

# Chapter 14. Notebooks of an Adjunct Professor

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Welsh-born, PhD in literature, feminist poet, and essayist, Zoe Brigley Thompson crossed the Atlantic with her now former husband, a mathematician. She found sessional employment at his tenure-track and tenured universities. Following divorce, she is raising two sons while teaching across English and writing for the sciences at The Ohio State University. A well-published poet across Anglo-America, she is now working on a study of American Westerns across media and genre.

In her 1961 introduction to *The Golden Notebook*, Doris Lessing (1961) recommends that before beginning their education every young person should be told, “You are in the process of being indoctrinated” (p. xxi). This controversial comment from the Nobel-Prize-winning novelist encourages Philip W. Bennett (1995) to wonder if Lessing refers to a more personal “pain of growing up” in the Western education system, or, thinking in a broader context of the philosophy of education, whether her comment reflects on how that system “works to make students fit ... to be good producers and consumers” (p. 75).

Lessing (1961) expands on her provoking comment, however, by adding that those who teach and work within academia often have had to adapt themselves to a particular hierarchical system and that sometimes they end up supporting the system’s elitist requirements:

Those of you who are more robust and individual than others, will be encouraged to leave and find ways of educating yourself—educating your own judgement. Those that stay must remember always and all the time, that they are being moulded and patterned to fit into the narrow and particular needs of this society. (p. xxi)

This statement praising self-education and warning of the dangers of having to fit into the university system is thought-provoking for an adjunct professor, whose role is often half in and half out of academia. My own career is characterized by work as a poet, an editor in the publishing industry, a freelance writer as well as a contingent instructor of classes in English literature, creative writing, and sexuality studies.

In this essay, I consider how adjunct faculty become adjuncts, our challenges, and the joys and felicities in the role. With reference to my own story, I organize the essay in a series of notebooks. In *The Golden Notebook*, Lessing (1961)

intersperses a realistic narrative of women in the 1960s (titled *Free Women*) with notebooks gathered by the novel's protagonist, Anna Wulf. The black notebook tells of her life in South Africa before arriving in London, the red explores Lessing's/Wulf's engagement with politics, the yellow is a story within a story about a failing romantic relationship, while blue tends toward dreams and imaginings. The golden notebook is the receptacle that brings these many elements together.

The text is an experiment in autofiction. Lessing herself recently was claimed as a practitioner of autofiction, especially in her tendency toward "shaping and arranging material" in fragmentary and elusive forms which evade simple autobiographical narratives (Menn & Schuh, 2022, p. 111). Effe and Lawlor (2022) explain that autofiction simply does not have "something to do with the self and fiction" but includes strategies such as "a combination of real and invented elements; onomastic correspondence between author and character or narrator; and stylistic and linguistic experimentation" (p. 1).

These strategies may be put to good use by the adjunct professor, who (as I will outline) in writing about the situation of adjuncts might be met with hostility or even jeopardize their own job, since adjuncts are often hired at the pleasure of the chair of their department without oversight or scrutiny.

This account of adjunct experience in the university is divided into notebooks: the black notebook describes obstacles to an academic career, the yellow considers the part that personal relationships play, the red comments on departmental politics, and the blue addresses the joy and felicities found in teaching and imagining as part of an adjunct teaching role. This essay is itself my golden notebook woven together by the story of an academic named Sophie, whose life in the university both converges with and differs from my own experience. In bringing these threads together, I adopt what Menn and Schuh (2022) define as "[Lessing's] autofictional way of experimenting with conventions of autobiographical and textual unity" (p. 113).

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"It's not so easy to succeed when you don't have a desk or a table to write at." Sophie's mother, Ruth, talks about her friend from school, Aled. Many of Sophie's friends do not have a table or desk to sit at when they have to do their homework. Aled tells her that he balances his books on his knee while sitting up in bed. Sophie feels a little guilty that she does have a desk to write at. Ruth made sure of that, and sometimes in the evening, they sit and read whatever Shakespeare play Ruth is teaching to her class at school, though Ruth always takes the best parts. At the age of 15, Sophie loves the work she brings home from school. She eats it up hungrily, every subject she studies, but especially literature and drama.

Sophie has not yet read Raymond Williams' (1983) theorizing of working-class culture and the power of a community, but she will, and when she does, she will recognize those long afternoons in the hazy parlor of her grandmother's house,

watching a Western, a black and white detective picture, or even French New Wave, her grandfather having educated himself through the movies.

It's part of the family history. Every week, whatever film passed through the town halls and churches converted to cinemas, the whole family was there to watch. First was the great-great grandmother, an exquisite Welsh seamstress; then the great grandparents—one an Irish immigrant and the other from rural Wales, both families came to work in the mines. Sophie's grandmother ran the candy stall at the local market and her grandfather was a miner who survived World War Two despite being a rear gunner in the AirForce. Sophie's mother, Ruth, would go on to be a teacher and writer and raise Sophie as a single mother. For all of them, books, movies, poetry—it was all a shared pleasure and a window on the world and a way to learn and better themselves.

Through one movie, Sophie's grandfather tells her what he hopes her future will be. One afternoon, they watch *Woman of the Year* (1942), starring Kathryn Hepburn and Spencer Tracey. Hepburn's Tess Harding is difficult, career-minded, driven, resilient, untamable but also loveable and comic. At the end of the movie, Tess is civilized, but Sophie's grandfather tells her that this is the kind of woman he hopes she will be—not Tess at the end, but Tess in her prime.

Sophie is not sure how she might become Tess Harding, but she senses that work and school are key, and schoolwork is an escape from the boys who follow her home from school, shouting lewd comments, or the older boy who often tries to kiss her. She doesn't tell her mother about the gang of boys who grabbed her on her way home one night from a friend's house. She is not sure if she is protecting herself or her mother, or perhaps their close-knit family unit: mother *and* daughter.

She doesn't know this at that time, but violence will continue to impinge on the edges of her education and career. At college, she works as a journal intern for a renowned professor and editor, who sometimes comments on her "summery dresses" and at other times bullies her to tears. From a fellow student, she receives disturbing emails threatening to harm her for being cold and distant. She starts a relationship with one of her housemates, with whom she will go on a vacation which ends with him punching her on the street in Istanbul. The university moves her into new accommodations, but she still has to see that ex-boyfriend in classes.

For all this, she will blame herself, and she will go on thinking that there is something wrong or unlucky about her. Yet, at every academic hurdle, she succeeds. Through her BA, her MA, and into a PhD program, all funded and completed, but at every turn, she suffers from self-doubt. Each step seems mammoth; at every achievement, she wonders if she really deserved it. Can a woman treated so often like no more than a body also be a creature of the mind? Are those thoughts worth hearing?

Later, she co-authors a book on violence against women with her best friend from graduate school, Niamh, and they are interviewed by *The Times* about the reasoning behind the book. "We need to highlight that our area of study is not personal," Niamh says. "We'll be criticized if they think we're only writing about it

because it happened to us.” Sophie agrees, and they write defensively, “To assume that the researcher of rape has suffered some sexual trauma is also a way of explaining away the importance of the research, as if it was only the result of some personal grievance or ongoing post-traumatic damage” (Gunne & Brigley Thompson, 2009, p. 40). The interview is titled “Why not choose a happier subject?”

## The Black Notebook

How and why do adjuncts become adjuncts? In a recent editorial for the *Los Angeles Times* (Times Editorial Board, 2024), the editorial board argued that contingent faculty are overused and underpaid, and that this has negative consequences for the standard of education generally. The article notes that contingent faculty in the state of California take home less salary than public school teachers with fewer benefits and less job security, and they are often viewed as a cost-saving measure by institutions. The American Association of University Professors (2024) reports that 70 percent of instruction at universities is conducted by adjunct professors. Berry and Worthen (2021) describe this phenomenon as a result of the “higher ed industry” which “like the real estate industry, and its sibling, the finance industry, has found a way to suck down the wealth accumulated by the previous generation, during the 1950s and 1960s, the years post-World War II when inequality for a while actually levelled off” (p. 3).

Who *are* adjuncts now? To begin, they are overwhelmingly women; as Margaret W. Sallee (2023) puts it, disinvestment in the university, “shifting the onus to support faculty from the institution to the individual” (p. 179), has had the most impact on women, who often take adjunct positions in order to solve the two-body problem where their partner is also an academic and they are seeking jobs together.

There is also the issue of institutional racism. For example, studies by Johnson *et al.* (2024) and Sakata *et al.* (2023) document the trauma of everyday racism experienced by Black faculty and students, including the feeling of walking a tightrope, the assumption of them being “exceptional,” unconscious bias, and the pressure to represent a community. Disproportionate exposure to violence in young Black people’s lives also has an impact on future careers (Sheats *et al.*, 2018). Victoria Collins (2022), writing about her decision to strike from her adjunct position, highlights an American Federation of Teachers (2024) report which describes how “[m]ore than half of Black educators (56 percent) took out student loans—with an average initial amount of \$68,300—compared to 44 percent of white educators, who borrowed \$54,300 on average.” Financial necessity pressures such academics to take on contingent work.

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Sophie and Will are running late, and that always makes her nervous, especially when they are meeting new people, and especially physics professors. Sophie is supporting her husband, Will, who has been giving a paper at a prestigious

Chicago university. At tonight's dinner with a colleague, he is keen to make a good impression, and so they rush along the sidewalk, hoping they make it in time. Both of them are fresh out of graduate school, and Sophie is working the equivalent of a tenure-track job in a small university in the England, while Will has a postdoc in the United States. Will has taken her on a work trip to Chicago, where he is trying to find new collaborators for a paper he is writing. Will has already told her that the professor they are meeting seems a little distant, but tonight they will have a double date with him and his wife.

"His name is Joe," Will tells her. The wife, Heather, works in the same department. "I know it'll go well with you along with me," he adds. "You're my secret weapon." She hates it when he says that. Like the whole of the meeting rides on her, but she says nothing.

In fact, when they reach the restaurant, they are soon seated in a booth, and the other couple is late. When they arrive, they apologize, smile, shake hands. Their smiles are warm, and so the night begins. They talk about Evanston, farmer's markets, local bands, foodie restaurants.

"So what are you doing at the moment, Sophie? Are you working at the university as well?" asks Joe.

"I still have a job back in the UK," she says.

"Well, that must be awkward, with you two just married," says Joe.

"It is," says Sophie, and she thinks how it is harder than he can imagine. Just after they were married and just when Will was leaving for a postdoctoral position in New York state, Sophie had a late-term miscarriage, and now she is wondering if a family will ever be possible for her and Will. "I thought about becoming an adjunct, but Will tells me that adjuncts are treated really badly in the United States, so I wasn't sure if I should take that on."

This leads to a marked change. The couple isn't smiling anymore, and it strikes Sophie suddenly from the way Heather turns slightly, the way her face slumps, that Heather must be an adjunct.

"I'm so sorry," Sophie says. But Heather is getting up from her seat, and turning her anger not on Sophie or Will, but on Joe. Heather stands there for a long while staring at Joe before walking away. When she leaves, there is no smile that can mask Joe's annoyance, and he in turn glares at Sophie.

Later, Sophie apologizes for embarrassing Will. She begins to understand that in the United States, being an adjunct is far more controversial than she realized. Sophie continues to wonder about them both and how they came to be: Joe "the Professor" and Heather "the adjunct." Years later, she hears that they divorced, and she is not surprised.

## The Yellow Notebook

The two-body problem is well known in academia, and while double tenure-track positions are the holy grail, it is often (although not always) women who are

offered contingent faculty positions (Wolf-Wendel *et al.*, 2003; Jacobs & Winslow, 2005; Sallee, 2023). In a report for *Inside Higher Ed*, Fulk (2019) recounts a story from her own experience of being an adjunct professor, telling how a full professor informed her husband that “long-term employment as an adjunct is the logical consequence of [a] decision to marry a fellow academic and not have a commuter marriage.” Fulk (2019) concludes, “I should, it seems, have followed my head rather than my heart if I truly desired an academic career of my own.”

Recent studies show that many women find it particularly hard to manage their roles as academics in complicated relationships to those as partners, and as mothers. In interviews with more than 31 academics and five academic partners, Margaret W. Sallee (2023) found that women in opposite-sex couples found commuter positions incompatible with their responsibilities within their families, and factors like these “drive some to leave the academy, or adopt accommodation strategies, such as pursuing adjunct positions” (p. 179).

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When Sophie tells her friend Niamh that she is leaving her position in the United Kingdom to become an adjunct in Pennsylvania and be with her husband, she is surprised that Niamh is angry. “You shouldn’t be giving up a position like that,” she says. “Why does he have to be in the US? Can’t he come to you?”

“I can’t ask him to do that when he has the position at the better university,” Sophie replies. “Besides he thinks that he might be able to get us a dual hire. And more than that I want to have a family. I already had three miscarriages. We need to be in the same place, or it might never happen for us. My body can’t take this constant back and forth.”

“Yes, I get it,” says Niamh. “But you are giving up so much.”

Sophie can’t see what Niamh is saying at that time, but she will later. Now, she is thinking about a family and how much she wants to be a mother. She is feeling afraid that she might never be a parent, and she is wondering what life might look like without children. She understands that sometimes women do not want to have children, but she has always wanted motherhood, and she is hoping that the calm and rest of being in one place will be what she needs to see a pregnancy through to full term.

She does get what she wants. She becomes a mother, after a pregnancy full of warnings and worry. She remembers that time as one of the happiest times of her life, the togetherness of mother and baby, the joy of caring for him, and watching him grow, which she had been afraid she might never experience. She finds it hard to write or fit in her research, but she has other things to think about.

Later though, she remembers what Niamh told her. She remembers when Will tells her that he doesn’t feel he can negotiate for two tenure-track positions, that the job means too much to him to risk it. She thinks back to the stellar position at Oxbridge that a colleague told her to apply for right after graduate school,

but how they agreed finally that Cambridge was too far away from Will who had a year of graduate school remaining. Then Will moved to the United States, and she had to follow him. She remembers Niamh's words when she starts teaching as an adjunct, based in an office without windows in the basement of the building while the tenure-track offices are on the top floor.

Sophie later meets with her department chair to try to negotiate an improvement in her position, perhaps even a move to the tenure track. "Well, Sophie," he says. "I have to tell you that some of the other women in the department resent you being here. They think a woman should earn her position rather than being a spousal hire. What would they think if I suggested you for the tenure track?"

"I never thought of that," says Sophie, thrown by the unexpected comment.

"I think you'll just have to stay where you are for now because you haven't really earned a tenure-track position, coming here with your husband, and you should have negotiated before you came here."

There is little that Sophie can say to this.

## The Red Notebook

In her detailed account of bias against adjunct faculty, Fulk (2019) comments that "every faculty member, both adjunct and tenured ... agreed immediately that bias against adjuncts is endemic on academic campuses." She explains that this extends to tenured and tenure-track faculty who "have a tendency to regard adjuncts as deficient in some aspect of ability, ambition or work ethic" or that there is "some weakness or error on their part." These tenured faculty find it easier to blame the adjunct for not publishing more or for not managing the job market, than to face the reality that "colleges and universities are offering fewer and fewer tenure-track lines, and more and more eminently qualified graduate students are left to attempt to survive in the adjunct positions that are the only ones available" (Fulk 2019). One example is a tenured professor who told a contingent faculty member that adjuncts are "scabs" and "complicit in [their] own exploitation."

Such attitudes show a lack of awareness and understanding of the lived experience of adjuncts. Take, for example, adjunct professor at Mercy College (New York), Victoria Collins, who writes about her decision to strike in a 2022 article. She points to the high numbers of people in the global majority working in contingent positions, suggesting, "My story is not unique — it mirrors the lived conditions of Black and brown folks in academia across the country." For Collins (2022), the decision about whether to continue teaching is difficult, even though she loves working with students and knows that Black instructors encourage higher enrollments of Black students. She notes, "As a queer, Black person from the South, who is relatively cash-poor, I had to think about survival and how I was going to pay New York City rent — among the highest in the country — and afford to eat."

Adjunct faculty who protest the conditions of contingent positions are often viewed as “complainers” (Fulk, 2019). Similarly, Berry and Worthen (2021) describe the case study of an adjunct professor, John Hess, who went on to be a successful organizer, working within the California State University system. When Hess describes his first call to organize, Berry and Worthen (2021) note his hesitancy: “People who work as contingents at universities will recognize the ... sense of risk” (p. 11). They describe Hess’ dilemma as he “figures out that he is being asked to come to a meeting where other people may vote on a proposal to eliminate some of his potential rights,” but “showing up at that meeting to vote against that proposal could mark him as a problem and could cost him his job” (Berry and Worthen, 2021, p.11).

Such stories are reminiscent of Sara Ahmed’s (2021) theorizing of the complaint, when she describes how seeking redress can often be posed as “*just* complaining, *always* complaining” (p. 1). Ahmed resigned from her university professorship precisely because of the problems she sees in universities. Interviewed by the *Paris Review*, she explains her view of contingent staff as producing cutting-edge work and working powerfully and politically through conflict with power structures of higher education.

I don’t know that universities can be places where you can go to have breathing space, given the kinds of pressures academics are under, and given the extent to which these institutions rely on precarious staff. All that makes it much, much harder to fight for alternatives. At the same time, the most inventive academic work comes from those who occupy precarious positions. A lot of the really important work—in Black studies, in gender studies, in women’s studies—comes out of a battle with institutions for something. (Ahmed qtd. in Binham, 2022)

Ahmed rejects the idea of the university as a refuge. Her work on the complaint is particularly relevant in the context of contingent faculty seeking better working conditions. Ahmed (2021) writes about “‘the nonperformativity’ of institutional speech acts, policies, procedures, and commitments” (p. 28). While universities may make gestures toward better working conditions for adjunct professors, these are sometimes empty promises when it comes to economics and actions.

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After Sophie has worked as an adjunct for about a year, she is permitted to borrow the top-floor office of a professor who is on sabbatical. One of the other professors stops her in the hall, and they talk about books, the department, and their children. He leaves her with a smile and the promise that they must get their kids together for a playdate. A few weeks later, she greets him in the corridor, and he walks past her as if she were a ghost. She presumes that he must not have realized she was an adjunct, but now he knows.

Another day, she is invited to speak on a panel at the university library. On the panel with her is a professor from her department who she has never met. They make conversation and the professor asks her if she is on the tenure-track. When Sophie explains that she is an adjunct, the professor looks appalled. The conversation dries up quickly.

Since Sophie began as an adjunct, she has been attending meetings with the chair of department and other adjunct faculty to discuss the possibility of adjuncts having a vote at departmental meetings. It is the day of the departmental meeting, and the chair of department sends her an email. The adjunct representative is ill. Could Sophie fill in to present the case for adjunct faculty?

Sophie is unsure if she wants this job, but she also wants to please the chair, since the renewal of her contract is entirely their decision. She decides to go ahead.

At the meeting, she presents the case of the adjunct faculty, explaining why it would be inclusive and supportive to allow adjuncts a voice in departmental matters. When the presentation is over, the faculty begin a discussion. Many of the tenured professors are angry. Allowing adjuncts more of a say might undermine the tenure track and put their own jobs and the system in jeopardy. The comments are savage. All of the administrative staff and most of the adjunct faculty walk out in protest.

Sophie stays and when the discussion returns to her, she notes that most adjunct faculty did not choose to take these roles but did so out of necessity. Sophie doesn't realize that this comment is controversial or that somehow all the anger and bitterness about the erosion of the tenure track has suddenly turned against her. In the weeks that follow, even more people snub her in the corridor until she really is a ghost in her own department. The adjunct faculty are allowed to vote, but few of them attend departmental meetings because they feel unwelcome. Few take up their new right to vote.

## The Blue Notebook

If Ahmed's (2021) theorizing about the complaint applies to adjuncts, she also outlines how students are framed as killjoys when they complain. Ahmed (2021) also observes that the tendency to blame the complainant is often part of students' experience when they are forced to take on institutional hurdles. This could be a point of solidarity between students and adjuncts. It is intriguing that students are reported to be the least biased and prejudiced group regarding contingent faculty within the university (Fulk, 2019).

E.P. Bettinger and B.T. Long (2010) find that "taking a class from an adjunct often increases the number of subsequent courses that a student takes in a given subject and may also increase the likelihood that the student majors in the subject" (p. 611). Contingent faculty have huge job satisfaction from their teaching and the mentoring of students. Angela Thomas, an adjunct at Georgetown University

Medical Center, describes seeking to inspire students from backgrounds with economic stress:

Many of my students have sought me out for mentorship, especially if they come from a marginalized group. They feel inspired by my story, which I usually share on day one or two of my class. Learning that I was a teen mom from Detroit turned healthcare executive and professor helps them have hope for reaching their career goals despite the odds. (Thomas qtd. in Cha et al., 2023)

Similarly, Crystal Lockett-Thomas, an adjunct at Collin College, describes providing “a culturally sensitive lens for students, letting them know there are other people like them who are successful” and providing “personal experiences of overcoming challenges” (qtd. Cha *et al.*, 2023). McLeskey and Obernesser (2024) argue that this kind of unpaid emotional labor is very often taken on by graduate and contingent instructors at their own expense and out of a desire to support students.

As the instructors most students encounter, certainly at the undergraduate level, adjunct professors are extremely important. The problem, however, is that many experience burnout due to unreasonable work expectations, tight deadlines, and lack of resources (Whitmore, 2023). Zhu (2021) emphasizes that positive student experiences in classes are not so much decided by whether they are taught by tenure-track or adjunct faculty, but by the working conditions of adjunct faculty, including factors such as “pecuniary and non-pecuniary compensation, involvement in institutional governance, propensity to seek outside employment, priority in course choice and scheduling, and access to teaching resources” (p. 12).

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One of Sophie’s students, Jake, wants to interview her about her research and teaching for a general education assignment. They meet on Zoom. He asks her about her field of study, and she explains that she works in creative writing and literary studies, especially narrative studies. He asks how easy or hard her students find her courses.

Sophie responds: “It’s a useful thing for students to have a strong grasp of because when we’re consuming different kinds of media, narratives are being constructed even in social media posts or advertisements. In our course, we talk about the body, how different ideas about bodies are communicated to us through books or social media or representations on TV or the magazines we read, and how those influence the narratives we create about ourselves. Do we create a narrative which is saying, *Oh, I’m insufficient* or *There’s something wrong about my body*, or *something wrong with me*? I don’t want that kind of toxicity for my students.

"We're aware that at the moment, it's election season. All kinds of narratives have been aimed at us to get us to vote a certain way. Students who have an awareness of language in all its different forms—they can recognize how that seeks to change the way we think, and that's good no matter your political affiliations.

"I often find that students are very good at analyzing the visual stuff because many of you have grown up to be quite sophisticated readers of film or representations in computer games, the kinds of media that young people embrace a lot. But sometimes, we feel the effects of a text and we're not absolutely aware of how that happened. I love getting students to analyze texts, like your film review, for example."

Jake: "Yeah!"

Sophie: "Looking at a particular scene makes you think beyond generalities about how even a one-minute scene in a film is doing so much work to influence what you feel and think. There might be emotive music playing, and perhaps you didn't even register that consciously except somewhere in your brain, you felt, *Oh, this is emotional*. To break it down and look at it carefully—that can be powerful for students."

Jake: "Oh, I feel that. I don't think I paid attention to this when I was younger, but I notice it now. It's amazing to notice all the multimodal techniques being used. But what big problems does your research and teaching explore?"

Sophie: "I'm particularly interested in looking at representations of violence, and what those scenes or those narratives are doing, what kinds of messages they're sending, and how it helps us to think about real violence in our society. So take for example the outcry around *Game of Thrones* and the scene where Sansa experiences sexual violence—there was huge outcry around that moment. Political movements of the time like #MeToo were responding to the writers of *Game of Thrones* in real time, and the controversy changed the way in which shows are made. *House of the Dragon*, the prequel of *Game of Thrones*, is far more careful in its representation of women and violence against them, and I find it very fruitful to study moments where narratives about violence in culture and fiction intersect."

Jake: "How does this link up with our course?"

Sophie: "Well, there are many ethical questions we can ask. There's a lot to think about regarding how bodies are represented. And that might include violence against bodies, whether that's physical violence or if we're thinking about the violent impact of certain toxic ideals on people's mental health. I'm also thinking about diverse perspectives. When we were looking at the Instagram accounts of writers and creators related to the body, I was quite careful to try and include all kinds of unexpected viewpoints. So we looked at the artist, Esther Calixte-Bea, and her artworks and arguments about being a body hair activist. I want my students to encounter unconventional points of view and attitudes, to be able to decipher the making of meaning and representations, and to have space to work out what they think for themselves. That is a real joy to me, and it is one of the reasons I love my work."

## The Golden Notebook

The fragments I assemble here are held together in this article by the golden notebook, which connects the strands. What might we amass from these pieces? From the black notebook, we learn about lived experiences such as misogyny and racism within the educational system and environment which offer obstacles for an academic career. The yellow notebook describes the untenable position (often of women) in dealing with the two-body problem. The red notebook outlines departmental politics and prejudice against nontenured faculty, as well as the refusal to face the reality of a shrinking academic pool of tenure-track jobs. The blue notebook describes how despite experiencing difficult work conditions, precarity, bias, and contempt, adjunct professors love their work as teachers, and they give up their spare time without pay to mentor and guide their students. Finally, there is Sophie's story, as she travels a long way from her working-class-family origin in Wales to becoming a successful teacher, writer, and editor.

Being an adjunct is certainly difficult. But I also emphasize that among colleagues I have met in my career, many have been sympathetic, ready to help, and desirous to change the system, including many department chairs who improve conditions for adjuncts in universities where I have worked. I am grateful for the support I have received.

In writing this account, I tried to outline an honest, realistic portrait of adjunct life. Despite the problems faced, including now being a divorced, single mother relying on precarious work, I maintain my optimism, I love my teaching, and I enjoy working with students. I want to extend my thanks to all those who have and continue to encourage me.

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