

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

4 AO: I'm honored, yes.

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

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

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

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

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

37 (phone goes off...) Sorry ... beeps.

38 Um, And I was also starting to write poems when I got into college so, although I took in my
39 freshman year at Harvard the curriculum you would expect of a likely-to-declare-physics-or-

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

60 RM: Wow!

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

74 (phone beeps)

75 ...If you are an academic you need to be on the tenure track to have a permanent home...to feel
76 like you can set down roots, and buy a house, and continue to have a family, and just devote
77 yourself to an institution. So, after four years I started looking seriously to move elsewhere and
78 was invited to the University of Dallas, and that was a curiosity because the University of Dallas
79 is a Catholic institution and I am not Catholic and in fact did not know much about Catholicism
80 before coming here...but learned from a colleague at Whitman that I should take this job

81 opportunity very seriously. The wife of the head of the math department, who was a Harvard
82 PHD in history and a devout Catholic, knew the University of Dallas and said “it is a serious
83 academic institution.” She knew me, that I was seriously academic, and she intuited that I would
84 like it. So she said, “You should take that interview very seriously,” not that I wouldn’t have, and
85 what really won me over at the University of Dallas in part was that when I got here and I was
86 teaching and then seeing what was happening between classes among my students, I learned that
87 people were having discussions in literature and their academics, and that they weren’t just going
88 to class and then talking about completely non-academic things, they seemed to want to spend
89 their down time thinking and conversing. And then in many ways the more fortuitous thing that
90 led me to find my home here was that I had somehow, despite the fact that I am devoted entirely
91 to poetry as my scholarly focus, I had never read Dante. And I needed to give a teaching
92 exhibition... of Dante! I was asked to come into a classroom where they were reading the
93 *Commedia* and teach six cantos of the Inferno. So, I had to lickety-split read the *Commedia* and
94 get myself in a position where I could do that convincingly. But it wasn’t hard to want to give it
95 my all because I was discovering Dante! And Dante is... The *Commedia* is the greatest work of
96 art perhaps ever written by, or ever made by any human in any artform. It is arguably that. I feel
97 it’s that good! And I hadn’t encountered it and so it was a lovefest to be reading it for the first
98 time and thinking about how to teach it.

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

101 RM: Yes, that’s perfect...

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

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

116 AO: Hmm...This will take a bit of thinking...So...some of the changes just have to do with the
117 educational level, certainly literature is taught differently at the high school level differently from
118 at the college level, even here as a professor I am teaching freshman differently from the way I
119 teach my grad students, but I think your question probably is more interestingly answered if we
120 talk about larger styles of pedagogy and even of focus. That, you know, they do come in periods,

121 there are fads in collegiate academia. When I was a college student – I don't think this is true
122 only of Harvard, but it wouldn't have been true across all the colleges of the United States –
123 there was a distinction made between two different majors or concentrations that were both
124 devoted to the interpretation of literature. We had English, and then we had Comp Lit, and Comp
125 Lit was for people who were focused on literature written in non-English languages in which you
126 already had to be fluent, but because it was comparative, and because of what was common to
127 different national literatures, was the *theory* of reading it really was a course and a discipline or a
128 major that was devoted to theory. So, this is in the 80s, and especially French theory, and
129 especially instruction was still fairly new, extremely influential, especially among the generation
130 of younger professors in the academy at the time. And I did not have a fluent second language,
131 so I chose English but I...as my major, but I was aware that there was a prestige, a cache to
132 French theory. And I certainly didn't want to seem to be studying English because I was less
133 smart or somehow less than some of my ostensible peers. And so I would audit those courses.
134 And I think that the devotion that Comp Lit at Harvard had to, especially deconstruction, post-
135 structuralism, without being "fadish" had partly gone by the wayside. There is, I perceive that
136 there has been kind of a flow away from prioritizing philosophical accounts, linguistic accounts,
137 theoretical/conceptual accounts of literature back towards a devotion to ordinary language, to so-
138 called close reading, even towards a certain formalism. Now some of that has been obscured for
139 me because I ended up teaching at an institution, UD, which is more conservative pedagogically
140 and never went over to deconstruction and high theory, always defined its English department, or
141 its take on literature, against that. So if I had stayed here throughout those decades, I probably
142 wouldn't have seen many changes, but I think I understand from reading journals, academic
143 journals, and from talking to colleagues at other schools and just being aware of what is
144 presented about it at various conferences, that there's been a retreat from devotion primarily to
145 theoretical accounts of literature and that would be one of the major changes...Let's push on a
146 little bit and I may come back to that.

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

149 AO: So that's a key question, and it's one that isn't maybe either of educators or of students
150 sufficiently. I like etymologies, word histories, and my mind immediately goes to the etymology
151 of the word education, which is from 'educere' - 'ex' means out, 'ducere' is to lead - so in some
152 ways education must have to do with a leading out and if you push on that a little bit, you realize
153 that what an educator is trying to do is to help the student, or younger person, more ignorant
154 person, not only be led out but lead his or herself out of, not just ignorance, but the conventions,
155 the instinctive behavior, the limitations that one has when one doesn't know more ways of doing
156 things or the kind of questions that might lead one, not off the straight and narrow, but to have
157 more liberal latitude in the direction one can go, even with regard to inquiry. Many people do not
158 ask interesting questions that lead upon interesting experiences, or new insights, or new fields of
159 investigation because the questions just haven't even occurred to them. And one of the ways you
160 lead someone out of their ruts, often out of their prejudices – and I don't just mean heinous or
161 racial prejudices – I mean you will pre-judge the opportunities you have for thinking and doing
162 in your life, unless you know more about what there is possibly to be done. And the educator of

163 literature especially introduces other people's stories, which very seldom coincide with the
164 experiences of the reader and help the reader learn that oh! This is a way to live! This is a way to
165 think! I'm teaching the *Odyssey* right now – Odysseus is the man of many ways, of many turns;
166 in part because he was so experienced, he was so travelled, and met so many different peoples,
167 and he came to be able to understand in his own mind how many different opportunities there are
168 at any given moment. How many ways to think about something there are. As a poet, I have a
169 vocation, I have a responsibility to help the readers of my work understand just how flexible the
170 mind and the common mind that we each inherit with the mother tongue is. Language is often
171 used as if it were a coinage that is well-thumbed and kind of trite and, you know, any coin is as
172 good as the next, any word is as good as the next, but no! A poet shows that words can be made
173 to have new meaning or to reconnect themselves with their old meaning as I was doing with the
174 etymology of 'educere'... And that there is something almost living in its vitality, and its
175 robustness, and its capacity for bringing new things into the world that we have available in our
176 language. So, I believe education is not just, you know, something that we often speak of in
177 relation to the liberal arts, but that it is literally liberating – it frees us up from the shackles of
178 prejudice, and triteness, and conventionality, and imagining that the way things we've done
179 before are the only way they can be done in the future.

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

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

202 I think as an educator I often get either frustrated by my students' lack of preparation to
203 immediately demonstrate that they are ready to go in a new direction or to respond to a new idea

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

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

222 AO: Yeah, so it sounded like you were leading towards a question about UD, but then in
223 speaking about modern education it seems that it's not UD specific. But I guess my answer
224 would still bring in a little of UD. So, again in my field of literature, something that has certainly
225 happened, and was already beginning to happen when I was being trained as an undergraduate,
226 especially a graduate student towards the end of the 20th century, was that although the
227 departments continued to be called English departments or literature departments, they were
228 effectively becoming cultural studies departments. Now, cultural studies is concerned with the
229 study of *cultures* as opposed to the studies of works of art. And there's a tendency to
230 multiculturalism, and diversity... there's a tendency to treat the works that are presented as
231 important cultural artifacts, as not the products of an individual's genius, but product of a culture.
232 That's the claim for their cultural relevance and why they should be included in the syllabus is
233 that they help tell us something about the culture that they made them as well as the culture that
234 esteemed them. University of Dallas pushes back against that, I would say the English
235 department probably doesn't have a mission statement that puts this in writing, but the tacit
236 mission statement, perhaps most importantly, is making claims for the legitimacy of literature,
237 and a skepticism directed towards caring about cultural artifacts only as produced by cultures and
238 esteemed by cultures. I think it's because I am, despite being quite politically and socially liberal,
239 pedagogically conservative that I ended up here and am happy here. (laughs) What do I mean by
240 pedagogically conservative? I mean that, as I said earlier, it was a revelation to me to read Dante
241 in preparation for teaching it. And I have no qualms saying that Dante's *Divine Comedy* is a
242 more valuable work of art than 99.9% of what else can be taught in a literature classroom. Is
243 there a merit to discovering works that were overlooked in their own time because of certain
244 cultural prejudices? For example, novels and poems written by women, prior to feminism, and
245 esteeming the voices of women in literature. Yes. It's important to go back and discover oh, well,

246 this woman wasn't really thought much of in the beginning of the 19th century, but we can see
247 that she is every bit as nuanced and insightful as this man who was canonized during the same
248 period, let's now read her as, you know, worthy of being taught in the classroom. That's a
249 recuperative project that we associate with cultural studies. There's nothing about UD'S system
250 that sets itself against it, but is that work likely to be more important than Dante's *Commedia*? It
251 is not. So, we will continue to privilege the great works for all time and want every student,
252 regardless of his or her major, to study Homer, and the *Aeneid*, and Dante, and Milton, and an
253 assortment of lyric poems. I strongly agree with that and so I'm happy doing that year after year.

254 RM: So good! Going back to earlier in our conversation, we were talking about changes that you
255 may or may not have noticed throughout your experience in formal education, and you
256 mentioned that there are pedagogical fads that kind of ebb and flow. I'm wondering if you have
257 any predictions for the future in the field of education in general or specifically in teaching
258 literature...of any future fads that may appear?

259 AO: Okay, so I think regardless of who's being interviewed, the fad or the change may be the
260 danger that is encroaching in the field of literary studies, and maybe in education as a whole right
261 now, is distance learning and online studies. At one level it is arguably hugely important because
262 it's availing education to people whose lives just can't accommodate it very readily, so
263 especially adult learners who are no longer, or can no longer just avail themselves of the public
264 education system because they're too old for it but would like to get more education and yet are
265 not available during the usual hours... or have access issues getting into urban centers where the
266 schools are...or if you're interested in studying at a school that is across the country or across the
267 state, it's wonderful that you can get some access to education through online courses where the
268 pedagogy is largely mediated through the internet or through email. But my sense is that this is
269 very, very second-best. And it would be terrible if what is currently the way of distance learning
270 became a norm. I'm aware that even among the students at UD, I sometimes hear that there are
271 people who prefer to take a course online, there aren't that many offered yet, because it just is
272 more convenient, it's easier in some ways. If one lives off campus, one doesn't have to commute
273 in on a certain day, but to my mind the ideals of education involve discussion, involve face-to-
274 face encounter. I'm always wary of efficiencies. I like efficiency...as a writer, I want concision, I
275 want terseness, I don't want any kind of fatty, unvaluable verbiage, but in pedagogy, there's
276 nothing better than one-on-one. Right? We have office hours, all professors have office hours,
277 you know, we write comments on papers, writing for an audience of one (both laugh). All the
278 time that goes into commenting on papers is for a single person to get what he or she can out of
279 that. Hugely inefficient, it's also invaluable. It's absolutely necessary. Many state universities,
280 units of private universities, this is absolutely true of Harvard, have some enormous classes. The
281 reason to go to a smaller liberal arts college is that the small size of the college almost ensures
282 that most of your classes will be small. They tend even to advertise themselves to their recruiting
283 by advertising small average class sizes. The ideal I think is...15. Actually, if every class I taught
284 had 15 students in it, that would be fantastic! Because you can have a table that preferably is oval
285 or round-shaped where everybody can look at everybody else, essentially in the eye. You can
286 have a non-hierarchical conversation or debate, and everybody can be included, there's no
287 disparity. When I was speaking earlier about the three students of the 20 who always do the

288 talking because they're better prepared – well sometimes they're not even better prepared,
289 sometimes they're just the ones who are more, you know, given to gab or wanting to impress
290 their teacher. They just get caught up, the teacher gets caught up in the ruts of calling on them.
291 When everybody's looking at each other in the face, there's more opportunity for parity, the
292 opposite of disparity. With distance learning, there's no face-to-face, because it's, on one level,
293 hugely inefficient because almost everything that is communicated at all has to be written and
294 not just spoken, to multiple people, I think that corners are cut and that there's a lot of
295 communication that's just lost. I mean, if I'm...if I'm looking someone in the face, or looking a
296 whole class in the face, as I make a joke or say something unexpected, my students can tell
297 whether I'm joking, being sarcastic, trying earnestly to communicate even though I'm flubbing it
298 (laughs) whether I'm well-meaning or angry, I don't know how much of that actually happens
299 online. I know that email has a great capacity for miscommunication. Just irony or sarcasm is not
300 picked up on and that people think you're saying the exact opposite of what you mean! (laughs)
301 But mostly it just takes the community out of it. Why do we want to learn? Why do we want to
302 not be ignorant? Why do we want to know anything? Mostly it's because we want to be a viable
303 community. We want to parts of probably many different communities interlayered amongst
304 each other. So why wouldn't we practice that by being a community, and why wouldn't we want
305 to have each other's faces smiling at each other, you know, while we do so? So I'm...I'm
306 worried about online distance learning catching on for the wrong reasons, because of the
307 convenience of it... when etymologically, the sense of convenience, which in the sense of
308 coming together, is exactly what it's not...I understand the desire to go there a bit, but I hope we
309 mostly avoid it. Um, I feel like there was another side to that question...

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

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

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

317 AO: I was joking with my American Literature students the other day. I'm teaching American
318 Literature for the first time after 12 years, even though I'm an Americanist of sorts, my
319 scholarship focuses primarily on American poets, but I hadn't taught American Lit, but I am
320 now. And I was telling them that, you know, someday in the future in my retirement, I'll
321 probably move up to Maine where my mother still lives and where I'm from and, you know, I
322 can imagine being kind of bored not teaching anymore and so what I would want to do is akin to
323 what in Ireland, and I think in parts of rural England, were called "hedge schools." Country, rural
324 schools where instead of going to Oxford or Cambridge, people would just go to a local
325 community and there would be reading aloud together and discussing of what one read. I'm
326 thinking of a situation of no homework where I would just kind of avail my kitchen or my barn
327 to young folk, maybe of high school age, maybe younger, maybe older, to come and just visit
328 former professor Osborn, and we would read things that they hadn't read, maybe some of the UD

329 curriculum, and we'd just read them aloud, and stop where we came to things that we didn't
330 understand, talk about them and then press on, I just..I think that's a kind of ideal. And again, it
331 comes to efficiency... It's not efficient at all. You couldn't very well have all the learning done
332 that way at a place like UD, you just wouldn't get through enough. Right? It helps to send
333 someone off with an assignment and come back and discuss the choice bits as opposed to letting
334 me read everything aloud and then people listen and ask questions or getting Rachel to read this
335 canto or read this book of the *Odyssey* and then we talk about it. But it would be gorgeous, it
336 would be lovely to have ... you can tell that I like the idea of being able to see people face-to-
337 face, and I want to the bodily community of being in the same place at the same time, discussing
338 this work, smiling at each other. Part of that bodiliness is actually filling the air with the lung-
339 warm inspired speech that is coming out of the text, but it's been revived by us intoning it,
340 translating it from graphical words into sound...sound patterns hitting our ear drums. There's a
341 real joy to that, and you learn a lot about literature by, especially if it's poetic at all, by hearing it,
342 hearing the rhythms, the cadences, the play between the phonemes. I'm afraid that some of my
343 students just, you know, read optically to themselves and don't have a taste for the sonic quality
344 of what they're reading, which is the embodiment of the language at all so... That's kind of my
345 ideal.

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

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

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

352 AO: Yeah, I guess where I was going with the earlier, maybe the other thing I wanted to get to
353 was, it's not quite a fad, but two things that colleges and universities often find themselves
354 doing, for the sake of efficiency, which really means for the sake of money, is expanding their
355 class sizes and also getting non-tenure track professors to do more and more of the teaching. So-
356 called affiliate or adjunct faculty. With regard to the former, it's not an evil that some classes are
357 lecture classes. I can't remember if I said, - no big shame if I repeat - the lecture, the Shakespeare
358 class that I took second semester freshman year was held in Sandler Hall at Harvard, which held
359 800 people, it was basically a theater. And there were, I think, as many as 800 people in that
360 class. And Marjorie Garber was a professor worthy of having 800 students in a semester. Her
361 lectures were fantastic, and I always read each of the Shakespeare plays assigned twice before
362 even going to the lecture so that I would understand it better. And then we, on Fridays,
363 sometimes on Thursdays, would have breakout sessions with graduate students, so-called
364 teaching fellows, which were for the face time with people who would read our essays and
365 correct our exams. So, there was an opportunity to jaw debate with peers, but then the main
366 lectures, were given to as many people as wanted to take the course that year and it was a huge
367 number because they were great courses! There's nothing wrong with lectures. You do need to
368 have the break out smaller sections available at least once a week as well, but you certainly
369 wouldn't want all your classes to be lecture classes. You just are losing out on what college

370 should be if, I would say, most of your classes aren't small. You would want to be in situations
371 in which you could know your fellow classmates, can get your voice heard, can get your
372 professor to know the color of your mind, not only from your written submitted assignments but
373 from your class discussion. You want to be able to have some debates, some give and take. The
374 issue of more and more teaching being done by adjuncts and affiliates is also... something about
375 it which I am a little bit ambivalent, meaning I'm now going to defend it before I decry it. The
376 good thing is that the people who are affiliates or adjuncts are often younger and new professors
377 who are teaching fewer courses at a time and who are giving their all to prepping because they're
378 learning to teach anew and about new materials, and they care deeply about it and are wanting to
379 do it right, and are often less jaded and just deeply deeply committed to what they're up to. Often
380 fantastic teachers. And I say this partly out of pride because I know that I was one for a while,
381 you know. And I know how much I put into it. The problem with having too much teaching done
382 by adjuncts and affiliates is that, while they are underpaid and exploited, and so the university is
383 complicit with a bad system, a system that doesn't treat its people right to the degree that it relies
384 on cheap labor. And then there's the problem with the students, that the students, especially I
385 would say at a private school with high tuition, they deserve that their alma mater, that their
386 academic family have the same stability as an actual family. When they email a professor ten
387 years later, wanting a letter of recommendation, that professor should be there. If the professor
388 was an affiliate or an adjunct, there's no way he's gonna be there. You probably would not go
389 and ask someone to be an affiliate professor to do this interview, not because he or she wouldn't
390 have some interesting things to say, but in part because, you know, that person...it's not really
391 his or her responsibility to do the extra stuff beyond the teaching of the classes and reading of the
392 papers, all the committee work, all the building up over a long time, the community, all the
393 letters of recommendation writing, all the advising the administration of how to keep the
394 university going, that's a huge part of being a faculty member and an educator and what we're
395 doing right now is arguably part of that. So, we can end there...it's kind of anticlimactic
396 but...(laughs)

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

398 AO: Good!