’s been liberating, I have no idea whether they have gotten out of their ruts.

I think as an educator I often get either frustrated by my students’ lack of preparation to immediately demonstrate that they are ready to go in a new direction or to respond to a new idea
I’ve shared with their own articulate new ideas, and so I go back to the sound of my own voice. And I’m just finding fault with myself in saying that. I think the class time that we all have is very short. I am in classes three hours a week with any given student. And for that hour, I might have prepped three, or six, or eight hours depending on whether it’s new material for me and the elevation of the course. If I then give over that hour or 50 minutes to mostly listening, then what has been the good of my prep? It doesn’t feel very efficient. And yet, that might be the best use of it. And of course, when you give over teaching time to listening, you’re forcing the other students to also be listening, and so you have to feel confident that what they’re hearing their other peers say is educative. So, to come back from what I’ve been saying, and to defend lecturing, what you get from lecturing is someone speaking in a fairly efficient manner, hopefully the most, pithy and convention-challenging ideas, that are likely to be challenging to everyone in the class. Certainly, it isn’t great pedagogy to have the same three students in a 20-person class always be the ones who talk and the other 17 just listen and think, “Oh, there goes Joe again showing that he did the reading.” (both laugh).

RM: One thing that I’m curious about, I know that teaching at UD is very special and different from teaching at another institution or like a state school, but I’m wondering if more broadly you have noticed any particular issues with the field of modern education and any conventions that are in place now that you might take issue with.

AO: Yeah, so it sounded like you were leading towards a question about UD, but then in speaking about modern education it seems that it’s not UD specific. But I guess my answer would still bring in a little of UD. So, again in my field of literature, something that has certainly happened, and was already beginning to happen when I was being trained as an undergraduate, especially a graduate student towards the end of the 20th century, was that although the departments continued to be called English departments or literature departments, they were effectively becoming cultural studies departments. Now, cultural studies is concerned with the study of cultures as opposed to the studies of works of art. And there’s a tendency to multiculturalism, and diversity… there’s a tendency to treat the works that are presented as important cultural artifacts, as not the products of an individual’s genius, but product of a culture. That’s the claim for their cultural relevance and why they should be included in the syllabus is that they help tell us something about the culture that they made them as well as the culture that esteemed them. University of Dallas pushes back against that, I would say the English department probably doesn’t have a mission statement that puts this in writing, but the tacit mission statement, perhaps most importantly, is making claims for the legitimacy of literature, and a skepticism directed towards caring about cultural artifacts only as produced by cultures and esteemed by cultures. I think it’s because I am, despite being quite politically and socially liberal, pedagogically conservative that I ended up here and am happy here. (laughs) What do I mean by pedagogically conservative? I mean that, as I said earlier, it was a revelation to me to read Dante in preparation for teaching it. And I have no qualms saying that Dante’s Divine Comedy is a more valuable work of art than 99.9% of what else can be taught in a literature classroom. Is there a merit to discovering works that were overlooked in their own time because of certain cultural prejudices? For example, novels and poems written by women, prior to feminism, and esteeming the voices of women in literature. Yes. It’s important to go back and discover oh, well,
RM: So good! Going back to earlier in our conversation, we were talking about changes that you may or may not have noticed throughout your experience in formal education, and you mentioned that there are pedagogical fads that kind of ebb and flow. I’m wondering if you have any predictions for the future in the field of education in general or specifically in teaching literature...of any future fads that may appear?

AO: Okay, so I think regardless of who’s being interviewed, the fad or the change may be the danger that is encroaching in the field of literary studies, and maybe in education as a whole right now, is distance learning and online studies. At one level it is arguably hugely important because it’s availing education to people whose lives just can’t accommodate it very readily, so especially adult learners who are no longer, or can no longer just avail themselves of the public education system because they’re too old for it but would like to get more education and yet are not available during the usual hours... or have access issues getting into urban centers where the schools are...or if you’re interested in studying at a school that is across the country or across the state, it’s wonderful that you can get some access to education through online courses where the pedagogy is largely mediated through the internet or through email. But my sense is that this is very, very second-best. And it would be terrible if what is currently the way of distance learning became a norm. I’m aware that even among the students at UD, I sometimes hear that there are people who prefer to take a course online, there aren’t that many offered yet, because it just is more convenient, it’s easier in some ways. If one lives off campus, one doesn’t have to commute in on a certain day, but to my mind the ideals of education involve discussion, involve face-to-face encounter. I’m always wary of efficiencies. I like efficiency...as a writer, I want concision, I want terseness, I don’t want any kind of fatty, unvaluable verbiage, but in pedagogy, there’s nothing better than one-on-one. Right? We have office hours, all professors have office hours, you know, we write comments on papers, writing for an audience of one (both laugh). All the time that goes into commenting on papers is for a single person to get what he or she can out of that. Hugely inefficient, it’s also invaluable. It’s absolutely necessary. Many state universities, units of private universities, this is absolutely true of Harvard, have some enormous classes. The reason to go to a smaller liberal arts college is that the small size of the college almost ensures that most of your classes will be small. They tend even to advertise themselves to their recruiting by advertising small average class sizes. The ideal I think is...15. Actually, if every class I taught had 15 students in it, that would be fantastic! Because you can have a table that preferably is oval or round-shaped where everybody can look at everybody else, essentially in the eye. You can have a non-hierarchachical conversation or debate, and everybody can be included, there’s no disparity. When I was speaking earlier about the three students of the 20 who always do the...
talking because they’re better prepared – well sometimes they’re not even better prepared, sometimes they’re just the ones who are more, you know, given to gab or wanting to impress their teacher. They just get caught up, the teacher gets caught up in the ruts of calling on them. When everybody’s looking at each other in the face, there’s more opportunity for parity, the opposite of disparity. With distance learning, there’s no face-to-face, because it’s, on one level, hugely inefficient because almost everything that is communicated at all has to be written and not just spoken, to multiple people, I think that corners are cut and that there’s a lot of communication that’s just lost. I mean, if I’m...if I’m looking someone in the face, or looking a whole class in the face, as I make a joke or say something unexpected, my students can tell whether I’m joking, being sarcastic, trying earnestly to communicate even though I’m flubbing it (laughs) whether I’m well-meaning or angry, I don’t know how much of that actually happens online. I know that email has a great capacity for miscommunication. Just irony or sarcasm is not picked up on and that people think you’re saying the exact opposite of what you mean! (laughs) But mostly it just takes the community out of it. Why do we want to learn? Why do we want to not be ignorant? Why do we want to know anything? Mostly it’s because we want to be a viable community. We want to parts of probably many different communities interlayered amongst each other. So why wouldn’t we practice that by being a community, and why wouldn’t we want to have each other’s faces smiling at each other, you know, while we do so? So I’m...I’m worried about online distance learning catching on for the wrong reasons, because of the convenience of it... when etymologically, the sense of convenience, which in the sense of coming together, is exactly what it’s not...I understand the desire to go there a bit, but I hope we mostly avoid it. Um, I feel like there was another side to that question…

RM: Um, if there maybe is another pedagogical fad you might see as...or with regard to theory of teaching versus just the means by which it is taught?

AO: Yeah... there were two things that I was going to say, and I forgot the other one...Um...Yeah, you’ll have to cut some dead space out of here (both laugh) because I’m gonna have to think for a minute or move on.

RM: Oh no worries, Alright, I think that was pretty much every point to cover, is there anything else that you would like to add to maybe sum up?

AO: I was joking with my American Literature students the other day. I’m teaching American Literature for the first time after 12 years, even though I’m an Americanist of sorts, my scholarship focuses primarily on American poets, but I hadn’t taught American Lit, but I am now. And I was telling them that, you know, someday in the future in my retirement, I’ll probably move up to Maine where my mother still lives and where I’m from and, you know, I can imagine being kind of bored not teaching anymore and so what I would want to do is akin to what in Ireland, and I think in parts of rural England, were called “hedge schools.” Country, rural schools where instead of going to Oxford or Cambridge, people would just go to a local community and there would be reading aloud together and discussing of what one read. I’m thinking of a situation of no homework where I would just kind of avail my kitchen or my barn to young folk, maybe of high school age, maybe younger, maybe older, to come and just visit former professor Osborn, and we would read things that they hadn’t read, maybe some of the UD
curriculum, and we’d just read them aloud, and stop where we came to things that we didn’t
understand, talk about them and then press on, I just…I think that’s a kind of ideal. And again, it
comes to efficiency… It’s not efficient at all. You couldn’t very well have all the learning done
that way at a place like UD, you just wouldn’t get through enough. Right? It helps to send
someone off with an assignment and come back and discuss the choice bits as opposed to letting
me read everything aloud and then people listen and ask questions or getting Rachel to read this
canto or read this book of the *Odyssey* and then we talk about it. But it would be gorgeous, it
would be lovely to have … you can tell that I like the idea of being able to see people face-to-
face, and I want to the bodily community of being in the same place at the same time, discussing
this work, smiling at each other. Part of that bodiliness is actually filling the air with the lung-
warm inspired speech that is coming out of the text, but it’s been revivified by us intoning it,
translating it from graphical words into sound…sound patterns hitting our ear drums. There’s a
real joy to that, and you learn a lot about literature by, especially if it’s poetic at all, by hearing it,
hearing the rhythms, the cadences, the play between the phonemes. I’m afraid that some of my
students just, you know, read optically to themselves and don’t have a taste for the sonic quality
of what they’re reading, which is the embodiment of the language at all so…That’s kind of my
ideal.

RM: That’s beautiful. That image you paint, that’s just really beautiful.

AO: Yeah, so I said this to my American Lit students and they said oh call us! We’ll come to
your hedge school, we’ll move up to Maine and live in your hay loft (both laugh), which is
charming. We’ll see if it happens! (both laugh)

RM: If it does, let me know, too! Alright, well if that sums it up for you…or was there something
else you wanted to add?

AO: Yeah, I guess where I was going with the earlier, maybe the other thing I wanted to get to
was, it’s not quite a fad, but two things that colleges and universities often find themselves
doing, for the sake of efficiency, which really means for the sake of money, is expanding their
class sizes and also getting non-tenure track professors to do more and more of the teaching. So-
called affiliate or adjunct faculty. With regard to the former, it’s not an evil that some classes are
lecture classes. I can’t remember if I said, - no big shame if I repeat - the lecture, the Shakespeare
class that I took second semester freshman year was held in Sandler Hall at Harvard, which held
800 people, it was basically a theater. And there were, I think, as many as 800 people in that
class. And Marjorie Garber was a professor worthy of having 800 students in a semester. Her
lectures were fantastic, and I always read each of the Shakespeare plays assigned twice before
even going to the lecture so that I would understand it better. And then we, on Fridays,
sometimes on Thursdays, would have breakout sessions with graduate students, so-called
teaching fellows, which were for the face time with people who would read our essays and
correct our exams. So, there was an opportunity to jaw debate with peers, but then the main
lectures, were given to as many people as wanted to take the course that year and it was a huge
number because they were great courses! There’s nothing wrong with lectures. You do need to
have the break out smaller sections available at least once a week as well, but you certainly
wouldn’t want all your classes to be lecture classes. You just are losing out on what college
should be if, I would say, most of your classes aren’t small. You would want to be in situations
in which you could know your fellow classmates, can get your voice heard, can get your
professor to know the color of your mind, not only from your written submitted assignments but
from your class discussion. You want to be able to have some debates, some give and take. The
issue of more and more teaching being done by adjuncts and affiliates is also… something about
it which I am a little bit ambivalent, meaning I’m now going to defend it before I decry it. The
good thing is that the people who are affiliates or adjuncts are often younger and new professors
who are teaching fewer courses at a time and who are giving their all to prepping because they’re
learning to teach anew and about new materials, and they care deeply about it and are wanting to
do it right, and are often less jaded and just deeply deeply committed to what they’re up to. Often
fantastic teachers. And I say this partly out of pride because I know that I was one for a while,
you know. And I know how much I put into it. The problem with having too much teaching done
by adjuncts and affiliates is that, while they are underpaid and exploited, and so the university is
complicit with a bad system, a system that doesn’t treat its people right to the degree that it relies
on cheap labor. And then there’s the problem with the students, that the students, especially I
would say at a private school with high tuition, they deserve that their alma mater, that their
academic family have the same stability as an actual family. When they email a professor ten
years later, wanting a letter of recommendation, that professor should be there. If the professor
was an affiliate or an adjunct, there’s no way he’s gonna be there. You probably would not go
and ask someone to be an affiliate professor to do this interview, not because he or she wouldn’t
have some interesting things to say, but in part because, you know, that person…it’s not really
his or her responsibility to do the extra stuff beyond the teaching of the classes and reading of the
papers, all the committee work, all the building up over a long time, the community, all the
letters of recommendation writing, all the advising the administration of how to keep the
university going, that’s a huge part of being a faculty member and an educator and what we’re
doing right now is arguably part of that. So, we can end there…it’s kind of anticlimactic
but…(laughs)

RM: Okay, well thank you so much for your insight! I really appreciate it.

AO: Good!