My Oxford Interview

Trinity College – December 2010

All of the interviews lasted for 20 minutes, not including preparation

1st interview: with Dr Evangelista (Fellow and English tutor) and Dr Groves (tutor from another college – or so I presume)

I was given 2 sonnets, which had neither the poet nor dates given, to prepare before my interview and I had just under an hour to do so (ample amount of time). When I went in they asked me which I wanted to look at first and then asked me to read it. They asked me to point out things I found interesting or wanted to discuss/ask about. They led it in the direction they wanted to and asked me questions and to give other interpretations etc. We looked at form, imagery, punctuation (general techniques really). They would ask me to go back and think again about some things having given me more information about the poet and what the poem was about. Dr Groves kept asking me other meanings for words such as “fast” and “brilliant”, but I felt like this was an assessment of how ‘teachable’ I was. They did the same with the second sonnet.

2nd interview: with Dr Ghosh (Fellow and English tutor) and Dr Robertson (again, not a fellow)

This was based entirely on my personal statement. We talked about Wuthering Heights and the concept of the usefulness of a biographical reading (how Emily Bronte was able to write such a novel considering her upbringing). Then I was asked about which feminist critics I had read – none! I put in my personal statement that I liked to approach poetry from a feminist point of view the best but this got lost in translation. I explained and talked briefly and Jacqueline Rose and Sylvia Plath’s “The Rabbit Catcher” (from Higher English) and talked about feminist views on Alice in Wonderland (my EPQ). Dr Ghosh was very interested in my EPQ and suggested that I read some Saki because he thought I would find it very useful.

3rd interview: this was on my second day and was at Worcester college (i.e. pooling)

I had 10/15 minutes to analyse and prepare one poem. Half of the interview was based on a discussion and ‘teaching’ of the poem and half was to talk about my personal statement and potentially other topics (although we didn’t have time for this). They, again, steered the discussion of the poem and helped me to see certain aspects that I hadn’t understood before (i.e. the potential to look at the class system in this particular poem). I found the poetry okay because it is not too dissimilar to what we do in class and Higher English. Then we talked about Frankenstein and the morality in it as well as the idea of man versus nature. On the subject of the gothic we moved on to Dracula and looked at why it was scary and also the roles of women in it. From here we then talked very briefly (about 2 mins) about women in Shakespeare’s sonnets. Everything in the second part related to my personal statement so there we no nasty surprises.