## MANY PEOPLE AND A FEW BOOKS

Traugott Lawler

I don't think there's much of a trajectory, but we'll see. I was born in Nyack, New York. My parents had just moved from the city, so essentially I was born to a family of New Yorkers, Irish New Yorkers. Three of my four grandparents were born in Ireland, and the fourth one, Traugott Keller, my mother's father from whom I have my first name, was born in New York shortly after his parents emigrated from southern Germany. (I feel so lucky that I'm Traugott Lawler, so I didn't feel an obligation to name my oldest son Traugott and so on – whereas my mother's older brother was Traugott Keller, Jr., and then he named his son, my cousin, Traugott Keller, and so on – they are now on the fifth. I'm sure if he eventually has a son, he will feel a strong need to name him Traugott Keller VI.) So I want to say a little about my parents, especially my mother. (What I want to talk about mostly is about the people, and especially the teachers, who influenced me.) My civil engineer father, John Lawler, who died when I was eleven, was a wonderful, generous man who has been a role model for me all my life, briefly though I knew him. It was my mom, though, Mary Keller Lawler, who first set me reading. She had been, herself, a brilliant student in school. She just aced school, and I think it was her aim to get her seven children also to ace school. We all of us more or less did, thanks a lot to our mom. She was a high school math teacher, though about the time that I came along she decided to just be a mother, and just teach us. She taught us math and English above all, but also French, a little Latin, and so on. So she was a significant figure in my life, made me care about learning, and care about getting things right. My mother was an utter stickler for getting things right. As we grew older we teased her unmercifully for being too particular (in grammar, for example), but a lot of it rubbed off on me.

I got sent to Regis High School. We lived in Valley Cottage, twenty-five miles up the Hudson from Manhattan, but I went to high school in Manhattan. It took about two hours to get there. There used to be the West Shore Division of the New York Central Railroad, running along the west side of the Hudson from Albany to Weehawken, New Jersey. I got on at Valley Cottage, took a ferry across the river from Weehawken to 42nd Street and 12th Avenue, then a couple of buses to get to Regis, which is at 84th

**Traugott Lawler,** Professor Emeritus of English, came to Yale as an instructor in English after completing his Ph.D. at Harvard in 1966. He was at Yale for six years, serving for most of that time as assistant director of graduate studies in English and teaching mostly Old English, English 25 (Major British Poets), and English 29 (European Masterpieces). In 1972 he went to Northwestern, where he taught Chaucer, Old English, a survey of English literature, and writing. He returned to Yale as professor of English in 1981, where he continued to teach Chaucer, both in seminar and lecture; designed a graduate course in *Piers Plowman* and taught it many times; and continued to teach English 25 and 29. He was master of Ezra Stiles College from 1986 to 1995 and acting master from 2002 to 2003. His publications include a book on *The Canterbury Tales* in 1980 and a number of essays on *Piers Plowman* from 1990 to the present.

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and Madison. It was totally worth it. Regis was and is a wonderful school. My father had gone there, my older brother was a senior when I was a freshman, and when I was a senior my next younger brother was a freshman. This was a strong tradition. Regis is a scholarship school for boys. Nobody pays tuition, and they get the cream of the boys from Catholic grammar schools all over the New York area. Mostly poor boys: I was one of the few people in my class at Regis whose parents had been to college; most of my classmates were the children of Irish, Italian, Polish, or German immigrants. Regis did well by all of us. I had wonderful Latin teachers. I often say to people that what made my career as a medievalist was my high school Latin. We all had to take four years. We all learned it well — okay, maybe not everybody. *I* learned it well. It has been a constant tool in my scholarship, and I got it at Regis High School.

I had a lot of good teachers at Regis, but the teacher I want to talk about most is William O'Leary. He was a Jesuit scholastic. The Jesuits take something like twelve years from when they enter the seminary to when they are ordained, and three of those they spend teaching. They are called scholastics, and addressed as "Mister." So this was Mr. O'Leary. He taught me history when I was a sophomore and English when I was a junior. On the first day of class in junior year he gave us a list of 120 novels and told us that for each of the six marking-periods in the school year, we were to read one novel on the list. We didn't have to write a book report, he said, just come to him and he would question us on the book. I didn't realize at the time – I've since realized as a teacher - that he was able to do that because he had read all the books, whereas teachers who require book reports don't have to have read the book. Anyway, we all quickly found out which were the shortest books on the list, and the word spread that the shortest of all was a novel by Booth Tarkington called *Monsieur Beaucaire*. It's very funny, a French novel by a writer from Indiana. I had read Penrod and Penrod and Sam, and I liked Booth Tarkington, but the big fact, surely, was that Monsieur Beaucaire was only 125 pages long. So I read it, and I went to Mr. O'Leary to be questioned, and he asked me a couple of questions in a bored tone, and then he said, "You're too gifted to be choosing a book because it's short. For next marking-period, read Pride and Prejudice." I love that. A teacher nowadays would be afraid the student would assert his rights and say, "Wait, you said we could read any one, you can't turn around and make me read the one you want me to read." But I just did what I was told. I was my mother's son.

And *Pride and Prejudice* totally blew me away. I had never imagined a book could be so good. I had read a lot growing up, but mostly boys' adventure stories, things like the Penrod books. This was the first novel written for adults by a good writer that I had ever read—and it turned me on to literature. That was a huge moment in my intellectual life. I've been a reader of good literature ever since I read *Pride and Prejudice*. I won't ever forget when I went to Mr. O'Leary this time, the difference in his tone. He was so eager to find that I liked *Pride and Prejudice*, and so happy when he saw that I did. We had a lively conversation about the book instead of the dull questions and

answers we had with the other one. And when we finally stopped, I said to him, "Tell me what to read next." He said, "Read *David Copperfield*." So I did that, and it started me on a long period of reading every Victorian novel under the sun. When I came to my Ph.D. oral at Harvard twelve years later, whereas all the other graduate students in English were so daunted at the thought of having to work up Victorian fiction, all those long novels, I had read them all and was in fine shape. What I'm really grateful to Mr. O'Leary for, though, was just making me see the joy of reading literature. It was clear in him and in his teaching, and in the fact that he had read all those books on the list, but especially in that conversation and the rest of the conversations we had over that year and the next as I read more Dickens and more Jane Austen, and added Trollope and Hardy. I forget what other books I read for the rest of the year for required reading, but it certainly had made me a lover of classic English novels in the way that I still am.

The next year I had another scholastic for English, David Carroll. He gave us a survey of English literature. I first read Chaucer with him. He tried to get me to read *Boswell's Life of Johnson* and write my term paper on it. I decided that was a little too much, and I actually returned to Dickens for that term paper. Mr. Carroll was more serious than Mr. O'Leary, less fun, but he had high standards and held us to them. He also taught me Greek in senior year, and I learned a lot of Homer from him. My education at Regis was extremely literary: I had four years of Latin, three years of Greek, two years of French, and four years of English. It certainly set me up for a career as a scholar in literature.

I then went to Holy Cross and had more Jesuits, including again some really superb teachers, but actually I think I got my most important learning at Holy Cross from my friends. It was different going to Holy Cross from Regis. I met boys from Long Island, from Boston, from Chicago, from California, boys who came from more cultured, better-educated families than my friends at Regis. I met boys who loved opera, loved classical music in general, and who read for fun not just novels but poetry. In short, from my friends at Holy Cross I got the notion of what it might be like to think of yourself as an intellectual. The major influence on me was a man some of you here must have known, Michael O'Loughlin, who went on to get his Ph.D. in English at Yale and taught in the Yale English department for ten years, from 1963 to 1973. Michael and I were classmates and close friends at Holy Cross, and I owe more to him than to anyone else I have ever known. Until he died a few years ago, he remained the most intelligent person I've ever known – and that he cared for me, that he respected my opinions, meant the world to me. Near the end of our junior year, Michael was made editor of our literary magazine for senior year, as we all expected. He then shocked me by asking me to be managing editor-"But," he said to me, "of course you're going to have to write; you realize that." So I spent a lot of my senior year at Holy Cross writing short stories and writing poems as well as judging and editing the work of others, and all that was a good thing for me, and one more benefit at Holy Cross of my friendship with Michael O'Loughlin.

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But I also have to talk about Father Thomas Grace. Holy Cross in 1954 had a quite old-fashioned Jesuit system. You had to decide at the start whether you wanted to get a B.S. or a B.A., and if you wanted a B.A. you had to do Latin, no problem for me with four years already under my belt. And you had to choose either the math track or the Greek track, so I of course took the Greek track. Thus my education in my first two years at Holy Cross was just an extension of my education from Regis: more Greek, more Latin, more English, more history, more French. The same stuff, just on a more advanced level. In Greek, Plato, then Demosthenes, then Sophocles and Euripides. I missed Homer, who is still my favorite Greek author. In Latin there was more Vergil, but also Ovid, Catullus, and Horace. I fell in love with Horace. We read all the *Odes* in freshman year, and then in sophomore year I had Father Harry Bean for both Latin and English. Father Bean loved satire. In Latin we read Juvenal and a lot of Horace's satires, and in English we read Pope and Swift and various other satirists, and in the process Father Bean gave me an abiding love for comic and satiric literature.

But back to Father Grace. At the end of sophomore year you finally got to choose a major and take some electives. I wanted to major in English. The word was that the English department wasn't so good, but I had decided that English was what I loved. I was going to go to law school, and I thought I could do what I loved and also get a good preparation for law school. So I chose to major in English, so-so teachers or not. And then I got to school in the fall to find that there was a new chairman of the English department, Father Thomas Grace. He had just come from Oxford and he was going to teach a course in Chaucer. So, I took it; Mike O'Loughlin took it; all my friends in my year and the year above me who regarded themselves as serious English majors took Father Grace's course in Chaucer. Some of them, Michael especially, already had a clear understanding of themselves, but this course really turned me around. Let me incidentally say that in high school I thought of myself as an athlete – an athlete who got good grades, but above all an athlete. I was a varsity basketball player. I had hoped to play varsity basketball at Holy Cross, even though they had championship teams and brilliant players like Bob Cousy, Togo Palazzi, and Tom Heinsohn, who was a junior when I arrived. Well, I lasted two months on the freshman team before I realized that I wasn't going to go anywhere, and decided to quit the team and do some other things. I still loved sports and played loads of intramurals, but I also had a hankering for leadership. I had been vice president of the senior class at Regis, and I thought I wanted to follow the course of student government, so I ran for president of the sophomore class and was elected. But in the course of that year and the next, I came to see that I wasn't really cut out for that, and the combination of realizing that I wasn't a super athlete, and realizing that I wasn't a very good president because I didn't after all like the work, and the thrill that I discovered at starting a major in English, made me finally realize that I cared most about what I was learning. I was not simply getting good grades, not simply doing my homework; rather, now in my junior year I experienced a real revolution of caring for the work, caring especially for Chaucer, and caring for him because Father Grace was such a stimulating teacher and was so clearly

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involved in his work. And then I had an epiphany. We had to write a term paper, and for it we had to read scholarship. So I'm reading article after article on "The Prioress's Tale," my chosen subject, and suddenly I wonder: who are these people writing these things? Oh, I get it, I see. These are college teachers of English. I could do that. I could write papers on literature for the rest of my life, just as I like to do. By the end of that semester, I had ditched the idea of being a lawyer: I was sure I wanted to be a college English teacher, and like Father Grace a specialist in Middle English.

Anyway, that's what Father Grace did for me: he gave me a career. I was at Holy Cross on a Naval ROTC scholarship, so when I graduated I had three years to do in the Marine Corps. First, three days after graduation, Peggy and I got married; many of you know Peggy. We spent those three years first at Quantico and then at Camp Pendleton in California. I did a lot of reading while I was in the Marine Corps, but even more, I did a lot of growing up. I went in thinking that the only value I was going to be able to find in this three-year hiatus from what I really want to do in life was the time I could spend reading. But that turned out not to be the value at all. I learned to pay attention to other people. Above all, I learned that the right way to live is to do the job given to you right now, not look past it because the future is more interesting. When that became clear to me – which was when I left basic officers' school and went to Camp Pendleton and had a platoon of Marines to be in charge of – I became a much better officer, and became more truly an adult. Later, when I was a college master, in speaking at graduation, I always figured out a way to tell the graduates the same thing, that even if they know that what they are about to do is not going to be their life's work, they still should do it as well as they can. That was a crucial lesson for me, and I always treasure my three years in the Marine Corps for it. I treasure them also as the only time in my life I've spent not connected with a school.

I went to the University of Wisconsin, but I only stayed a year. My Old English teacher, Richard Ringler, had just come from Harvard, and I took so to Old English class that one day in October he said to me, "You should go to Harvard." I had a Danforth Fellowship, and didn't realize how easy it would be to transfer, but that's what I did. I took away from Wisconsin not only some lifelong friends and my first experience of the Midwest, but two terrific courses in Old English, the first from Richard Ringler and the second from Frederic Cassidy; as Fred Robinson knows, I've always hung on to my love for Old English. All through the eighties and nineties, whenever Fred would go on leave, I'd get to teach Old English, and it's thanks to those good courses I had at Wisconsin. And then there was Madeleine Doran. I took a wonderful course from her on Elizabethan rhetoric and style, which was an introduction to me to thinking about literature in terms of the theory about it written by contemporaries. Not something that I've ultimately cared a lot about, but certainly something that I invested a lot of effort in early, and Madeleine Doran was an extremely stimulating thinker and teacher of such ideas in that course. She had high standards, and I gained confidence when it seemed to me that I had earned her good opinion.

So I transferred to Harvard. I have already spoken of all I learned from my friends when I was in college. Well, I made a lot of good friends at both Wisconsin and Harvard, and yet it seems to me that in those schools I learned from my teachers, not from my friends. It's odd to reflect that one of the major experiences of school is learning from your friends, and yet it's the teachers that I remember from graduate school. At Harvard that means especially Morton Bloomfield. I still wanted to specialize in Middle English, and I took his course in Piers Plowman in my first semester at Harvard. That was the beginning of my lifelong love of that poem, and also of a lifelong admiration for Morton Bloomfield. He was such a serious scholar. He insisted on the importance of knowing the culture that literature came out of. He was schooled in thinkers such as St. Bernard and St. Thomas Aquinas. He simply knew the Latin background of English literature and gave me an abiding realization of the importance of it, though I can't say I have gained anything like the acquaintance with it that he himself had. He taught me something else, too. With his guidance I chose to do a dissertation on John of Garland, an Englishman who taught literature at the University of Paris in the thirteenth century. John of Garland had written one of these theoretical books, the Parisiana Poetria, "Poetry as it is Taught at Paris," and there was an edition of it, but not a very good one. My thesis was simply to edit that from manuscript and translate it and annotate it. Well, it got to be February or March of 1966 – I had come to Harvard in 1962 – and I went to Mr. Bloomfield and said, "I've made pretty good progress, and I actually could finish by the deadline of April 15 and graduate in June if I can leave out this part at the end about rhymed poetry, the ars rhythmica – and I'd really like to finish." He was so wonderful. He said, "Traugott, you have three children. You have a job at Yale and you'd be much better off if you went there with your degree finished – so that's a good idea. Put that part aside. Get your degree, and before you publish this as a book, you can do the ars rhythmica." He was so accommodating, and thought of the issue completely in terms of my situation as a husband and father. I should have known him well enough by this time, but somehow I was still expecting that he would take a rigorously scholarly attitude and say, "Well, no, you have to edit the whole thing." I've tried never to forget that in how I treat my own students.

By the time I finished at Harvard, I clearly thought of myself as a philologist and a humanist. Philology and the humanities, or humanistic study, were what I thought I was doing, and I feel I haven't veered from that, although there were various temptations. So I came to Yale to teach. As Bernie Lytton said when he introduced me, I came to Yale twice. I first came in 1966, straight from graduate school, one of nine new instructors in the Yale English department. It was a heady time to come to Yale. English was the biggest major. It was a heady time to get out of graduate school, so easy to get jobs. Most of us in this room got out of graduate school about the same time; you remember how education was expanding and we thought it would just continue to expand. In any case, I lucked into an offer from Yale, and I came here. It was like going to graduate school again. The Yale English department was very different from the

Harvard English department, much more interested in the New Criticism, a little less interested in the historical matrix of literature; and without abandoning my interest in that, I learned to care for the close reading that was the hallmark of the study of literature at Yale. Marie Borroff, Talbot Donaldson, and John Pope were the three senior medievalists. All of them were extremely kind to me; I learned a great deal from them, and I got to teach Old English with John Pope a number of times. It was still required of graduate students. We had so many graduate students in the late sixties that John Pope had three sections of Old English, he and two instructors, and we would rotate around the sections and frequently meet with each other, so it was as if I got to take Old English from him as well as from my teachers at Wisconsin and William Alford at Harvard. In the meantime, I was teaching English 125 (then called 25); that was my first experience of teaching Chaucer, and to teach it from Talbot Donaldson's textbook in a department where Talbot was my colleague was of immense value to me; I have the fondest memories of Talbot Donaldson. People like Bill Wimsatt and Cleanth Brooks, too; everyone was so gracious and so easy to talk to that I learned a whole lot from the senior faculty in my six years as an assistant professor here, and of course also from the colleagues of my own age. Above all, Michael O'Loughlin once again - I was happily back with him. The other person who meant so much to me was Bart Giamatti, whom, of course, many of you knew well. Bart and I arrived together. He had studied at Yale, of course, but went off to teach at Princeton and came back in 1966, so we both started our teaching career at Yale in the same year, and we took to each other; we were very good friends, as he and Michael were. I still miss him, still resent that he died so young. I learned a lot about teaching from both of them.

Two other people I want to mention briefly. The first is Richard Sylvester, who did Renaissance literature and was in charge of the Thomas More project. He taught me a lot about editing. He was in charge of the Yale Studies in English and accepted my edition of John of Garland (when I had finished it) for that series. It was read for the Yale Press by Neil Ker, the great British medievalist who was here for a year because he wanted to look at all the manuscripts containing English in the Beinecke Library. He recommended publication, but he took me aside and gave me a little paleography course, pointing out various things I had missed in my manuscripts. He was extremely generous and useful to me. And it was in these years at Yale that I had the first experience of learning from my students. I had awfully good students in those years. I particularly remember Donald Elliott, who went on to study, and then teach, in the Yale Law School and was the lawyer for the Environmental Protection Agency; and Reed Hundt, who also went on to Yale Law School and was chair of the FCC under President Clinton. Both of them were in my English 25 class, superior, challenging students and a joy to know, outside of class and in it.

Here is how I knew them so well: it's a good Yale story. As soon as I came, I was made a fellow of Davenport College. My first two years, English 25 was taught in the colleges. There were two sections in every college, and I taught both sections in

Davenport for those two years. So I would see my students in the dining hall, and often eat with them, and after I taught them, they were still there, and so I made these longtime friendships with my students from English 25. For me as a young teacher the college system at Yale worked wonderfully, and then of course it worked even better later when I became a college master.

Well, it was a wonderful six years but they didn't tenure me; luckily, though, the bottom hadn't yet fallen out of the job market. I got a job very quickly: ten days after I was told that I wasn't going to be promoted, I had a job at Northwestern. So I went there as associate professor in 1972. I was there for nine years, and that was another good experience. It was great for Peggy and me to come back to the Midwest and get to know it, and it was especially a great place for our children to grow up in. Our oldest son still lives in Chicago, and so my being at Northwestern has given a permanent Midwestern dimension to our family life. Gerald Graff, a good literary theorist who has written revealingly about how his early love of sports finally made him an intellectual, was my colleague and good friend. (I should have had him on my Ezra Stiles golf team. He's a way better golfer than I am.) So we made good friends over that, but Gerry was also constantly after me to "examine my presuppositions." He made me think harder about what the theoretical basis of my ideas about literature was. I also got to teach graduate students Middle English literature for the first time. I was director of graduate studies in the English department for most of the time I was at Northwestern, and so I was heavily involved in graduate teaching, which was very valuable for me. It makes you grow up to suddenly be teaching graduate students. I taught various courses, several involving Chaucer, and I taught Piers Plowman a couple of times, going back to that love that had started in graduate school in Morton Bloomfield's seminar. And I took a teaching idea from that seminar too. At the end of the semester, we had a couple of extra meetings after we'd written our term papers. Everyone read everyone else's paper, and we discussed them in the extra meetings. I thought that was good; in particular, I liked it that the research we each did had value for the others. So I did it in my courses. I didn't want people criticizing each other's papers, though, so I always insisted that we were talking about the subject of the paper rather than the paper itself, and that worked pretty well. But I added something to Morton Bloomfield's method: I would write a paper myself, and its subject was discussed too. In every graduate seminar I have ever taught, I've written a paper, given it to my students to read and comment on, and heard their discussion of its subject. One of them, for a course in Chaucer, became the germ of a book I published on The Canterbury Tales in 1981, and in fact most of the stuff I've done, including many of the essays that I've published on Piers Plowman since I came back to Yale, has also come out of those seminar papers. In short, growing up to teach graduate students something other than Beginning Old English was a huge advance for me.

Also during my time at Northwestern, somewhere before I wrote that paper that became the germ of my book, I read Jill Mann's *Chaucer and Medieval Estates Satire*,

a book that turned around my understanding of Chaucer. When I had studied Chaucer at Holy Cross with Father Grace, his favorite book on The Canterbury Tales was Robert Lumiansky's Of Sondry Folk. Lumiansky argued that the whole interest in The Canterbury Tales lay in the presentation of the tellers of the tales, in the tales as dramatic characterizations of the tellers. That was an appealing idea, almost universally accepted in the 1950s – that's how I learned to read Chaucer. When I first taught Chaucer here at Yale, I treated *The Canterbury Tales* in that way. But two books changed me. One was D. W. Robertson's A Preface to Chaucer, in which he argued that it all came out of Saint Augustine, that all medieval literature was Christian and was designed to promote charity. That was a totally different approach to *The Canterbury Tales*, focusing on the tales as embodiments of ideas rather than embodiments of the characters of the tellers. I never loved Robertson's book. It was full of really good information, and very challenging, but I couldn't quite buy Robertson's central idea, or his readings of individual poems – but then I read Jill Mann's Chaucer and Medieval Estates Satire. She shows you that both The Canterbury Tales and Piers Plowman belong to a genre that she named Estates Satire: that is, satire focused on people's jobs, on treating people with occupational stereotypes. I found it a much better antidote to Lumiansky than Robertson was. It completely changed my understanding of The Canterbury Tales. I called the book I wrote The One and the Many in the Canterbury Tales and argued that the poem was both individual (as Lumiansky thought) and general (as Robertson and Mann thought). By "the one," I meant all the aspects of *The Canterbury Tales* that drive toward generalization, toward seeing the characters in the tales, as well as the characters on the pilgrimage, as representative of their gender or their job; by "the many," I meant to grant a simultaneous emphasis on multiplicity, on the individuality that Lumiansky had so insisted on. I thought of my book as mediating between those two opposite attitudes toward The Canterbury Tales.

Well, people at Yale liked it, and Fred Robinson especially liked it, and one day, out of the blue, I got a phone call inviting me to come back to Yale. That was pretty exciting. Northwestern was very good for me. It was good to be in a new atmosphere. I had lots of new ideas. It was very bracing and refreshing — and yet I have to say that I always missed Yale. I missed especially that close relation of faculty and students, and eventually I realized also that the big difference between Northwestern and Yale was this, that Northwestern has a lot of pre-professional schools: a very famous school of speech, a technological institute, a school of journalism. The College of Arts and Sciences was a kind of tiny enclave surrounded by what seemed like the real business of undergraduate education at Northwestern, which was the pre-professional schools. I realized that what I missed was that Yale was *all* a college of arts and sciences. It was the whole enterprise, and when I came back here in 1981 I was particularly glad to be back where the study of the humanities was at the center of what people were doing.

I don't have too much more to say. In the twenty-four years between 1981 and when I retired in 2005, I did a lot more teaching of Chaucer, and in 1987 I began to

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teach a regular graduate course in *Piers Plowman* and that has become finally my favorite poem, my favorite poem to think about and write about. I will mention briefly two research projects that I've been involved in for a long time at Yale, but first I want to talk about being a college master.

I went to Harvard Graduate School, and Harvard has this inferior system to ours, but they do have a system, and a lot of my friends were tutors in the houses. I did some teaching at Harvard, but just in the classroom as a TA, not as a tutor. Still, that was my first contact with a residential college system, and I admired it and thought that would be something I'd like to be involved in. Then I came here and immediately I was made a fellow of Davenport. Horace Taft was master of Davenport, a wonderful master, wonderful guy. And we had a lively fellowship. I tried never to miss the weekly meeting. I have talked about teaching English 25 in the college, so in my six years as an instructor and assistant professor here, I was totally involved in Davenport College. I also played intramural sports for them. And I thought, man, I'd love to be a college master. I was actually a master at Northwestern, which has a small-scale residential college system, but I didn't live there so it wasn't really quite as intense an experience. I don't know how many hours it was after I got my phone call inviting me to come back to Yale that the thought came, "Oh. Maybe I can become a master." So, five years after I came back, in the fall of 1985, I went to Bart Giamatti and said, "I would like you to make me a college master." And right away he said, "I need two acting masters next year. I'll let you do that right now and then you can see if you like it." I said, "I know I'm going to like it. So, no, I don't want to be an acting master. I know you need a permanent master at both Pierson and Ezra Stiles. I want you to consider me for one of them." I doubt many others have done that, asked to be master instead of having their arm twisted, but to me, the residential colleges are so deep a part of Yale, and so much the best part of Yale, that from the very beginning I wanted to be a master – and I wasn't disappointed.

I remember when Kai Erikson spoke in this series and in the question period afterward, I said, "You barely mentioned being a college master. Wasn't that a big part of your experience?" He said, "Well, yes, but not of my intellectual experience." But I have to say that being master was not just a major part of my experience as a human being, but as an intellectual experience, too. It made me, for one thing, a much more understanding teacher. You know how cranky we teachers can get if we don't think students are spending enough time working on our course. Being a master made me see how many other things students have going on in their lives, and made me grateful if they could find at least a little time for what I was trying to teach them. It gave me a terrific respect for all the skills and abilities that Yale students have that you just don't see as a teacher. And, of course, it forced me to be interested in the interests of every student in the college, so I learned lots more than I ever supposed I would. You may have noticed that I had virtually no science in my education, but I learned a lot about the sciences from students in Ezra Stiles, and also about the social sciences, about

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history. I came to have the highest regard for the Yale History department from talking to students and hearing about the good courses they were taking, or the good senior essays they were writing. So besides being a wonderful human experience, suddenly having four hundred children instead of four, it was also an expansion of my mind.

I have worked on two large projects since I came to Yale. One of them is *The Book* of Wicked Wives. It gives my wife no end of pleasure to know that her husband is involved in The Book of Wicked Wives. The Wife of Bath in her prologue talks about her five husbands. The fifth, Jankyn, is half her age: he's come from Oxford and all he cares about is antifeminist literature. He has a book that she calls his Book of Wicked Wives, from which he reads to her every night until she throws it in the fire. Robert Pratt was a wonderful Chaucerian who taught at Illinois and Penn for many years, who had gotten his Ph.D. here at Yale under Karl Young. Karl Young got the idea of publishing The Book of Wicked Wives. He gathered copies of all the manuscripts that had the three major texts in Jankyn's book, but he died in 1943 without finishing it, so Pratt took it over. In 1981 he turned it over to me. I invited Ralph Hanna to help me on it. In 1997, that is, sixteen years later, and more than sixty after Young started on the project, we published our first volume, an edition and translation of those three major texts. And only two weeks ago, I sent the second volume to the publisher: editions and translations of seven commentaries on one of those texts, Walter Map's Dissuasio Valerii, largely my work, since the first volume was largely Ralph's. So it's been a really long project of editing something of cultural interest, though, of course, it's a little bit embarrassing to think that I'm editing all this sharp antifeminism. But the wonderful thing about the commentaries is that three out of the seven take issue with the text, and so are defenses of women from the Middle Ages, not unique but hardly common either, and I'm very proud to be bringing them out to the world. So, I'm proud of that work, though basically I'm glad it's finally over.

In about 1987 I was invited to be part of a commentary on *Piers Plowman*. *Piers Plowman* is a very complex poem, it's long, it's in three versions. This is an ambitious program to produce a very complete annotation of the whole poem in all its versions. So I started out in '87 and it's not done yet, but I have turned to it fully now. You know, like many of us, I just go to work every day. When I retired, I said it was in order to get my work done. Now at last the first of my projects is done, and I look forward to getting the other one done. I have actually done plenty. I have published nine essays on *Piers Plowman* since I started this. When I realize something is far too complex to write a note on, I write an essay, and then in my note I can just say, see Lawler 2010, see Lawler 2009, and so on. So, I've done a lot of that and I'm certainly very proud of those essays, as well as my book on *The Canterbury Tales*.

I'm going to finish up. Oh, I need to say this. When I came back to Yale, it was clear to me that certain movements in literary study, especially deconstruction and feminist criticism, were much more on people's minds in the English department and at Yale in general than they had been at Northwestern, despite Gerry Graff. I was

instinctively opposed to deconstruction, but I finally realized that instead of just opposing it, I had to think about it. Then in 1986 my friend Peggy Knapp, who taught Chaucer at Carnegie Mellon University, wrote to me to say that she wanted to propose a debate at the upcoming Chaucer conference: she wanted to argue in favor of using deconstruction as a way of reading Chaucer; would I be willing to take the other side? I said, "Sure," and it forced me to learn a lot about deconstruction, and think even harder about it, and eventually what I said at that conference in reply to Peggy Knapp was published. Maybe ten years later, a graduate student I knew said to me that my little essay on deconstructing Chaucer had a cult following among graduate students because they regarded it as the clearest explanation of deconstruction they had ever read. I hope they read through to the end, though, where I concluded that this finally isn't the best way to read Chaucer. So anyway, I have to say that coming to Yale certainly expanded my intellectual horizons but never quite changed me. I am still a philologist, still above all a close reader of literature. Oh, I forgot to mention another book that was of immense importance to me, which I first read when I came to Yale in 1966: Northrop Frye's Anatomy of Criticism. It taught me to think in terms of literary genre and made me ready to respond so positively to Jill Mann's book. It helped me become more of a close reader of literature, less of a historian of ideas, than my training at Wisconsin and Harvard had made me. It has pretty much stayed that way, but I have also stayed committed as deeply as ever to the human value of the study of literature. I simply think that the way to go about it is to read as carefully as you can. And I'm also committed to clear writing. Was there a trajectory? I guess maybe sort of a mild one. To me it's mostly a kind of straight line, though: I don't feel as if I'm too much different a reader than I was when I got out of college, say. Thanks for listening.

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