BERNADETTE SWEENEY CONFLUENCE INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

ELLI CATERISANO: I don't really know how she got to Montana from Ireland, but to have so many connections that she does, like, with the Abbey Theatre in Dublin, and with Trinity College. Just to have worked as much as she did, and directed. It's kind of amazing. To say that she's like, a diamond in the rough would be like, a complete understatement, I think.

DAVID MILLS-LOWE: She’s really been pushing for a lot of inclusion, a lot of safety within the, the way that we do things in the theatre. It's really helping to shape an atmosphere that is safe and feels, feels nurturing to everybody so that we, that we can explore ourselves. When we're safe, we're able to do that in a way that can be healthy.

JADD DAVIS: I appreciate her. I appreciate that she cares about the students and I know that I'm not the only one who says, “Hey, I feel like Ber really listens to me.” That's a pretty common theme amongst students who've interacted with her, which is the mark of a good professor.

ASHBY KINCH: Welcome to Confluence: where great ideas flow together, a podcast of the Graduate School of the University of Montana. On Confluence, we take a long float with some of the best and brightest professors and graduate students who contribute to the watershed of wisdom that flow through our campus. I’m your host, Ashby Kinch—Associate Dean of the Graduate School—and I’m delighted to be guiding your sonic float today.

KINCH: You just heard the voices of Elli Caterisano, David Mills-Lowe, and Jadd Davis, talking about our guest, Dr. Bernadette Sweeney. Each episode of Confluence, we select a passage about rivers from literary texts for our guests to read. Some important things happen alongside a river, and in this passage from, “Twice Shy,” by the famous Irish writer Seamus Heaney, you’ll hear Bernadette voicing the ripe tension of love that hangs between two people taking a stroll along a river embankment.

BERNADETTE SWEENEY: Her scarf a la Bardot, in suede flats for the walk. She came with me one evening for air and friendly talk. We crossed the quiet river, took the embankment walk. So, cheery and excited as a thrush linked on a hawk. We thrilled to the March twilight with the nervous, childish talk. Still waters running deep along the embankment walk.

KINCH: As you can hear from the soft lilt of her accent, and will hear detailed in the episode that follows, Bernadette has brought to UM her distinctive training and experience as a specialist in Irish theatre history, on which she has published two books. In our discussion, she narrates her journey to Montana, some of the work she did on oral history of Irish immigration to Montana, and the ongoing presence of Montanans of Irish descent. We talk about the theatre program, her training of graduate student actors and directors, and her broader role on campus in work with the Humanities Institute. Throughout, you’ll get a sense of Bernadette’s great passion for theatre practice as a labile, ever-changing space for performative re-interpretation of enduring classics.

KINCH: In a slight break from our norm, we begin the episode with a second passage about rivers, on the opposite end of the tonal spectrum from Heaney’s poem. This passage comes after the grim moment in Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* when Ophelia drowns herself in a river. Bernadette reads from the prose passage in Act V, Scene 1, when the two gravediggers, comic foils to the tragic action of the play, contemplate the dark ironies of the difference between being an active and a passive victim of a river’s flood. Bernadette’s reading leads straight into our discussion of the interpretive work that goes into staging a Shakespearean play: his corpus of writing is a cultural touchstone like no other in the West. Great minds and dazzling actors have lent their talents to bringing into the space of performance the complex web of words Shakespeare has bequeathed us to decipher. Our Montana students and faculty are intrepid voyagers in this great journey and Bernadette leads the way with verve, energy, and insight. Welcome to Confluence! We hope you enjoy the float!

SWEENEY: Give me leave. Here lies the river good. Here stands the man. Good. If the man go to this river and drown himself, it is will he, nill he, he goes. Mark you that. But if the river comes to him and drown him, he drowns not himself, er go he that is not guilty of his own death shortens not his own life. Obviously that's a bit of black humor to start us off with. But I work on Hamlet, both in theatre history and in an advanced acting class and Shakespeare. And it's always fun to work with the, with the humor with the prose sections or the sections that aren't in verse because they're, they ground us in the universalities and the inevitabilities. And this, this scene here is so important because it is grounding Hamlet both in his past and in his mortality. And it, not just Hamlet, but everybody.

KINCH: Everybody.

SWEENEY: And the audience as well.

KINCH: Yeah.

SWEENEY: So, it's a real. Oftentimes with, with Shakespeare, this is something we really discover in performance more so than in the reading of the text. But, so much of it is directed rest of the audience or is a knowing aside to the audience. Yeah. And that section to me really reads as something that would be delivered directly to the audience.

KINCH: Yeah, and staging that particular scene of Ophelia’s suicide is, I've seen it stage obviously, you've seen it stages tons of different ways, but, but there's a kind of epiphanic quality to it some in some productions in particular, you know, they'll, they'll have her almost sort of be a angelic figure kind of drifting into the river. How do you, how do you feel about that river? Cause it’s haunting right? It's a haunting image of, of it’s a brutal way to die. It's a brutal way to kill yourself one thing.

SWEENEY: And we've seen it represented variously, it's become an icon.

KINCH: Yeah.

SWEEENY: Culturally the image of Ophelia. We're having some really interesting discussions in theatre history in at the moment and, and across our school, about representation and agency. And this is a really interesting play to talk about, because Ophelia is really drawn as somebody whose life circumstances and future is determined. For her. She's either her father's daughter or she's Hamlet's intended. And, and the only alternative to that is the nunnery as Hamlet tells her so famously.

KINCH: Get thee to a nunnery.

SWEENEY: Yeah, yeah, and, of course, the, the body interpretation of that often, it's interpreted at that time, that nunnery was a euphemism for a brothel. So, either way, she's, she's not going to have much say in her own life and circumstances. So, the notion of Ophelia’s death as , as a kind of a sacrifice is hugely problematic. And one of the really interesting discussions we have in theatre classes, both the studio classes and the literature classes is, this is this extraordinary role. Right. And it's a role that has great cultural significance now. It's the kind of role that suits the age of the majority of our students.

KINCH: Young, searching. Seeking.

SWEENEY: Female.

KINCH: Female. Impressionable.

SWEENEY: Yeah.

KINCH: Hoping for more than life will give you.

SWEENEY: Yeah. But of course, the question is, if we keep replicating this role, what are we saying about it? We can question it, or are we questioning it? Or are we enforcing, reinforcing her? Her lack of power.

KINCH: Has there been a production that internalizes her in a way that makes her a more assertive figure, a more—I'm thinking especially, I'm you know, this this is a naive thing to say to someone in theatre history, but I remember when Kenneth Branagh’s production of Hamlet, there’s a version of the monologue of Polonius’s advice, “Neither borrower nor a lender be.” It was so brilliant, it was one of those moments that sticks out for me, you know, being a literary person, not a theatre person about how a monologue can be turned inside out. That monologue got turned inside out in that production where he became this sort of saccharin oily, really smart cagey figure rather than the kind of stupid, bumbling Polonius of history of theatre history. Is there something like that for Ophelia? Some, some way in which that the character in that scene has been turned inside out and sort of rediscovered?

SWEENEY: Well, I think, to some extent, any production does that. And that's one of the reasons why Shakespeare is still with us. And so intriguing for us theatre makers to work with because there's so much room to—the universality gives us access, but then there's still room within it to make it applicable or relevant to what we are going through or what we need to say or what we want to say. There's another theatre production of Hamlet that's been filmed. So, it's on DVD and on the internet. With it, it's an RSC production—Royal Shakespeare—with David Tennant in the role of Hamlet, and it's Oliver Ford Davies, who's playing Polonius in that scene. And, it’s brilliant. That scene in particular is so brilliant because he's being such a, he's being such a kind of a helicopter Dad I guess in current terminology, and both Laertes and Ophelia when it, when this camera’s filming just them they're mouthing along to some of his advice because they've heard him 1000 times. It's, it's, it's not, it's kind of loving in one way and he's been loving, but in a really kind of a fussy fuddy duddy kind of way. But, their responses to him shows us their, their connection, their sibling connection and love for each other. It's the way it's done. It's so beautiful.

KINCH: It's a connection Hamlet’s missing and it's, their family is the other family of that play, right. It's the counter family, I guess of that play.

SWEENEY: It's the closest to functional. I mean, it's not at all really in one way. But it's, it's certainly a more functional version of what poor Hamlet is trying to deal with at that time.

KINCH: How did you end up University Montana?

SWEENEY: Well, the simple answer to that is I married a Montanan. Um, yeah.

KINCH: But there's, there's more to it than that. I mean, for example, the Irish oral history project that you worked on.

SWEENEY: Yeah. So, I, after I got my PhD at Trinity, I was faculty at University College Cork. And, met my husband in Ireland, and we lived in Cork for a while. And then, I had my—I have two daughters—I had my first daughter, Ruby. And I had a sabbatical. I was finishing my book Performing the Body and Irish Theatre. So, we came here while I was on sabbatical, for a year, and that was 10 years ago. So.

KINCH: Never went back.

SWEENEY: Didn’t go back.

KINCH: Yeah. Tell us about Éist, that whole, is that the right pronunciation

SWEENEY: Éist.

KINCH: Éist.

SWEENEY: Yeah.

KINCH: Tell us about Éist.

SWEENEY: So éist is the Irish or Gaelic word for “listen”. So, when I first got here, and I was, you know, working on my book, and all those things, and I started to make connections, I had some connections with the Irish studies program here. And I taught as an adjunct while I was here, as I say, didn't realize I was staying here indefinitely, but I taught a class on Irish theatre, and had connections with the Irish studies program. And then it became evident that we were seeing I got involved in oral history project called The Gathering: Collected Oral Histories of the Irish in Montana. So, I secured some grants from the Irish government, and was the director of this project for a couple of years, where we collected the oral histories of the Irish in Montana. And my husband has, has Irish on both sides of his family from the Beara Peninsula in West Cork, and from Kerry. [Unknown] from Kerry and Downey from Cork. And so, he has a very large family. So, I had, I could already, I could start just by talking to all of his family. But we got a lot of buy in really, really quickly from the community, which was lovely, a lot of volunteers there’s a really great community here locally of supporters of the Irish studies program. And they all got behind it. And of course, the Irish studies program did. Ellen Crain at the Butte-Silver Bow Archives was amazing, as were many, many others, the, in Helena as well, and so on.

KINCH: So, a couple quick shout outs to Butte-Silver Bow archive.

SWEENEY: Yeah.

KINCH: Which is, you know, fantastic, archive doing a lot of great publishing work. And the UM Press where you can buy.

SWEENEY: Yes.

KINCH: A copy of Éist.

SWEENEY: Éist.

KINCH: Éist.

SWEENEY: Éist.

KINCH: where you can buy a copy of Éist.

SWEENEY: [Crosstalk] So I developed an oral history, documentary theatre project out of it, as well. And we collected over 170 interviews and the work continued after I, once I went to the theatre program here, the work continued with Bob O’Boyle and Traolach O’Riordain as well. But while I was here, while I was working on that project, I worked with a lot of work study students, both in the English department and in the media arts program. And we went across the state and interviewed many of the volunteers as well, I wasn't doing all the interviewing. We interviewed over 170 people, and we videoed about at least a third between a third and a half of those—high quality digital video as well. And all of that now is belong to the, is in the hands of the Mansfield Library, as part of The Gathering archive. And that was an extraordinary opportunity. I mean, it was just an amazing life experience that I'm still drawing on. People were so welcoming and were so articulate and in so passionate about their Irish heritage. As an Irish person, it was kind of humbling to meet all these Americans who, who, in my mind were Americans. But their Irishness was really very, very, very meaningful to them. And so, I also developed a class with a theatre program around the project where the students would go and interview a number of people and so the interviews would be part of The Gathering. So, it was kind of doing two, two things as it were, but the students would also then choose a monologue and develop it for performance. So, we put together this play, if you like, a series of monologues called Éist. And many of the, in fact, I think all of the subjects came to see themselves being performed.

KINCH: Wow, yeah.

SWEENEY: Which is a huge challenge for the actor to perform a version of the person who's sitting in the third row, two seats in from the left.

KINCH: The harshest critic possible.

SWEENEY: Yeah. So, but that was lovely. And so, then we developed it into a script, and the UM Press published the script. So that, so the many outcomes from that project, which is great.

KINCH: Your graduate program has kind of some unique characteristics. So, I wanted to kind of just start by talking a little bit about that, how it's organized, how you admit students. Kind of describe this difference between the MA and the MFA and how they interact.

SWEENEY: Yeah. So, we actually have students right now in the school theatre and dance who are MFA students, or MA students, and we actually right now have one PhD student in interdisciplinary studies as well. And you and I have worked a lot on making that happen. Our MFA students we take in a cohort in the performance and practice program within the School of Theatre and Dance. We take in a cohort every three years of MFA actors and MFA directors. This year, we've started with a new cohort, starting this semester. We have. We have two MFA directors, we have one MFA music director as well, which is a new departure for us. We're very excited about that. And we have for MFA actors. Also, in the school, we have two MA students, and an MFA costumer in design and technology, she's finishing. And, our PhD student. So, we have a very wide and varied field right now, which is so exciting for us.

KINCH: And, and so that, that eclectic quality, how much of it is curated through the admissions process where you're looking to fill niches in a cohort of students so that they can work together? And you know, obviously, in one year, you can't have too many directors can have too many actors. How do you kind of handle that process?

SWEENEY: Well, we are very mindful, as we're putting that cohort together. We've been more and more, we've been recruiting, we've been trying to get outside of the Northwest and moving in ever broadening circles to try and expand our options if you like. So, we're getting more proactive in terms of going and looking for students. My, my colleague, Pamyla Stiehl has been really involved in that process, especially, with the head of the school, Mike Monsos. We, then obviously, we interview students, so we invite students to campus. Most of our current cohort could come to campus, not all of them and those who couldn't come we interviewed on Skype. So, it's interesting, it's not necessarily that we're looking for personalities, per se. But, it's exciting to see how these things come together and the current cohort are a very, very hugely enthusiastic group who bring very, very different skill sets, and interests, and each of them. Well, I think it's fair to say that our MFA program—any of our graduate programs, we're working to try and build an independent artist, we're not trying to make them into cookie cutter versions of ourselves as theatre artists, or we don't want them all to be the same. We're not trying to impose anything that way. We're really trying to facilitate and maximize their potential as graduate students, and then moving forward helping them to develop as artists.

KINCH: So, what kinds of traits, then, are you kind of looking for and what kinds of growth do you expect and hope to see out of your students over the course of their time?

SWEENEY: We're certainly hoping to see them, like I say, maximize their potential. To, to, to learn, I mean, we're not here to—neither are we interested in rubber stamping them for a set of, a skill set that they come in with. This isn't an after-the-fact qualification that they've just tagging onto their skill set so they can go and teach somewhere else. We're really interested in working with them as artists and developing their potential. And I'm thinking of some examples from our recent students. And they're very varied, but one student Tsiambwom Akuchu, he was very interested in performance as an actor and he's also very talented hip hop artist and choreographer. So, he did a lot of work with the dance problem as well as with the theatre program.

KINCH: Which showed up in Everyman.

SWEENEY: He performed. Very much part of his work because Everyman and he developed the choreography for that piece as well, for that production. But, he also developed piece based on some of his research for Everyman that he performed at the Kennedy Center this past summer.

KINCH: Wow. What a feather.

SWEENEY: I know. Yeah.

KINCH: How common is that?

SWEENEY: It's, well, it's, I certainly haven't had that happen before. But in each case with each of the students we’ll find that they develop a specialization that takes them somewhere interesting. Another one of our really recent, or not recent graduates, she'd be there the class before him, Claire Edgerton, she's now the education manager for the SITI Theatre Company run by Anne Bogart in New York, which is one of America's, like, absolutely prime and internationally recognized theatre companies in the top echelon, and she's now working with them, which is just extraordinary. And she's wholly deserving. She's fabulous. Very smart. Came in with a really, really interesting range of skills. And has, they're taking her further, which is great.

KINCH: Yeah, that is amazing. Well, so, um partly what we're interested in, in highlighting in Confluence is your role as a mentor, and advisor. We’re also interested in your research, and that “doctor” at the front of your name matters in your case. Tell us a little bit about your journey, your intellectual journey, what, what got you into theatre history? And how do you kind of blend theatre history and practice? And why is it so important to your art?

SWEENEY: Yeah, I've always really been interested in the relationship between theory and practice, I always consider myself a practicing artist. And so, I did my PhD in Trinity College in Dublin. And I was working as a young actor, and realizing that I wasn't really able to support myself, you know, going from gig to gig. A lot of it was theatre from for young people, because that's where the, the kind of the regular money was. A lot of waitressing, that kind of thing. And so.

KINCH: Venerated really well trodden path of the actor.

SWEENEY: Yes, yes, the day job of the actor. And so, I enrolled as a master’s student at the, what was then the Samuel Beckett School of Drama at Trinity College in Dublin. And then I transferred to the PhD register, but I was always interested in the integration between theory and practice. And what became an emerging field as I was finishing around the time, midway through my PhD was practices research, where an awful lot of the scholarship in, in theatre and performance was through practice, because of course, it is practical performative art form. And so, a lot of the knowledge was being generated through, through the performance moment. So, I engaged with some of that in my PhD. And, and I was teaching as well at the time there I was teaching acting. And so that then just, it's always been the cornerstone of my work as a, as a theatre scholar and as a theatre maker. So currently, one of the projects that I'm working on is I am one of the commissioning editors with Franc Chamberlin for the Routledge Performance Practitioners Series. I worked with Frank in UCC before I moved to Montana. And he's, but he's from the UK and he's back in the UK now in Huddersfield University and he set up the Routledge Performance Practitioners Series and it's, so it's an extant series. But then, Routledge approached him to develop a companion to the practitioners and handbook of studio practice. And he asked me to come on board as co-editor. And now, they have decided to relaunch and expand the series. So now we're commissioning new works as well. So, each of these books is a, it's a small, they're smallish books. And it, each book features a practitioner like famous example would be Stanislavski, right? And there are many others on people like Augusto Boal and there's a lovely one on dance theatre practitioner, Pina Bausch, etc, etc. And, the books introduce the kind of the biography of the, the practitioner, the theatre artist, and their early works, or their company, or their professional life, and talks about the third section will talk about a particular work. a very famous piece of work that they might have, directed or generated or whatever it might be, or a series of words. And then crucially, what, what makes these books so particular is that the last chapter includes exercises that you can bring into the workshop or the studio, and try out yourself as, as, in your own practice or with a group of students or actors, if you're in rehearsal, whatever it might be. So, they really democratize the, the, or demystify the rehearsal process. And, it's they put it, it's a series so you can compare and you can find points of overlap or ways in which they are in conversation with each other, or whatever it might be. So now we're commissioning new ones, it's really, really exciting to be doing.

KINCH: That's fantastic. I mean, I can imagine, I don't know, market wise, whether this is bearing itself out. But, I can imagine a book like that, or a series like that being useful in literature classroom as well. And, I think one of the problems literature professors have in conceptualizing what to do with theatre is that problem of crossing over into, you know, speaking of democratizing, as non-specialist in the theatre, they're probably a little leery to bring those practices into the classroom. And this probably gives them a tool to kind of do that.

SWEENEY: Or at least have substance to imagine how they would begin to approach it.

KINCH: Yeah.

SWEENEY: Or, or what happens when this work goes into the rehearsal room.

KINCH: Yeah.

SWEENEY: Because one of the things that Frank and I are really working on at the moment, as we're trying to put together the companion is, what are the circumstances within which this work, then lives and obviously IT varies hugely, depending on who picks up the book.

KINCH: Right.

SWEENEY: The circumstances where this work originated, is very much a set of professional circumstances. And so, the outcomes will be different. But, that doesn't mean that you can't approach the work.

KINCH: Right.

SWEENEY: Frank often talks about this almost like a recipe book. That you don't have to be in, I don't know, Julia Child's kitchen to make her recipe, it might turn out the same.

KINCH: Yeah.

SWEENEY: But the recipe is, what you, what’s, is what's available to you?

KINCH: Yeah.

SWEENEY: And you can do what you want with it, then.

KINCH: Yeah. And I've always been amazed, in conversations with, with directors about how they do enormously sophisticated interpretive work on the text side of a play in the course of producing it. But then over time, you know, the pressures of practice mean you have to kind of go and actually make that interpretation of physical reality and do something with it on the stage. And I think that's the bit that the literature professor doesn't have to do, right? They can, they can turn around and teach the same text the next time and run an entirely different interpretation. But in the sense that, you know, it's also, there's a performative quality to that, right? I mean, you're re-performing the text. Just in the imagination, rather than in the physical. I've learned so much, I think by you know, again, I think back to our conversations about Everyman, but in thinking through that lens, even when you're not turning around and practicing it, it makes you think about the body differently. It makes you think about the presence that lies behind those words when they need to be vocalized onstage.

SWEENEY: And the one thing I think that we always come back to as theatre makers is you're not just performing it once. It has to be sustainable. And, it has to be something you can replicate over a period of however long your run is.

KINCH: Yeah, yeah.

SWEENEY: And it's often interesting, you'll see some artists coming back to a work much later. So, Ian McKellen, for example, in the Roxy recently, that National Theatre Series showed him playing Lear. Anyway, he had played your 10 years previously, as well. And, there's some really interesting interviews out there, where he talks about the difference in not just in the two productions and their kind of production values and aesthetics. But, the difference for him.

KINCH: Sure.

SWEENEY: Playing the role.

KINCH: 10 years closer to death.

SWEENEY: Yeah, exactly.

KINCH: For Lear, for Lear, you better face your mortality.

SWEENEY: Yeah.

KINCH: Square in the eyes to get that role.

SWEENEY: And also, 10 years more in your own body. And it's, and it's aging.

KINCH: And it's aging, and it's decay. Yeah, that's fantastic. Yeah.

SWEENEY: So, one of the things that I think that always informed my work is the lived-ness of the work, that you live in the work that you have to breathe in the work. So, I teach an advanced acting class in Shakespeare, for example, we were talking about this earlier, that the Shakespeare in performance is so different to Shakespeare on the page, because it was, it was developed in performance. Shakespeare himself was a performance practitioner, he wasn't sitting in his attic writing by himself.

KINCH: At UM, you’re when you're particularly valuable, I think as an example of the importance of having faculty that can move comfortably across multiple colleges and universities and maintain communication between an among and, I think, your scholarship, which so many of us in the English department and the humanities side, we respect, you know that you've really done incredible scholarship as well as your art. So, tell me a little bit about the Humanities Institute and your participation in that and how you think you know why it's important for you, in particular, to be part of the Humanities Institute and to work as a board member.

SWEENEY: Yeah, I was really thrilled to be approached to be part of that, which, in a sense, I think there's, a there's, there's a—division is the wrong word, cause it sounds negative. But there's definitely a split between the practice of theatre making and the scholarship of theatre making. And, I see that much more. So, still in place here, from what I've experienced of American Theatre academia, then, in Ireland, or amongst the Irish and British theatre academics, who would have been kind of the conference circuit that I was moving in. Or, that I do move in when I'm in Europe. And so that, again, that, that, that the engagement and the inter-reliance of theory and practice is so central to what we do as theatre makers. And that split between theory and practices really been breaking down over the last few years, which is, I think, really exciting. And, I think one of the reasons why I'm so, I'm so committed to being part of the Humanities Institute is because it is giving our students and a link to scholarship. So often our world is in the PAR-TV building or in production, we're in rehearsal, we're going from one production to the next. It's, you know, it's a, it's a world of late night rehearsals, and late night tech runs, and it's all about casting and performance. And to a lesser extent, it is all about performance for the dancers too, we're trying to have more and more of an outreach into the community, with the new artistic director of the Montana Repertory Theatre, Michael Legg, is really taking a lot of the work out into the community, which is really lovely. The dance.

KINCH: Plays in cars.

SWEENEY: Plays in cars. Look out for plays in hotel rooms, coming up. The dance, the dancers are really good at that my dance colleagues with dance and location and dance in the community. Bare Bait Dance Company that, you know, we, you saw that work that I did with them last year. And so, we're trying to break that down. But, I think one of the other things we have to break down is the split between, like I say, production and performance and scholarship. And as the theatre history professor, a lot of that teaching, at the kind of the more formal teaching, is done, is kind of my load, if you like. And I like to be able to give, to model for students, publication, publication opportunities, conference participation, especially for the graduate students, but for the undergraduates as well.

KINCH: Yeah.

SWEENEY: And so, the, because the, a lot of the publication and funding opportunities on campus come through the Humanities Institute, I like to be involved, so I can make those opportunities available to them.

KINCH: Yeah. And from the other side of that I'm, you know, from the outset, when we were building the mission of the Humanities Institute, we really did want to make sure that we reached out across campus and that we thought of the humanities in the broadest possible way. I mean, you know, it's not at all, you know, an exaggeration to say that there's a crisis in the humanities, culture wide and the United States, arts as well. But I think it's interesting, you know, that boundary, I have colleagues in the humanities that want to police that boundary between the humanities and the arts, because they feel like humanities oftentimes is kind of brought over on to the—indiscriminately lumped, you know, within, within the arts community. But we don't perform, you know, professors don't perform, professors don't draw audience, professors don't go out in the community and perform. And then there's colleagues, I think, on the other side of that, who say that, that, that's there's a kind of strength and reminding ourselves, that's the core of a culture, the core of a culture is the ways in which people who read think and reflect on the past and on its history, recreate that culture in the present, and that's what the arts do. I mean, that's one of the things they do in, in addition to creating new art, so important to have you involved.

SWEENEY: Yeah, I'm just like I say it's always a pleasure. I, I am reminded of so, so much. The job is so different here than it is, than it was, in Ireland. My job is such a different job. And it's, it's important to, what I try to do is bring the best of both worlds together in both in my scholarship, but also my teaching. And, to give, again to give the students and the graduate students practical skills, but also, you know, interpretive skills and critical thinking and hopefully then critical practice and critical writing.

KINCH: Okay, here’s the quick hitters. Morning or night person?

SWEENEY: Oh, night.

KINCH: Bitterroot River or Clark Fork.

SWEENEY: Clark Fork.

KINCH: Pintlers or Missions?

SWEENEY: Missions.

KINCH: Yellowstone or Glacier?

SWEENEY: Glacier.

KINCH: Winter or Summer.

SWEENEY: Oh, summer, summer, summer. I can’t stand it.

KINCH: What, what has been most exotic? I mean, is the winter the most exotic thing? What's been the most exotic thing about locating to this area?

SWEENEY: Yes, definitely the weather. Yeah. And the summer too, because the summers are so hot.

KINCH: Yeah.

SWEENEY: Yeah. I mean, it's just, it's huge. And I'll never get used.

KINCH: And with that, been lovely talking to you. Thanks so much for taking some time.

SWEENEY: Thank you.

KINCH: We hope you enjoyed your time floating on the river of knowledge with us. If you enjoyed this episode, give us a like on SoundCloud, and stop by the University of Montana Grad School website at www.umt.edu/grad, for more episodes and videos highlighting our amazing graduate students.