



## Jon Lewis Oral History Interview, May 4, 2017

### Title

“The Godfather of Film Studies at OSU”

### Date

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### Location

Valley Library, Oregon State University.

### Summary

In the interview, Lewis describes his family background and upbringing on Long Island, his early education, and the development of his scholarly interests in literature and film studies. Of particular note are Lewis' recollections of his awakening to cinema while an undergraduate at Hobart College in the mid-1970s. From there, Lewis comments on his doctoral candidacy at UCLA, recalling his memories of the physical transition to southern California as well as the specifics of his studies in UCLA's new Film Studies department.

Next, Lewis recounts the circumstances by which he came to accept a faculty position at Oregon State University. He then discusses his memories of the state of the English department in the early 1980s; his leadership of the International Film Series and friendships with Paul Turner and Peter Copek; and his building a Film Studies curriculum at OSU from scratch.

The session then turns its attention to Lewis' research, touching on each of the books that he has written as well as his personal forays into film production. A major topic of conversation is Lewis' long-standing interest in the life and work of Francis Ford Coppola, including a well-received book that Lewis wrote on *The Godfather*. Lewis likewise traces the origins and authoring of several other notable works including *Hollywood v. Hard-Core* (2000) and a new text, *Hard-Boiled Hollywood: Crime and Punishment in Post-War Los Angeles*.

The interview concludes with Lewis' thoughts on his work habits and productivity; his perspective on change within OSU's College of Liberal Arts; and his sense of OSU's direction as it looks toward its 150th birthday.

### Interviewee

Jon Lewis

### Interviewer

Chris Petersen

### Website

<http://scarc.library.oregonstate.edu/oh150/lewis/>

## Transcript

**Chris Petersen:** Today is May 4, 2017. We are in the Valley Library with Jon Lewis, Distinguished Professor of Film Studies at OSU. We'll talk a lot about your career here at OSU and your research and writing. But I'd like to begin at the beginning and develop a bit of a biographical sketch. I'll ask you first—where were you born?

**Jon Lewis:** I was born in New Hyde Park, New York. I grew up on Long Island. My dad was a World War II vet and like a lot of WWII vets, he got a GI mortgage loan and moved out of Manhattan to Long Island about two years before I was born they moved out there.

**CP:** Can you tell me about the Long Island boyhood?

**JL:** It's pretty boring. It was suburban New York. I didn't go to New York City much because my dad worked there and the thought of going back on a weekend with the commuting was unthinkable. I went to a public high school and am public school alumni. I played baseball. I played tennis. It was pretty typical suburban life.

**CP:** What was your father's line of work?

**JL:** He worked his way up from being a foreman in a warehouse. He was working class. My sister and I are the first generation to go to college in our family. He was a foreman for this warehouse, and he was really good at math. He didn't have a college education, but he was really good at math, and so he eventually became the controller of the account for the company. Then the company went under because it was run by two brothers, and one brother cheated the other and ran away with all the money. My dad was in his 50s and out of a job because there was no company, and the Teamsters hired him because he had been a foreman. He had been management but he was always fair to the workers in the warehouse who were all Teamsters that they reached out and gave him a job—when you are in your 50s it's hard to start over again. Then he was an accountant for the Teamsters.

That was a totally different life because he would go to work sites to make sure that they were appropriately depositing money into the Teamster account. You have got to be out of your mind to be stealing money from the Teamster accounts [laughs] because—I don't think this is actionable to be talking about this—the Teamsters are a tough bunch, let's just leave it at that and you just don't mess with them. My dad was the kind face that arrived first, and then if he came back not satisfied then I have a feeling other people show up. That's what he did until he retired. My mother was a secretary briefly at Hofstra College and then for a Jewish Temple.

**CP:** You mentioned sports. Were there other particular things that you were interested in as a boy particularly?

**JL:** Not really. I was really just interested in sports. I learned how to do math by doing baseball calculations. I played baseball until I was about fourteen, competitively. Things are different now with kids. They have all these clubs and stuff. But I played little league, and then it sort-of stops when you're fourteen. Then I took up tennis, and I played tennis through high school and into college. I've since given up tennis—I'm going to be sixty-two next week—to play soccer, so I play soccer all the time. So that's my new sport. I've always been into sports. [Looks over shoulder] We have a bug in here.

**CP:** [Chuckles] What was school like for you?

**JL:** I was really good at school even though I didn't—it was awfully easy for me. I found public school really easy. [Motions over to the side] Should we get rid of this guy? [Referring to bug] Or, are we happy with him?

[Recording stops and restarts].

**CP:** Alright, we got rid of our bug.

**JL:** Okay, where were we, though?

**CP:** We were talking about school.

**JL:** Oh yeah. I just wonder, because you're talking to a lot of professors I wonder maybe they knew they were going to be academics early on. I didn't because my parents didn't even go to college. For my dad and mom the big thing with them was that my sister and I would get to college because they didn't get to. I always knew I was going to go to college what that even meant I had no idea. I didn't know anybody who had been to college, so I just didn't know.

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So I was a good student. I probably could have been a better student if I actually applied myself, but I just found school so easy that I didn't do much. I really didn't do much work until my junior year of college, and then I happened upon a movie screening. I was majoring in English—you couldn't major in film in those days pretty much anywhere except NYU and UCLA. [At Hobart College] there was no film major. So I was majoring in English and I imagined myself to be a future novelist, I think. I walked into a movie screening on a wintery night - I went to college in upstate New York. Really to get out of the snow I went into see a movie that a friend of mine was projecting and it was *Out of the Past*, a film I had never heard of. I was just blown away. I also had an epiphany: I absolutely understood what I was looking at in a way that I never felt with literature. I was doing fine. I probably could have been a literature professor if that is the direction I went in. But this I absolutely got. And finished college. I got an MFA in Creative Writing [at State University of New York at Buffalo].

**CP:** Let's back up a little bit. I'm interested in how did you arrive at lit in the first place?

**JL:** I don't know. I was really good at math, so I probably should have been a math major. I did better on the SATs and the GREs in math than verbal. I don't know. I just didn't think I wanted to be a scientist. Because I didn't know what you could be with these degrees because I didn't know anybody who had been to college. I sort of arrived there. I figured, well, I don't want to be a scientists and I don't want to be a doctor really, so I guess I'll be a college teacher or even a high school teacher.

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That was really what I was thinking—that I'd get my BA and I'd teach English in high school. I had been to high school so I knew what high school teachers did.

**CP:** And there was no special interest in film prior to this moment?

**JL:** Not really. I went to the movies like anybody else. But not really. I wasn't a big film-goer. It was not one of these things where as a kid I always had a camera. You would never have looked at, what is it: see the child at seven and I'll show you the man, right, you know. That was definitely not me.

**CP:** So this was your junior year as an undergraduate, and the remainder of your undergraduate experience was it following this interest in film? Because this was a very rich time for film in America.

**JL:** It was. I was very lucky. It's good you point that out. I went to college in 1973, a year after *The Godfather*, which revolutionizes cinema. If you look at from when I was going to movies on my own -picking my own movies as opposed to going to movies with my parents - *The Graduate*, *Bonnie & Clyde*, *MASH*, *The French Connection*, *The Godfather* it's a really great time. Of all the times to say you know I think I'd like to study movies, it was a pretty fabulous moment. One way of looking at it is that I graduated high school in time for *The Godfather*, and my first grad school experience was in time for *Apocalypse Now*. So I sort of frame the '70s, the glorious moment of American cinema.

**CP:** Which is the roots of a future book. We'll get to that later.

**JL:** Well, indeed, yes.

**CP:** So you have this moment as an undergraduate, but it's not necessarily permeated your ambitions at this point, but you do go to graduate school. How did you decide to do that?

**JL:** Well, there are two stories. One is that I didn't study more film because there were no more film classes. It wasn't even a film class. It was an American Studies class, and it was on—I don't even know the theme because I wasn't in the

class. As I think back on it now I don't even know what the class was on. But this movie was pretty powerful, and I came to it absolutely cold—knowing nothing about film noir, knowing nothing about '40s America or '40s American cinema, and it just had a really profound effect on me. But there was no Film Studies, you know? So I sort of left it at that. I went to grad school because I was thinking I would get my BA and I'd be a high school teacher. I had a literature professor named Grant Holly at Hobart College in Upstate New York, and he was my advisor from my very first day I arrived. It's a small school, so you have relationships with professors that are kind-of built into the program. The idea is that he would be with me for four years as my advisor. It was a serious thing. It was not just telling you what classes to take. It was more comprehensive than that. One day he asked, "What are you doing?" And I said, "Well I'm getting my accreditation" - in New York you could graduate with a BA and at the same time compete your accreditation so you could basically walk into a school and teach without an MA. I thought that seemed the most practical thing to do. My parents didn't have much money, so when I got out of college I pretty much had to have a plan. He said, "You don't want to do that." And I said, "What do you mean I don't want to do that?" He says, "You don't want do that," as in you can do better. He said, "You should be a college professor, and with your skills," and whatever else. He said, "You should go on and get a Ph.D." I probably rolled my eyes because I could just imagine telling my father: "Well I'm just going to stay in college. I'm going to go to grad school." He would have had no idea what that meant either.

Then I went and got an MFA in Creative Writing because I did like writing, and I had this dream that I was going to be a novelist. I had a professor there. It is interesting because these off-hand things—I'm very careful what I say to students because of this—this offhand thing that a professor said to me. He said, "Well your writing is—" You know, I had gotten my MFA so my writing was certainly acceptable—he said, "You know, you're writing's just technical. Nothing ever happens in anything you write." He said, "The problem is nothing's ever happened to you." I was twenty-three years old. I had my MA and I was 23 years old, and he said "nothing's ever happened to you." Which was right. And he said, "You need to move to New York and have bad shit happen to you." Those were his exact words. But I didn't want to go to New York and have bad shit happen to me. I lived in New York, and we're talking New York in the late '70s, which was absolutely a scary place. I just didn't want to go there. I got what he meant: no one died; no one broke my heart; I didn't have any kind of tremendous disappointment; I had never been beaten up. I didn't have anything. So I get what he was saying.

Then random things: this guy from USC literature program came recruiting for Ph.D. students. My graduate program was very well-respected, so they were trying to get people to change schools, not realizing I was creative writing I got a literature guy, and he was sort of selling the USC program. He said, "You come out here and we'll give you a GTAship and you won't pay for thing. We're a great school, and it's in LA and it's sunny every day." All I could think of was that by then I realized that the literature BA maybe wasn't me at all. It had been really hard to fake it. I said to him, "I don't know. I'm flattered by the offer, but I don't know if I want to do two languages, and pre-1800." I said, "Everything I read is post twentieth century or twentieth century." And he said, "Well, what do you like?" And I said, "Movies." And he said, "Well you do know you can get a Ph.D. in movies?" And it was that sentence: "You *do* know..." The answer was, no, I *did not* know. And he said, "Yeah, there's a handful of programs in the country that do it, including ours." At time USC's program was kind of new, but UCLA's was the heavyweight. So stupidly, naively, I applied to one place: UCLA. Got in: one of three people in the nation outside of their own MA to get in, and here I am.

**CP:** Well—

**JL:** I mean, that's a long narrative. But that's my life story.

**CP:** Big transition from Hobart College and SUNY—Buffalo to Los Angeles. Tell me first about that physical transition to Southern California.

**JL:** My parents think I did that just to get three thousand miles between us, which is not true. I had never been to Los Angeles. I arrived with a suitcase to go to grad school never having been to LA, not having any preparation, never having been to campus, for example. Not knowing that the differences between USC and UCLA are pretty profound. I didn't know any of these things. I just sort of landed there.

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And it was big, but you would just—grad school is grad school. I tell my students now, you really just—just get into a really good grad school and it doesn't really matter where, geographically, it is. If they are really good in the field that you are studying then you're fine. Because it's all about your grad cohort. The Ph.D. students at UCLA in the three years total I was there were fantastic. My closest friends probably five or six of them are from that cohort. That made the transition easy because you just sort of pop down. UCLA, in those days, took care of you. This is something sort of time capsule-ish, but there was no tuition at UCLA in 1979. There was a registration fee. And the registration fee for in-state, which I became after just one year - and not really being a resident, just being a student - was \$750 a year. Needless to say UCLA does not cost \$750 in-state anymore. So it wasn't even that. They picked it up. They pick up everything. It was a great experience, and I just loved Los Angeles as a grad student and loved UCLA, and my experience there was fantastic. I know grad students are supposed to be, I don't know, in despair all the time. But I'm way too practical for that. Maybe I'm way too working class for that. I couldn't believe what they were paying me to do. It just seemed too good to be true, and I didn't want anyone to be aware that the gig was that good, because I was too afraid they'd change it. So I just said, okay fine, this is great.

**CP:** I'm especially interested in your perspective on what it means to go from an enthusiast of movies, which I gather you were when you were in your MFA program, into a scholar of movies. You've actually written a book about this. Can you talk about that?

**JL:** I actually took film classes at Buffalo, partly because I could and partly because here was finally a school that had a considerable program in those days. There were screenings everywhere on campus. It was just so fantastic. And I went to Buffalo I didn't really know anybody and I was in a pretty intense program. But it was really small, so I had a lot of time on my hands in a way—there is a limit to how much time you can actually read and write. They published a booklet that had screening times for every class on campus. I picked up the booklet the first day of every term, and I saw everything. Five nights a week I was at screenings, free screenings. I didn't care if it was a French class or, I don't know, a social work class. I didn't care. I saw everything, and that was pretty fantastic. So I don't know if I became a scholar necessarily at that moment, but I was devoted in a way that not even an enthusiast would be, because I was very organized about how I went about it. And I took film class. I took film classes in some ways as a hedge. The literature classes were really challenging, which I didn't mind, but they also were so reading intensive I was concerned that I wouldn't have time to write because the writing classes had quite a lot of reading in them too. I don't think you can be a writer unless you read. So I took these film classes and they were great, and I got a lot of encouragement. Maybe whatever instincts I had about film were apparent and I think, well I know, that I was getting more attention than their own students were getting. I was this kind of outlier from another program, and they seemed to like my work better than their own students. So I was getting this encouragement that was—in the meantime somebody's telling me to go to New York and get beat up but [smiles and shakes head]—okay. It was not that hard a choice.

Then I wrote a paper in a class as a master's student, and the professor sort of off-hand said, "This is really good. You should get it published." I didn't realize at the time that was an outrageous compliment. I get students all the time saying, "Well, should I submit this somewhere?" and having to politely say, "No, just don't even bother, you don't want this in print—take my word for it." I just sent it off, and it got published right away like [finger snap]. The first place I sent it picked it up, and so when I applied to UCLA I had, you know they say a writing sample. Most people send the term paper, and I sent an offprint.

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So I probably looked more heavyweight than I was. That maybe marks when I became scholar because I had written in a ten-week class I had written a paper that got picked up by *Quarterly Review of Film Studies*, which a big, a top five journal at the time. Maybe that was the sign. But I didn't know—again, I became a college professor without knowing how to be a college professor.

**CP:** But you were acquiring a toolkit at UCLA, I have to assume?

**JL:** Yeah—it was less professionalized than it is now. When we interview students now, recent Ph.D.s, for jobs, they are all so polished, and they understand the industry and what it means to be a college professor, and I had no idea. But it was a great education, and it was a good combination—the GTA gig was a lot of work. You were thrown into a classroom, and you basically had your own class. The material was set up by the supervising professor who would come and lecture

for a couple of hours a week and show the films, and then you'd have these breakoff sections that would meet once or twice a week. That was completely your gig. So it was sort of trial by fire. So I think the toolkit is you either you discover you don't have it, or you do, or you develop it. It wasn't so much that *they* developed it because they put you in a situation where you pretty much had to sink or swim.

**CP:** Was teaching something that came naturally to you?

**JL:** I think so. I think my mother, who is still alive, says that I always wanted to be a writer, which I think, from my sense of myself, is that's true too. I wrote a play in second grade for my class that they performed, and I always sort of wrote on my own. Most kids I don't think do that. In a way that is kind of what I do now—I'm kind of a writer. The teaching part, it's hard to describe. I'm sixty-two now, almost, so tail-end of the career, and I know a lot of people who retired because they're just finally exhausted from teaching, and I'm not at all. That's the last reason why I'd quit or retire. I think I discovered in the doing of it that I like teaching.

**CP:** Your dissertation topic was different from anybody else I've interviewed for this project, that's for sure: *The Comedy Films of Marilyn Monroe and Jerry Lewis*. [ : *A Narratological Study and An Introduction to the Social/Ideological Project*]

**JL:** I was smart enough never to publish my dissertation. In those days you didn't. Now you pretty much have to, or try to. But in those days it was something you didn't publish. It was almost seen as kind of unseemly to do it. I was asked to write something for the Director's Guild of America, a kind of history of the Director's Guild. Which I in retrospect think would have been a really interesting topic. But it was a little hard to pin everybody down because I would have to interview a lot of people. That was really hard in Hollywood because people are not dependable. So I was a little leery of the project initially. Then a few of my professors at UCLA were saying that the topic maybe feels a bit safe. So my response to, "Well that feels a bit safe," is the most ridiculous topic ever, which I understand rather shocked the English Department here at Oregon State University in 1982 when I was interviewed, which was: "Holy crap... this guy... we have no frame of reference for what this guy's doing." Now I think in retrospect that probably worked to my advantage.

**CP:** Well that is a nice segue. You did spend a year at your alma mater, it looks like, in between [your time at UCLA and OSU].

**JL:** It was great. I had a great experience at Hobart and a lot of affection for the place. I grew up there in a lot of ways. I was still in touch with a few of the professors in the English department there.

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UCLA would have supported me for that one more year after: so two years of coursework, I passed my comps, I passed my proposal for the dissertation on Jerry Lewis and Marilyn Monroe, and then I could either stay at UCLA and basically do what I was doing, be a GTA for another year. I was corresponding with people at Hobart and they said well, this woman who teaches American Literature is going to take a year off. It was a sabbatical tied to the fact that she was having a baby. So she was going to take the full year off and she wasn't going to be around. It was sort of, "Why don't you come in?" So I was a visiting instructor, as I think they call it. I didn't have my dissertation done yet, so they couldn't hire me as a professor. It was a great experience. It was really nice that they invited me back, and it was more money than I would've gotten in LA. Plus what was nice is that - I don't know if you've ever been to upstate New York when November hits and you're inside until April. It was good way—it's harder to write in LA where it's sunny everyday than when you're sort of stuck in the snow. So discipline is maybe a touch easier. I wrote my dissertation in about nine months there. Then I came here.

**CP:** So you entered the job market, and OSU is offering a job. Is it a job in Film Studies?

**JL:** Kind of [chuckles]. I interviewed at the MLA [Modern Language Association conference], and I had a few prospects. OSU has—it has been our habit for the English Department that we interview at MLA which was in December, now it is in early January. But it was in December so right after Christmas, the weekend after Christmas. They had me out there, it was barely after New Years for the campus interview where they had three or four people on campus. Then they had an offer by January 15th and the other schools probably hadn't even met to talk about MLA yet. So I was 27 and somebody's

offering me a real job, and nobody else *is* in the next reasonable amount of time. Even if the other places would've hired me eventually, they hadn't even done campus interviews yet. I had never been to Oregon. This is like a trend [laughs]. I had no dying desire to come to Oregon. Oregon wasn't cool like it is now. In '83 no one knows anything. I knew that OSU had a good basketball team. I knew William Stafford, the poet, was from Oregon who was a kind of anti-war poet that I was really fond of, and I knew it rained. Those were the three things I knew, otherwise nothing. I mean, how could you turn down a job when it's an actual job on the off chance that one of the other things would pan out? I mean you'd be crazy. Then Hobart matched it. They said, "Okay, we'll keep you. We'll match it." But it wasn't that tough a decision because I went to school there and I felt like, "god you know I can't just live in the same place forever," which now I've done of course. I thought, "I don't want to do that. Go to OSU and see what it's like, and if you don't like it you can move on."

**CP:** What was the state of the English Department at the time you arrived?

**JL:** Oh yeah, that question. It was really traditional, and I was definitely not what the doctor ordered for a lot of people in the department, I'm sure. When I interviewed on campus, so that was with everybody in the department, it was a very mixed vibe. For one thing I was able to—I wasn't as savvy as our candidates are now. But I could read a room, and I could definitely see people sort-of rolling their eyes and asking "What are we doing? We can't hire this Hollywood guy," because they probably thought of me as a Hollywood guy. It would be like telling a Joyce scholar that he has to share an office with a Hollywood producer. I definitely got that. I could also feel who in the department really felt that I was what they needed—an actual film person as opposed to a literature person who could also teach film. That's the direction they went. I wasn't privy to the liberations that led to my hire.

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But I was hired pretty quickly so it's pretty safe to say there was a meeting and they decided on me. But from the minute I got here everyone was great. I've got great colleagues. You don't stay in a place thirty-three years if you don't have great colleagues. I'm not just saying this for the camera or for the program that you're putting together. I've had a uniquely fantastic experiences as a college professor here. I know lots of college professors in other places, and it's not—[shakes head]: We socialize. We hang out. There's a really friendly vibe that existed right away so that even though at my presentation I not only figured out okay, I'll have some supporters and some not supporters; not everybody is going to want me over a different candidate because the other candidates are going to be great too. I realized that. I got the sense that they just didn't want anything to do with me. You know, like I don't want this stuff coming here. But the minute I got hired and arrived everybody was great. In retrospect, deeper into my career I became friendly with the people in the room I knew were thinking, "Okay we're going to hell in a handbasket here if we hire this guy," and then we became great friends. And nobody said "Oh, don't teach film." Now, when I got here there was no film so I had to invent a curriculum, and that was interesting. There were two classes: there was "Film Comedy" and "Film Tragedy," the Aristotelian division of genre. I guess Film Comedy makes sense as a title, but Film Tragedy is kind of silly. So I, mostly around myself, because I was the only person teaching it, built a curriculum of sorts.

**CP:** Well, we'll get back to that here in a second. I'm very interested to hear you talk about the International Film Series. This was something that was very near and dear to a lot of people, myself included, for a long time here, and you were in charge of it for a long time.

**JL:** Yeah, that was a labor of love. I'm glad to hear that, and I didn't know you had been here that long. When I got hired Peter Copek was running it, and he was doing a lot of other things, including putting together the Center for the Humanities and was looking for someone to take that task off his hands. So I arrived here and my service component [motions air quotes] to my position was to run a film series. That was pretty fun. We had a budget. We ran four showings every weekend, usually two films, sometimes one if it was a popular film we thought a lot of people would come to. It was like programming an art theater. I know how to program an art theater too because I've done that since. It really was like a full-time programmer's job as my tiny little service component of my career. It was a lot of work, and the screenings were stressful because the equipment wasn't always working. And we had a lot of student workers, so a lot of moving parts. We had actual prints, 16 mm prints, showing up—so none of this was like satellite delivery or DVDs. These were big movie prints in giant metal canisters that had to arrive when they said they would arrive, and often they were arriving from another university that was doing the same thing we were doing. I look back on it and it was a crazy thing to actually be doing while I'm trying to start my career as an academic.

The flip side was it was so fun and so rewarding because for people, like yourself, it was really one of the big things to do in Corvallis on weekends in the '80s. Even after VHS came in, so you're talking mid-'80s to late '80s and DVDs probably a little after that, people still came to those screenings. Even if it was out in VHS they came to the screenings just because it was what they had been doing for a long time. So that was a labor of love. I finally stopped doing it partly because the A/V people were getting—you know, it was just such work for them too, and it wasn't even an academic program. So they were trying to figure out a way not to do it. I don't blame them. In retrospect at the time I blamed them. And then one of my former students, Paul Turner, came to me and said, "What if I open an art theater?"

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I said, "Well, it'd be great. I doubt you're going to make any money." He had already owned a theater in Lebanon called The Kuhn. It didn't show art films. It showed what I call "sub runs," so popular movies late in their run for a cheap price. He wanted to do something more interesting than that. He wanted to get out of Lebanon, apparently, as well and was turned on by some of things—I hope he was turned on by some of the things we did in class because he had taken some classes with me. And I said, "Yeah let's do it." I didn't realize "let's do it" meant he was going to build the whole darn thing. Then somebody had to get the movies in. So I for a couple of years as truly a labor of love, again, I worked with theatrical programmers - crazy people - to get movies in for the first couple years of the Avalon Theater. That meant that the International Film Series could sort of go quietly to the night, and then the Avalon was popular. Now it's the Darkside and has three screenings. He has a programmer he pays now, so I don't do that for him anymore. But the International Film Series; I haven't thought of that in a while. That was a fun thing to do, and I think people who have been around for a while look back on it pretty fondly. I think it was a good thing.

**CP:** Paul Turner is a unique individual. We interviewed him for this project. I asked him what he majored in, and he said "Jon Lewis."

**JL:** Oh really? [chuckles] I'll tell you about, boy—first of all he's a great friend now. [Back then] he shows up for my class in his leather jacket and his leather pants to, what looks like, ride off on a motorcycle. He's probably 15 years older than anybody else in the room except me. He is gruff and unpolished but clearly really smart. He knows stuff about the movie industry that you could only know because you're in the business. And one day he invited me to The Kuhn, and I went to The Kuhn with my boys, Guy and Adam, my two sons, and they were little then; they're all grown and big now. We went down there, and Paul had set up something in the projection booth. This is your old-fashioned 35 mm movie pallets. He had set up something in the projection room with a board and then two different-sized telephone books that they would sit on so they could see over the window. They had a big tub of popcorn that was bigger than them and these giant pops. They were VIPs. They would walk into the theater and everyone would know who they were. They'd go straight into the projection room. It was, I think, a pretty cool moment if you're like, what, 8 years old, 6 years old, and you get to walk into the theater like you own it. They would watch and we would hang out and talk and we became fast friends.

**CP:** I'm interested as well in your memories of Peter Copek. He occupied an interesting niche in this place. He basically was the Center for the Humanities for quite a long time, and then he died.

**JL:** Yes—suddenly and young. Well, I loved the man. What else can I say? Of all the people in the room, the room I was talking about when I interviewed, Peter was clearly the one who was adamant about we have to hire a film person. We can't hire a literature person who also teaches film to do this right and to do this in a way that we can respect ourselves in the morning, so to speak. We have to hire Jon Lewis. It was clear when I got here, because he took me around and he really wanted me to come. That was unmistakable, and that was a big part of me wanting to come here. I was smart enough to know that if there were people who want you that's a good situation, you know? When he started, it was called the Humanities Development and Grant. It wasn't even called the Humanities Center yet because there was no building. The very first set of release time grants; I was happy to say I was one of them. So I benefited from his hard work kind of right off the bat. It's kind too bad you can't interview him because he came here when it was a very different place, when Corvallis was a very different place and OSU was a very different place.

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It became a different place because of Peter, in part because of what he did with the Center.

**CP:** Sure. Let's talk about building the curriculum. There were two classes before you came here, and there have been plenty of new ones since then. Tell me about building the program.

**JL:** Well at first I just figured I'd teach whatever I wanted because it was just me, so who's to say? I did that for a couple of years and then decided that wasn't—[shakes head]. I think I became more and more a film historian when I got here. I was only 27 years old so I was hardly the finished article, so to speak. I was sort of stabbing in the dark at different kinds of writing about film. And the term "Cultural Studies," which is clearly now what you would say I was doing, wasn't really a term that anyone used or anybody would've understood. So I just seemed to be doing a kind of ideological criticism of film, which I also didn't think I was doing because that was very theoretical and that wasn't that attractive to me. So it became more and more clear that I was a film historian but not a kind of encyclopedic version of that, which is sort of what film historians were initially. They sort of made the point, okay film's an art form, and then they'd sort of say okay these are the important film makers and films. That didn't interest me either, so I was sort of at the early stages of talking about film history as a kind of larger, cultural enterprise. I was—is that going to be okay? [External conversational noise].

**CP:** That's fine.

**JL:** Okay. As a larger cultural enterprise—I just thought I can only be one person and I can only teach six or seven classes a year - in those days it was six or seven and now it's five or six - and I can only do so much, so I should do one thing right. So I decided to do film history. I created a film history sequence that pretty much is the same. I don't show the same films, I don't teach the same books, and I don't necessarily say the same things but it's the same basic argument. That if an OSU student comes in and only takes one thing, that only one film class, then they should have some film literacy. They should understand how films operate in a kind of cultural history. It was a three-part, because there were three terms, so it fit nicely—1895-1941: the beginnings of cinema to the American entrance into World War II; then 1942-1967: the war era and then postwar and then transition; and then '68 was the obvious place because of the rating system and movies change fundamentally, so '68 to the present. At first it was just '68 to like '85. Now it's 1968-2017. We may need a fourth term at this point.

**CP:** Can you talk about some of the particulars of teaching with film. It's a very specific form of pedagogy that most professors don't necessarily have at hand. Especially back then when you actually had to acquire film.

**JL:** Well you couldn't show clips in class. Unless you had the 16 mm print. There was no VHS. VHS comes in probably mid-'80s and OSU probably doesn't—I don't remember having access to the kind of sophisticated A/V that we have now or any A/V really until the '90s. So the first ten years of me teaching we would rent a 16 mm print, and we would show it on a screening in the evening, usually two films a week; I'm a believer that you can't take a movie class and not see a lot of movies. Those would be shipped in. Again, it was a pain in neck. These big films come in, and it's the only way to show film. So you had that kind of logistical component to teaching, which you don't have anymore. You couldn't show clips, so you'd really have to be descriptive. Students couldn't stop and start it like they do now, they can't watch it again just simply by going to Netflix or Amazon Prime. So it was different. When I got the ability to show clips from VHS you still had to fast forward and rewind. I mean it sounds silly now, but it's a linear medium.

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So if it's twenty minutes in you'd have to fast forward [chuckles]. You could leave the tape on the spot you wanted, but if you wanted more than one clip that didn't help you much. There was that. I have gone through that and now with DVD and Blu-ray it's a little easier.

**CP:** Let's talk about your research. I was interested to look through your vitae and see that in those early years, as you mentioned, you were kind of bounced a little bit in terms of your topics that you were writing about, but you also were making films back then.

**JL:** Oh yeah, yeah. There was definitely a mixed reception to that. I had come out of UCLA at a time when the production faculty - it was called Critical Studies Faculty, so criticism, history, theory faculty - didn't speak to each other. This was kind of a typical divide in film schools that still exists to an extent, and it was really dramatic then. I was one of the few who was interested in both. And there was no way to get my Ph.D. in filmmaking. No such program exists. But

I still wanted to make movies, and I still at that time wanted to write movies. I was already working in the industry when I was in LA. I was reading scripts for a living: \$25 a script, which in 1979 to 1983 I could read two or three a day, so it definitely supplemented my income living in an expensive city. I got a kind of sense of what it would be like working for a story department and a studio, at least in that era, and then I worked for a marketing company: Lieberman Research West. So I had a sense of two different industry jobs.

Plus I was making these sort of low-budget videos because I was interested in production. So I don't know. Maybe in retrospect I was hedging my bet, thinking, "If this professor thing doesn't work out I could always go back to Hollywood, and if I go back to Hollywood I'm going to need a reel; I'm going to need to show them something." Maybe I was thinking that. But no one ever said the words, "Okay well this will count towards tenure." Those words were never spoken. I understood what that meant: that they didn't. So that was very much me. Maybe it's a kind of working class thing. You know I just wanted to, you know what if this professor thing didn't work out. I didn't want to be out of work so I had another career lined up in case this one didn't work out as well as it has. I shot a couple of videos: one actually here that got a bit of play. I showed it at some really nice film festivals. I actually got shown around, and it should've counted. [chuckles] Today it probably would. But in those days it was: it's enough we've hired you. The last thing they wanted to do—they wanted scholarship and fortunately I did that too.

**CP:** On that note, tell me about writing your first book: *The Road to Romance and Ruin: Teen Films and Youth Culture*.

**JL:** This is, by the way, kind of fun because it is very flattering to talk about your own career because I don't often think about these stories.

It was straight out of a movie. I was at a conference and my friend Richard deCordova who died very young, sadly, who taught at DePaul. We were in Iowa at a conference in Iowa, and we drove from Iowa City to Chicago with two other guys who I didn't know at all: Dana Polan and David Rodowick. They are really now quite famous in film studies, and they are a little older than me so they were already more established than me. We're sitting in the car, and I was the one person who didn't know everybody. Everyone else knew everyone else. I just knew the driver, and I didn't know the two other guys because he was one of my cohort at UCLA. The conversation went the way of what are you working on? I took it not as a kind of casual question but as a kind of okay, I'll pitch my book. I probably gave a twenty-minute pitch. Once they got past how ridiculous what I was doing was they were really helpful, and they were a little ahead of me so they knew what I needed to do to make it a book. So in a four-hour drive, five-hour drive, from Iowa City to Chicago I kind-of wrote my précis for my book.

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Then one of those guys, Dana Polan, who is one of my close friends still, and - well David is too, but Dan and I are really close. He told Bill Germano, who is the editor of Routledge, which was the hot press—a press I would never have sent my stuff to because I thought they'd never publish me. He basically said [to Bill]: "I heard a pitch in the car and you've got to hear this." So he met me for a drink the following year at the conference, and I probably said what I said in the car but over a drink, so however long it takes to drink. And I signed a contract on a napkin [chuckles]. It was straight out of a movie. He just wrote it out, and he said, "I'll send you something real in the future but I want your book." I was like, "Great." So there's that. I've never written on spec since. It's an amazing story. I've never written a word book-wise without a contract, not a single word.

**CP:** Well three years later came the Francis Ford Coppola book, and this is a figure of intense interest for you.

**JL:** That came out of actually seeing more from the heart and being hit with a thunderbolt. I had heard the film's terrible, right? I didn't see it in its initial release and actually saw it for the first time in the International Film Festival here because it was the sort of title we showed because it didn't get any play. I saw all four screenings. I was just, why isn't this film being talked about the way it should? It was that question that led to that book, because it was, it turned out, a really big question. It was because the studios had to kill that film. It became a kind of necessary transition moment from auteur Hollywood to what we now call the new Hollywood, blockbuster Hollywood. The big casualty of that transition was Coppola, I discovered, and that's what the book's about.

**CP:** Interesting.

**JL:** But it really was just another kind of lucky accident. I saw the movie just because I was showing it, and it was really like a lightning bolt. I couldn't believe how fantastic this film is, and nobody seems to think so.

**CP:** That train of thinking does seem to segue, though, into the next book, which made a big splash: *Hollywood v. Hard-Core*. [ : *How the Struggle over Censorship Created the modern Film Industry*]

**JL:** I'm a much more mature scholar by the time we get to that book. So I think that *Whom God Wishes to Destroy*, the Coppola book, was, in a way, a kind of lucky accident. I saw the movie. I had written just before that a piece for a Disney book for Eric Smoodin, who I've since coedited two books with. He was doing a book on Disney when no one was really writing about what had happened. It was a history of Disney that wasn't run through the Disney filter. Everything about Disney had been run through the Disney archive. The only way into that Disney archive is you sign something that they get last look. No scholar in their right mind gives them that, so no scholar ever wrote about them. This was sort of the first book that says, "Okay I think we can do this without them." I was asked to do something on the new Disney, that vague, and I sort of locked into a kind of blow-by-blow story from the death of Walt, the death of Roy, and the kind of almost collapse of the company to its resurrection under Eisner and then onto Frank Wells and how these guys who are big Texaco investors end up being the ones who take it over. It was all these shenanigans on Wall Street, and it became the kind of story that I ended up telling in the Coppola book because that very much is almost like an industry procedural. I stumbled upon that because I had done the Disney one. When I realized that, okay, the reason why *One from the Heart* gets killed isn't because it's a bad film. It gets killed because it's part of a larger Hollywood industrial drama, then I endeavored to tell that industrial drama sort of blow-by-blow. So I look at *Whom God Wishes to Destroy* as this kind of procedural.

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It got ridiculous exposure. *Entertainment Weekly* reviewed it and, again, my colleagues are thinking what is going on here? I was getting reviewed all over the place. That was great because it really is an academic book, and it was this sort of new way of looking at the policies and procedures of industrial Hollywood. The *Hollywood v. Hard-Core* is much more of a—like I said I'm a much more mature scholar by the time I get there and I think there's fewer lucky accidents in that book—very straightforward argument built off of a single moment, a single observation that in 1972—I was writing a piece on *The Godfather* for a book, that's the premise of this. I was looking at *Variety* for the year: primary research that was just looking at every issue. The two films that come up over and over again are *The Godfather*, predictably, and *Deep Throat*, not predictably. I was thinking, "Why is *Variety* writing about *Deep Throat* at all?" I was 17 when the film came out so I was a little young to have gotten to have seen it, let alone to even understand its cultural significance. And I was very surprised. Then I saw, oh wow, they are looking at dirty movies like they're real movies here, and that's interesting. So that's where that book began, and then I endeavored to say, "Well, how do we get to that moment where Hollywood's actually maybe going to have to make a *Deep Throat*, they are going to have to make a hardcore movie, or at least there's an economic imperative to try." I thought, "Okay, that's a story nobody's told." That's how I got onto that book. I think that book I know more of what I was doing from the start than the other books before. I know exactly what I'm doing in that book, I think. I go back to the Black List because I insist that the drama of modern censorship really begins with the Black List. [Pause, electronic vibration sound].

**CP:** That's my watch.

**JL:** Okay. Then I go all the way back to the colonial era to talk about the evolution of the First Amendment. I think I have a better sense of what that book's doing. That book got reviewed all over the place also, and favorably, which is nice as well.

**CP:** *American Film: A History*— is that a textbook?

**JL:** Well, sort of, yeah. That's what it's intended to be. Norton is a great publisher, and I'm doing another edition actually this summer, so it's kind of nice. I think in academia people tend to say textbooks sort of *sotto voce*, you know? [chuckles].

**CP:** [Laughs].

**JL:** That's why I don't really want to think of it that way. It's really how I teach history, and I took that challenge. I could have written something that I thought other people would want to use to teach film history, but it's more a kind of compendium of stuff I've learned teaching American film history since 1983. So we're talking when I wrote it over 20 years, now over 30 years, of teaching. So I think of it as more than just a textbook. The irony, of course, of academic publishing is that you make much more money on textbooks than you do on your monographs. So we shouldn't be saying it's so *sotto voce*.

**CP:** Well, 2010 brings *The Godfather* book and that was clearly a huge success. This has been translated to Turkish, Chinese, and French.

**JL:** You know there's a great story behind this. [Looks down at watch] I'm going to check—Oh, we've got plenty of time.

**CP:** Yeah.

**JL:** I've got a Turkish translation, a Mandarin translation. So the Turkish translation and the French translation are out. I have physical books. And the Mandarin one if it's out I don't have it yet, but it's contracted. But it will be written. I doubt I'm going to be able to read the letters. At least the other ones I can read the letters. This is a great story because I was at a conference, which is often where books get talked about, and you talk to publishers and then later you correspond and a book takes shape or it doesn't. By that point I think I'm a kind of logical person to think of for a *Godfather* book as I had published an essay on *The Godfather* in this book on all three *Godfathers*. I had published *Whom God Wishes to Destroy*, so I was probably a reasonable person to ask. So at the conference this young guy, Andrew Luckett was his name, and he said, "Would you—" because they had this Modern Film Series and they didn't have a *Godfather* book yet.

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And he said, "You know we've had this trouble getting our head around it because it's such a big title." And the series is really interesting: There's a *Wizard of Oz* book by Salman Rushdie, a famous novelist. Then there's *The Manchurian Candidate* by Griel Marcus who is one of the editors of *Rolling Stone*. So there are different kinds of high-profile writers writing and then academics covering certain titles. It's definitely an honor to get invited. It's a really nice invite, because it's invite only. I thought, yeah, okay, I could definitely do a *Godfather* book. Then I get back home, and within a week of the conference I get this very strange, very apologetic note from the editor or BFI - British Film Institute - which does these books, saying "I can't believe Andrew did this. We're so embarrassed, but the book's already contracted out." Well, okay [chuckles]. I felt it was an honest mistake. It was already contracted out to Gore Vidal. I thought, "Okay, Gore Vidal over me. I can live with this, you know?" And Gore just never wrote the book, and they got to the point where it was clear where he just simply—it sounded good to him, but the stratospheric numbers he gets for his books are not in play—it's an academic book. So it would have to be a labor of love, and I guess the love wasn't so deep—he never wrote it. So I got to write the *The Godfather* book because Gore didn't want do. And it was a slog. It was an interesting slog. I've been very lucky with editors mostly, but I had really difficult editor there. Not the woman who contracted the book but the person who was reading it for BFI. It was a very strange thing. But it ended up being, really, a better book than the book I originally submitted to them. I guess I could have just packed it in and said "Okay, we're never going to agree," because it felt like we're never going to agree on this. We kind of found common ground somehow, and then the book came out. It's been a really nice success, and I like the book a lot.

**CP:** What was your process in compiling it? I have to believe there was a lot of time spent poring over the scenes over and over again.

**JL:** It's funny because I don't do close reading much in a lot of my writing. I do it in class all the time, and in this series there's always a close reading component. Somehow in the body of the book no matter what you're writing about. A good example is *The Manchurian Candidate*, which I think is one of the best books. He's writing about—it's framed by the JFK assassination and the RFK assassination, and if you know the film *The Manchurian Candidate* it's about a political assassination, so it makes sense. But the book is sort-of kaleidoscopic and all over the place, but still in the middle there's a reading of the movie. So the guy who didn't like my first version - I'm thinking he's a guy and refer to him as such - there are moments when you're a writer, and I'm very good with editors because I get that they're just trying to get the best book out of you and there are ways of asking for that best book that are nice and others that are not so nice—this guy was way on the scale of not so nice, as in snarky, as in condescending. But anyway, he ended up being right about that,

because he said, "Well you have this tiny little bit that's reading the movie but it's the best part of the book." I'm thinking, "That's not the best part of the book—I'm just doing that because it's the formula here and I had to do it." He pushed me into doing much more of that and I'm glad he did. Because I do think that's now the best part of the book [chuckles]. So I guess I'm saying that he's a jerk, but he was right, and maybe I was adult enough to realize that eventually and wrote that. And then, yeah, watching the movie over and over again. Luckily it's a great movie.

**CP:** Have you had occasion to speak with Coppola at all about the stuff you've written about him?

**JL:** No. I've never talked to the man. When I did *Whom God Wishes to Destroy*, I thought maybe that would be fun. He's a UCLA grad, and so I thought that might be a way of making that work. But I had such limited resources. You know you don't have a budget to write these books. So nobody's going to fly me to LA. You know, I had two little kids. It wasn't like I'm getting on a plane to go talk to Francis Coppola. And what are the chances that he would even talk to me? And if he talks to me what are the chances that he's going to tell me anything close to the truth? And there are all these players in the book, and I figured once I talk to him then I'd have to talk to all these other people, because otherwise it's just his version, and the whole book is about everybody having a different version. So I abandoned it then, and I haven't had occasion to revisit it.

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When I did *The Godfather* book it just didn't seem maybe appropriate. There are so many *Godfather* books, including his own, that I don't see that he would be all that interested. He has a new book that just came out from Norton just this month that I just got in the mail so I haven't read yet. So maybe he'll do a tour and I'll get to meet him then. I've never met him. And if I did, what are the odds that he even knows about the books? It's actually probably good that these guys all have big egos. He probably knows everything ever written about him [jokingly smiles]. He'd have nothing to fear from me, because I definitely appreciate his talent.

**CP:** Well two more of your books to talk about—*Essential Cinema: An Introduction to Film Analysis*.

**JL:** That's a pure and simple textbook and not a labor of love, as was *American Film*, because it's not what I teach. It's really a primer. It's how to read a movie. I took the challenge for two reasons: one is I think I teach form and style differently over the years than maybe my colleagues at other schools do. I thought I had a different approach to it, a different way of teaching an intro class, even though I don't teach one. So I thought it would be interesting to write a textbook that did that. [pause] I guess I can say this on camera: also at that point both of my kids were looking at college. College is very expensive, and I don't do anything that makes money except write a textbook. I figured in a list of sins writing a textbook you're not really that into is not a very big sin. I'm not selling my soul to the devil. I'm not writing an exploitative Hollywood romance. I'm not doing anything hurting anybody. I actually like that book for what it is, but it's not something I would hang my hat on.

**CP:** And a brand new one this year—*Hard-Boiled Hollywood: Crime and Punishment in Post-war Los Angeles*, this year.

**JL:** This month [gestures with hand] Well, it's May now, so it came out in April. Yeah my new book. You want me to talk about it? [chuckles].

**CP:** Please do.

**JL:** Well I have no critical distance from it. I started this one actually built off of a class I was teaching. I wanted for a while to write about what I call 'the transition era'—the era between the collapse of the studios and the emergence between 1967 and 1972 of a kind of revitalized American cinema; the auteur era, or whatever you want to call it. There really is this space from about '47 to about 1967 that is kind of under-reported. There are books about noir, there are books about the Black List, and there are books about movie stars of the era, but there really isn't anything that historicizes the era in a way that goes beyond just saying that, "Well, everybody was waiting around for a solution to all our problems: the box office problem, the censorship problem, the TV problem, and the everybody-lives-in-the-suburbs problem." So I was toying with the idea, but I didn't know exactly what to do about it. I was teaching a film noir class, a graduate class, and one of the topics was LA noir and I showed *Sunset Boulevard*, *In a Lonely Place*, which are the two obvious ones to

show, and then a film that doesn't get shown much that I admire a lot called *Big Knife*. I showed all three over probably two weeks right in a row.

Again, something sort of dawned on me that these are movies about Hollywood, and there are two common elements. One is that nobody actually has a place to go to work: there is no studio to go to. Even *Sunset Boulevard*, which has scenes set at Paramount. It's really about the fact that the screenwriter can't—the only time he actually gets invited is as the boyfriend of the fallen star as a gigolo. The only time he gets to go there is as a gigolo and not as a screenwriter. The other times he gets invited there he gets shut down or he gets himself in trouble: he falls in love with his best friend's girlfriend.

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So there's that. In the other two [films] they don't even get to go to the studios. There is no studio at all. I thought, that's interesting because that is a dynamic that's happening: the studios are shrinking and movies are being made in a different system, and isn't it interesting that even in Hollywood these are films about people who can't figure out what the system is anymore?

Then the other thing is that there are dead bodies in all three: there is the screenwriter lying facedown in the pool who narrates *Sunset Boulevard*. In *A Lonely Place* a woman offers a synopsis of the novel that the Humphrey Bogart character can't bear to read that he has to write a screenplay on. He's just kind of this rude, no-goodnik and she—after she narrates it to him he doesn't even bother to walk her to the cab stand and just sort of sends her packing, and she ends up dead. She ends up dead tossed from a car like the famous Black Dahlia killing. I thought, "Wow, that's interesting." Because that's only three years after the Dahlia murder. Then in *Big Knife*, spoiler alert, he commits suicide at the end rather than capitulate to the studio's demands. He's being blackmailed to capitulate to the studio's demands. The movie star kills himself, slits his wrists or drowns himself, but dies off-screen in the bathroom upstairs. I thought wow, dead bodies is the common element here. Is this just noir or is it more? Then I started looking at newspapers of the era, and, oh boy, are there dead bodies. So I started like a dead body book: casualties of Hollywood. And then that grew into, well, a lot of the casualties were caused by these sort of strange relationships between Hollywood celebrities and gangsters, whose role in the daily operation of Hollywood is significant, more significant than I ever imagined. I knew gangster money was in play, and I knew gangsters were involved in the union, but I did not know that in order to get discovered a lot of these young woman, who ended up casualties, a lot of these young women were going to clubs and the only way into the clubs was on the arm of a gangster. There was a price. These guys meant business in the strictest sense of that expression.

Then I was sort of interested in the whole policing of stardom. This idea of the role of gossip and the gangster discourse but also on the discourse of sort of the Red Menace, the whole purging of communism in Hollywood. There have been a couple movies out lately that are really bad: the Dalton Trumbo film, for example, is horrendous and not even close to being accurate historically. But there is the sense of the power of these gossip columns. I got interested in that. The book ends with two women who both became casualties of this transition era. One no one's ever heard of—Barbara Payton. But she was really an interesting person. The other was Marilyn Monroe, who everybody's heard of. She becomes a kind of iconic figure of the very nature of stardom. So the book begins with the Black Dahlia killing and ends with Monroe's death by misadventure. And there you are.

**CP:** I have a few concluding questions. I know you have to go teach here pretty soon. The first is about you and productivity. I'm always interested in asking people who have been prolific about their work habits. Can you give us a little insight into how you've been able to write as prolifically as you have?

**JL:** I write every morning. At least three days a week I can block off 8:00-noon. I attribute this a little bit to being a child of a working-class family. I see what I do as so fantastic I kind of can't believe how good a job I have. I'm going to work hard no matter what I do, I guess. And I'm thinking, "Wow, I get to read newspapers all morning and it's work? I get to watch a movie and it's work?" I mean it's kind of ridiculous. So I'm very disciplined about that. I do work on weekends. I work all the time. But work is so fluid. I don't know if scientists have the same experience as I have because, I don't—you're either in your lab or not, I guess.

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But you are probably always thinking about what you're doing, and that maybe is also part of it. It's not hard for me to be thinking about what I'm working on because it's so interesting to me and because reading is all around me, and so I'm seeing it all the time. So I'm pretty disciplined about that. I've always been a fast writer. I ghost wrote a book in grad school for money on restaurants. So writing is not problematic. I should knock on wood because I don't want it to be problematic [chuckles]. But writing seems kind of easy to me. I have two things. One is that I have a kind of naïve self-confidence: once I start a project I actually think I can finish it.

The second thing is that I don't mind editing. I don't mind that process where you show somebody something that's not quite done yet and you kind of get slapped across the face: you're not the most brilliant person in the world kind of comments. I think a lot of writers don't like that moment. They hold on to everything. There is a famous quote, I think it's Paul Valéry the poet - he's attributed this quote but I don't know if it's really his - that "You never finish writing, you only abandon it." That's kind of true. Maybe I'm willing to abandon a little earlier than some other people [laughs], so that probably helps to be more prolific. I don't mind that give and take. I think a lot of people are afraid of that moment, and so they hold on and hold on and hold on. It's never perfect. And it's better to get good comments and hear what some other smart person thinks about what you've done. But I know firsthand, because I've edited a journal and I've edited a lot of anthologies, that people aren't always that receptive to commentary.

**CP:** A couple of institutional questions to close. The first is a probably a pretty big question, I'm guessing, for you and your career. I'm interested in change within the College of Liberal Arts. This is a college that has changed mightily over the course of the time that you've been here from being kind of an afterthought to something more than that, I would think it's safe to say at this point. Could you reflect a little bit?

**JL:** I never thought it was an afterthought. Though, my colleagues when I arrived did. They resisted the idea that they were a service department, English. We were the biggest, probably still are the biggest as in teaching the most students. But the feeling was that we were tolerated because we were a necessary evil—you can't have a college without an English Department. But I confess—no one ever made me feel that way. I was never in a room with a scientist or an, I don't know, engineer where they made me feel that what I was doing was less interesting than what they were doing. I guess I operate on a more personal level than some people. So I actually never felt that way. I never felt like, "Oh he's the film guy—that's a joke." I never felt that way. But it has grown. It's become more sophisticated. When I got here I think it was Bill Wilkins was CLA dean. I think that's correct. At first I didn't know what deans did. As I said, I knew nothing about how colleges worked. I think it's safe to say we never get candidates that are as naïve as I was when I got here. [Bill and I] we became friends actually through the International Film Series, and the Summer Film Series. He used to come to that all the time. I became friendly more with Bill after he retired than when he was CLA dean, where I wouldn't have that much contact with him. I had no reason to. It has certainly grown. Our department has always been pretty strong. I think it's more than just pretty strong now. The facts of life of higher education right now is that jobs are just so hard to get and the competition for a job at OSU... even twenty years ago or even thirty years ago—there were four hundred applicants for my position. So that's a lot of competition. You got to figure whether you like me or not, you've got to figure that if you are hiring out of a pool that size you're probably getting something pretty good.

[1:20:00]

Now because Oregon has become a kind of cool place, it's a place people actually want to go to, let alone a Research-1 university which, as a tenure-track job at a Research-1 university, you'd be an idiot not to think that that was a great opportunity. But now it's like, okay, you can live near Portland which is the coolest city in America right now. So we're getting everybody who's in whatever field we're advertising for applies. We've hired over the last bunch of years really fabulous people. This school still isn't the Liberal Arts school, and I don't think the students here—maybe because they've been told there's no career in what we're doing or told by their parents there is no career in studying what we teach—that they just sort of pick up a class here and there. Which is too bad because I think the faculty here are pretty great. I don't have any profound thing though to say about the evolution because I never got a sense that we are bereft or incompetent or horribly underappreciated. At the risk of sounding like one of those old curmudgeons, this is one of the last great jobs, and anybody who has the job I have and complains should get another real job and see what that's like. Because I've had those too. And my dad worked at a job like that his whole life, and my mother worked in that job her whole professional life. Those jobs are much harder than mine. I'm doing *this*? I mean, it's ridiculous.

**CP:** My last question is one we've been asking everybody for this project and it's to share their thoughts on OSU's positionings as it looks towards its 150th birthday.

**JL:** Wow. I don't know. I've been here long enough to see the physical plan change dramatically, and for the better in significant ways. It seems every new building is beautiful, and the school is twice its size. It was 15,000 when I came here, and it's 30,000 now. So it's twice the size in lots of ways. I think it's too bad one of the things that I have seen is that the state investment, meaning state and federal investment, in higher ed has dramatically declined since Reagan, since the '80s. Actually I arrived here just as that was happening, and then we got Measure 5 which cut even more. It was sort of every year a new budget disaster, right? And students are getting gouged in ways that isn't the design of a public institution, right? \$750 for a graduate education is what a state university is supposed to be doing, and that's not happening anymore. So as I look towards the future unfortunately the down side of that is there's no sign with our current political situation that it's going to get any better soon, and I think our values are just kind of screwed up in that way. Because I wasn't necessarily attracted to it, because it was a job, it was a great job, and somebody offered it to me and so I took it. But I quickly got on board with the idea that I was not teaching America's bored and wealthy, which is what I taught at Hobart. It's not what I get here. The clientele is much more to my liking in some ways, and I think that we're doing that right, and that is something that we've done as an institution from the start.

**CP:** Well Jon thank you very much for this.

**JL:** You're welcome.

**CP:** I really appreciate it. It's been a lot of fun and best of luck with everything that comes forth.

**JL:** Yeah, thanks [laughs].

[1:24:06]