Herb Childress, *Adjunct Underclass: How America's Colleges Betrayed Their Faculty, Their Students, and Their Mission* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 2019)

I CARRIED Herb Childress's *Adjunct Underclass*, a book about the damage done to academia by the widespread adoption by universities of an unsustainable and exploitative model of human resources, with me on a commuter train heading to one of my two current out-of-town teaching contracts and to a negotiation of my union local's collective agreement. When I was home it sat beside my desk as I read emails informing me that I had not made short lists for a tenure-track position ("we received a high number of exceptionally strong applications"), and as I pondered the expiration date of my attempt at an academic career. When I opened the book, I invariably felt interpolated in some intense way, sometimes (in the argot of the very online) seen, occasionally triggered, and very often personally attacked. Like Childress's observation about adjunct email, that "all of the between-class contact with students, the casual coaching that shifts confusion into possibility, [takes] place over email," such that "brief conversations [become] a series of carefully crafted writing projects of their own, adding more time to the week." Similarly, the discussion of PhDs from prestigious programs who, having lost out in the market for the few elite positions available, out-compete people with less prestigious PhDs for jobs at lower-tier schools; and of how completing a PhD after 35 makes you less likely to end up in the tenure-track: all pretty bleak content, and highly relatable. (I got my PhD from Carleton at age 42). This is the level at which the book works best, and its effectiveness in capturing what is wrong with adjunctification and what being an adjunct feels like makes it worth reading, even if its analysis is weak.

It isn't explicit until the end of the book, but *Adjunct Underclass* is a kind of memoir, enlivened by interviews with other adjuncts and ex-adjuncts, and buttressed by some casual wonkery that is sometimes illuminating but often useless. It's the story of the failure of one person's very modest dream, to make a living teaching and writing about something he is uniquely knowledgeable about, and why that dream died, putting the emphasis on structural forces that have changed the nature of work broadly, and on uniquely dysfunctional attributes of higher education that create the conditions for an adjunct underclass. Childress is a good writer, and the passages that dealt bluntly with emotions are powerful. But it emerges that all the personal material is merely illustrative.

This is a problem with the book's framing, with its imagined audience. As much as I got out of it, the best bits were things I already knew, if only inchoately. Rather than address the book to adjuncts, though, Childress addresses it primarily to students. The first chapter is titled "What the brochures don't tell you;" what you're being offered is a buyer-beware exposé: the person who is teaching you won't be a professor in the true sense but a temporary employee of the university. Childress notes that retention rates are lower when introductory courses are taught by adjuncts; so students end up as collegial collateral damage. Graduate students should also think critically (and ignore the "magical thinking" that underpins the "hope labour" of research and writing) about whether their PhD will get them onto the tenure track: unless you grew up knowing you were going to be a prof, and you made every step quickly and confidently towards that goal, your

chances are near zero. The only time Childress shifts from the perspective of the individual consumer, it is to occupy the mind of a college administrator. This is a telling failure of imagination.

It is refreshing to see *Adjunct Underclass* making class a central concept. Unfortunately, the class analysis is more of a schematic of the American ecology of higher education than a class analysis per se. Childress posits that the role of adjuncts differs in community colleges, state colleges, liberal arts colleges, and research universities: in the former, poorly paid middle-aged adjuncts teach remedial courses to working-class students; at the latter, harried young post-docs and grad students teach undergrads while their supervisors oversee research teams and give keynote addresses. Childress's analysis is very much hewed to the American context, where institutions of highly learning operate with vastly unequal funding and serve entirely separate student populations. Canada's universities are comparatively uniform, and so the class composition of our students and the working conditions of adjuncts at different universities are less easily schematized.

This connects with a claim Childress makes early on and never really elaborates on; that colleges' betrayal of their faculty, their students and their mission, were "crimes without criminals." Administrators, Childress notes breezily, deal with a lot of uncertainty, including funding changes and enrolment changes, and so they cushion themselves by employing educators on short-term contracts. Even if we accept this argument, why do funding changes happen? Harvard's endowments don't change from year to year, but publicly funded universities are at the whim of legislatures and the platforms of the parties therein. Universities increase their complement of contract faculty because they can't replace tenure-track faculty because provincial governments don't fund post-secondary education adequately. Treating austerity in higher education as a given is a common administrative stance, but if we're assigning blame it seems odd to leave out the politics of public finance.

The other element the book leaves out, somewhat oddly, is unions. In Canada, where adjunct faculty are often organized, the difference between unionized and non-unionized contract instructors is clear; collective agreements that outline some form of non-tenure permanency, or that mandate departmental hiring committees to convert course instructors into permanent faculty, effectively use the threat of a strike to alter the facts of contingency. It's a real poverty of analysis if, in a situation where a movement could be very effective, you limit your understanding of agency to individuals and then reduce their possible actions to a shrug.

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Eric Blanc, *Red State Revolt: The Teachers' Strike Wave and Working-Class Politics* (New York: Verso 2019)

The strike wave of teachers across southern US states in the spring of 2018 was arguably one of the most important events for the American labour movement so far in the early 21st Century, contributing to the highest national strike rate since 1982. Alongside a strong rebuke to years of cuts to public education funding, the struggle centred in regions with weak unions and entrenched Republican administrations. Claims that the *Janus* Supreme Court decision would spell the end of organized labour have been refuted by the fact of successful,