"I LEARN BY GOING WHERE I HAVE TO GO"[1]

Richard Brodhead

I've had the chance to listen to hundreds of students confide their hopes and uncertainties about charting a course in life. I have counseled as well as I knew how, but in ways I was the last person they should be talking to. For I never doubted my trajectory: there never was a time when I did not know what I wanted to be. When I was little, I loved to learn things: my idea of a good Christmas present was a book of flags I could memorize. When it came time to go to school, that place suited me to a tee. There were many things I was not good at in my youth, but school always came easily. School is where I was at home.

When I was thirteen my parents sent me away to school, partly out of class aspiration perhaps, but largely because they recognized my peculiarity and wanted to give me as much education as they could. I did not love Andover's hierarchies of preppy cool or athleticism, but I had a great experience of learning with a succession of memorable teachers. The best shared an incisive intellect delivered with a mix of droll irony and sincerity that commanded your full attention: when they talked, everything became more interesting and you felt fully awake. In their presence I came to the idea that I wanted to be a teacher, and from age fifteen, I never considered another career.

If you were reasonably smart at my school, Harvard or Yale is where you went next: 100 of the 225 students in the Andover Class of 1964 went to one or the other. I thought I'd like Yale as the less pretentious of the two. But although I did not know this when I chose a college, Yale was in the middle of a transformation of which I was the inadvertent beneficiary. A faculty committee in the early '60s had decided that Yale's tight adherence to the elite boarding school model was causing it to fall behind Harvard and even Princeton in academic prowess, and the university resolved to make itself a more intellectual place. In the last years of the Griswold presidency and the first years of Kingman Brewster's, this led to a more professional, less clubby approach to faculty hiring and a changed profile for student recruitment. When admissions officers went

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Richard Brodhead received his undergraduate and Ph.D. degrees from Yale in 1968 and 1972. He joined the Yale faculty in that year and was later named the A. Bartlett Giamatti Professor of English. He also served for eleven years as dean of Yale College. A scholar of American literature and culture, he taught widely in the fields of English and American studies and wrote and edited more than a dozen books, including *Cultures of Letters: Scenes of Reading and Writing in Nineteenth-Century America* and *The Journals of Charles W. Chesnutt.* He also taught high school teachers for many summers at the Bread Loaf School of English in Middlebury. After forty years at Yale, Brodhead left in 2004 to become president of Duke, where he served until 2017. His writings on higher education have been collected in two books, *The Good of This Place* (2004) and *Speaking of Duke* (2017). For his national role in higher education, he was given the Academic Leadership Award from the Carnegie Corporation of New York.

to work at the time I applied, they were instructed to give more weight to intellectual aptitude and less to gentlemanly manner. In consequence, mine was just the second Yale class to include more students from public than from private schools.

Everything still looked like Old Yale when I got here. The student body was still all male and clad in coats and ties. But there was a difference, and I felt it. In Directed Studies I was in class with the kind of people I'd always hoped to be surrounded with: real smarties, fellows active of mind and tongue, people who read great books without doubting that their own thoughts were worth sharing too. It did not take three weeks to conclude that this was where I really belonged: I still wanted to be a teacher, but now, in a university. But a professor of what? Directed Studies gave us the likes of Alvin Kernan in English, George Kubler in History of Art, or Robert Jackson in Slavic Literature. I learned from them, but none was the key to turn my lock.

In sophomore year I took a course on nineteenth-century American literature from R.W.B. Lewis and, as they say in Faulkner, Something Happened. Lewis was a captivating figure. I can see him onstage in W.L. Harkness with his fascinating overabundance of initials, his white hair combed back in a lionlike mane, and his reputation for being friends with famous authors and painters — a man of letters, a new thing for me. Under his direction, we read books and authors whose like I had never encountered: those enigmatic Hawthorne tales of people who suddenly succumb to freaky but irreversible compulsions; the flowing lines and lapping rhythms of Whitman's poetry; *The Portrait of a Lady, The Education of Henry Adams, Pudd'nhead Wilson*. Under the sway of this teacher and these mesmerizing texts, my ambition clarified itself. Now I meant to be an English professor, administering the mysteries of this uncannily charged domain.

Here too I felt the force of historical developments I was unaware of as such. Having been born in 1947, my youth coincided with the postwar boom of American higher education, which vastly expanded college opportunity while creating the research university as we know it. As you probably know, Vannevar Bush's *Endless Frontier* made the case for scientific research as a national priority to be federally funded at universities where judgments of research projects would remain free of federal control. We do not often remember this fact, but the postwar reenvisioning of the university made a correspondingly critical national priority of the academic humanities, understood as nurturers of cultural value, critical thinking, and the individual quest for meaning.

I arrived at college in an unparalleled age of confidence and expansion for the humanities. To the joy of some and the dismay of others, Yale has always been known as a humanities university, and in the 1960s English had pride of place. When this field advanced from the mix of belles lettres and Germanic philology that had characterized it before World War II, Yale professors led in theorizing literature as a distinct body of knowledge requiring distinctive methods to unlock it. In this approach, literature was a site of existential meaning only accessible through close reading, scrupulous attention to the play of language within the text. We've all learned to mock the

so-called New Criticism, but it's hard to exaggerate how it transformed the landscape of literary study, opening it to an enormous public and giving it intellectual heft, while broadcasting Yale as such study's mother ship.

So I had come to the echt humanities department of the echt humanities university at the high-water mark of the American valuation of the humanities. Of course these forces shaped my trajectory. But as an undergraduate, I just felt the magic of it. No historian could guess what it was like to have Harold Bloom for a seminar in my junior year—Bloom, whose way of reading fit no paradigm except one he generated, encountered at the exact moment when he stepped beyond the nineteenth-century Romantics to teach the poetry of Yeats and Wallace Stevens. I remember our first class. Bloom's father had just died. He was the first teacher I had who spoke of personal experience or death. Bloom was wearing a stretched-out orange sweater, and he had begun reading from the moving Conclusion to Walter Pater's *The Renaissance.* While continuing to recite (he knew this, like all texts, by heart), Bloom began to remove the sweater. But it got stuck as it passed over his head, so we could hear oracular utterances about life's irredeemable evanescence continue to come from out of a gyrating mass of wool until, the garment subdued at last, Bloom pronounced: "That is the most profound thing that was ever written."

Yeats and Stevens remain among my most treasured writers, and they remain, for me, wisdom writers as much as poets. This is a direct debt I bear to Bloom, but the point is a larger one. It's hard to feel the power of literary works all by ourselves. We need teachers to show us how to love them, how to invest them with the energies of our experience until the text can speak words for us we could not find on our own.

Since Yale was agreed to have the number one English department, it seemed obvious that I should stay at Yale for graduate study. I was expecting more of the same, but graduate school proved to be profoundly different, in ways both good and bad. More than fifty students entered my graduate class in English—the department had expected forty and had assumed there would be some attrition due to the Vietnam War. So the graduate seminars were all grossly overcrowded. Plus, what a product of Yale's great undergraduate teaching department could scarcely believe, teaching as I knew it was barely attempted in most classes. Brilliant faculty assigned students to give oral reports on static subjects, and we listened nodding until the class was done. Let me tip my hat to James McIntosh as the one true teacher I had in graduate school.

On the other hand, here were new friends the likes of whom I'd never known. I now had women classmates for the first time since eighth grade, and one of them, Cynthia Degnan, became the great new fact of my life. We became seriously involved in the spring of 1969, so academics were no longer exactly top of mind. The elations of courtship were amplified by other disruptive new realities. The civil rights movement and the Vietnam War had formed a jarring undersong to my college career. In the spring and summer of my last year, we lived through the Tet offensive, the assassinations of Martin Luther King, then Bobby Kennedy, and the horrors of the Democratic

Convention in Chicago. By spring 1970, ordinary business had halted at American universities, preempted by radical questioning of the familiar world whose outcome no one could confidently predict. On another front, my brother had been in a car accident at the end of my freshman year that left him paralyzed from the neck down. This threw my family into psychic turmoil that, by 1970, brought this loved group to the verge of breakdown.

Everything was crazy, but somehow everything was manageable with some discipline and focus. This city's brush with the specter of revolution on May Day, the Kent State shootings, my Ph.D. orals, and our wedding took place within a few short weeks in 1970. That fall I got my first taste of teaching, as a TA in Al Kernan's superb lecture course on Shakespeare. I found this just as fulfilling and joy-inducing as I had anticipated. Circling back to American literature, I cobbled together some ideas about Hawthorne and Melville as the basis for a dissertation, and by the summer of 1972 I finished the degree.

As you will remember, the 1970 student revolution was followed not by the promised utopia but by what could be called the Era of Bad Feeling—and then by an unexpected and most unwelcome guest, an economic downturn. My classmates and I paid little heed to the rise of inflation driven by the Vietnam War, or the cratering of university endowments after an ill-considered investment scheme in the late '60s, or the unforeseen costs of Yale's hastily announced, minimally planned coeducation, or the further costs the new need-blind admissions policy imposed when coupled with another absolutely key commitment of this time, affirmative outreach to underrepresented minorities. The cumulative result was that both inside the university and out, the long prosperity of the postwar period was going away fast. Coming onto the market in 1972, we could see the first hints of the possibility that forty-plus new Yale Ph.D.s in English would not always be able to count on tenure-track jobs at top institutions. (Ten years later, Yale was admitting a class of eight or ten, and finding jobs was harder than ever.) Yale was having a hiring freeze when I applied for jobs, but since the English department needed to teach virtually every freshman in a small seminar with a ladder-faculty instructor, it could always make the case for junior lines. And so it came to pass that in January 1972, during a hiring freeze, I was offered a job as assistant professor at Yale.

You might have thought I would have had enough of Yale by now. I did have an offer from Berkeley, the other great English department of this time. But in truth, I didn't seriously consider it. Moving three thousand miles away from my very needy family would have been an act of unforgivable treachery, so that was one reason. Another is that I did not want to leave. No graduate student would have been caught dead admitting to positive feelings for an institution at that time, but I knew that Yale would be a great place to do what I cared about, so I stayed.

The Yale I joined as a faculty member was wonderfully different from the one I had graduated from four short years before. The transformation of the student body

that had begun when I entered had by now progressed much further: the dependence on feeder schools and their academic culture had been almost totally disrupted by the early 1970s. As for coeducation, that was just the best. I never attended a Yale College that included women students, but I never taught at a Yale College without women students. They brought an intellectual vitality that made study more serious and more fun for everyone. At the same time, in many ways, the Yale I loved remained almost mystically preserved. Whatever upheavals authority had suffered elsewhere, in freshman English the literary canon reigned in undimmed glory. Chaucer, Spenser, Milton, Wordsworth: they were now mine to teach, and I learned that preparing works for class discussion was the very best way to activate the power of a literary text. Yale's residual humanistic culture was largely still in place as well. On my way into my first class as a professor, Richard B. Sewall grabbed my coat sleeve, drew me out into the hall, and said: "Come 'ere, come 'ere, I have something to tell you. Now, don't be afraid to say something profound!"

Teaching loads were heavy for junior faculty, but I was happy as can be. I was doing work I loved with students who repaid any amount of effort. When I wanted to learn a new body of material, I'd invent a new course with new student partners. The University of Chicago published my revised dissertation, so I had a book. In my third summer I was invited to teach at Middlebury's Bread Loaf School of English, where many a Yale luminary (most recently, Bart Giamatti) had taught before. Things were going great! In spring of 1976 I even offered my first lecture course, on nineteenth-century American literature. So I was R.W.B. Lewis now, I was the R.W.B. Lewis of latter days: I was twenty-eight and had already become the furthest thing I could imagine ten years before.

But under this smiling surface, my way of engaging my profession was becoming seriously problematic. Cindy and I spent the 1976–77 academic year on sabbatical in London, where an American assistant professor's salary was still a princely sum. This was glorious, as long as I didn't think about the work I was supposed to be doing. As the Life of Dick was advancing step by charmed step post-1970, literary study had been undergoing a profound shift. Theory, the shorthand name for the successor to humanism-cum-close reading as bearer of intellectual prestige, was centered at Yale; so, far from threatening the dominance of my department, theory renewed Yale's title for another decade or more. The trouble was, I felt no call to work in these new styles, yet could scarcely defend myself from their internalized judgments. I recall the day a senior colleague said of a friend's work that it was "insufficiently theorized." You mean, there's now a whole new way one can be insufficient?

So I was now sailing against a stiff wind; and worse, the undeniable power of new methods exposed the work I was attempting as riddled with naive assumptions. I had a fellowship to write a study of American literary realism. The first two books I read on arriving in London were Roland Barthes's *S/Z* and Jonathan Culler's *Structuralist Poetics*. Too bad for me! Already I had learned that the literary relations to reality I was set to discuss were actually textual effects activated by reading technologies.

I soldiered on, but it was dismaying to find my work so thin that it had to be abandoned. I returned from leave to a Yale full of challenges. The economic situation grew abysmal as stagflation took hold. On campus, deferred maintenance was making Yale a kind of gothic slum. The academic job market had virtually gone away, especially for humanists. Theory was ever more dominant, heaping scorn on beliefs that had been foundational to my engagement with my field: the idea that authors, not critics, were the interesting ones; the idea that literature is a privileged bearer of deep understanding of the human lot.

With tenure an ever straiter gate and no real project in hand, I threw myself into the part of the profession I knew I was good at, the teaching end. I even went back to Bread Loaf in summers, a paradise of teaching where scholarly expectations could be temporarily put to sleep. But this only postponed what came ever clearer: I had never faced the fact that my profession was a structured career with its own expectations I would be judged by, not just a fantasia on my personal desires. As the tenure clock ticked ominously in winter 1978, I got an invitation to lecture at Boston University. In short order I learned that I was being offered tenure and the chance to lead their American Studies program. What luck! I could escape from my dark woods by going somewhere else.

With the job market at its nadir, I thought I should jump at the chance. I went so far as to call my acting chair, Geoffrey Hartman, and tell him I was resigning. ("OK," he said, in an unreadable tone.) But I couldn't bear it. I instantly knew that I needed to try for a career at Yale and not leave just to avoid the risk. Sheepishly, I phoned Geoffrey back and rescinded my resignation. "OK," he said, with another enigmatic tone.

I never regretted this decision, but the aftermath was somewhat sick-making. I had squared to the challenge; now it was all on me. I began a project exploring the outsized role Hawthorne has had in later American literature, specifically the way the greatest writers (Melville, Henry James, Faulkner) have returned to him to help them negotiate turning points in their literary careers. I hadn't solved the problem of how to orient myself toward the new discourses of my profession, but it was interesting (even fun) to work on this in the long, hot summer as we waited for our child to be born.

That fall, it was time to hand in my work for my tenure review. I had a book, some essays, and a couple of chapters toward a new book—surely that was enough? How could they not give tenure to someone acknowledged to be among the great teachers in the department, an indignant inner voice would say. (I'd been given the DeVane Medal for Teaching by Phi Beta Kappa that spring.) To which the voice of fantasized senior colleagues would reply: "But Dick—do you seriously think that is evidence of a major scholarly career?" "But what about Bart Giamatti?" I would inwardly retort. "He got tenure and became president of Yale with a profile not very different from mine." "Dick, please: Bart was Bart, and those were other times."

Months went by with no word from the department. Returning to New Haven from the Modern Language convention in San Francisco, getting on the Connecticut

Limousine, I found—no doubt to our mutual horror—that the only vacant seat was next to the chairman of my department. Like many admired senior colleagues of that time, he was profoundly ill at ease in ordinary interactions. After an hour sitting together in silence, I could stand it no longer. "Can you tell me anything about how my case is coming?" I asked. He winced, then said as carefully as if each word were being vetted by the FBI: "That will depend on how your work is considered in the opinions of a range of colleagues."

Having later occupied the position this good man held, I understand his scruple about giving any encouragement that might not be borne out by events. But at the time, it was enough to make you blow your brains out. In late spring I heard rumors that the senior faculty had voted on me, though the result was not reported. After perhaps ten days, I broke down and called Charles Davis, a friend, who told me the vote had been positive. It was ten further days before the chair confirmed that the department had forwarded my case to the senior appointments committee, though he offered no word as to how I should estimate my chances. (Several months later Howard Lamar told me I should not have worried.) We learn our lessons in forms both bitter and sweet. A chance to welcome me into the community of permanent faculty was lost to the buttoned-up, super-hierarchical, generationally skewed departmental culture of that time. A year or two later Margie Ferguson told me her promotion was revealed to her in these words: "Your tenure has been approved. We will give you a list of typos we found in your material."

Getting tenure was good but did not resolve my professional problem. Then things took a turn. The national media had concocted the name the Yale School for deconstruction, though the colleagues grouped by this label were anything but identical. But Yale was the school of other things than theory, and one of these came to my rescue. During the '70s and early '80s, scholars in American studies began recovering the history we would tell if women were understood as protagonists, not extras. This led to an excavation of the culture of domesticity of the emerging middle class of the early nineteenth century, which had created new worlds of leisure and new cultural spaces for reading. From the first I was intensely interested in this history, and at a certain point, I and others began asking how it and literary history could be drawn together. Reading back and forth between literary texts and cultural formations gave me a new way to visualize my work, and we were off to the races. The half-finished Hawthorne book had been trapped in a concept of influence study that no longer seemed very compelling. Now, instead of assuming Hawthorne's stature as a towering canonical figure, I could recompose the history of how such a status was created for certain contemporaries in nineteenth-century America, then use other authors' literary interactions with him to trace their navigations of their own cultural establishments.

When that book was done, I was on fire. For the next decade I was never without a project. My new work caused me to expand my reading far beyond what I had known as American literature. Reading familiar classics together with forgotten bodies of

writing that had been their contemporaries opened the door to endless explorations. Soon I was tracing the history of the movement against corporal discipline of children by pulling together child-rearing manuals, polemics for universal public education, antislavery tracts, and the popular fiction of domesticity, most prominently Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Then I was reading *Little Women* (for the first time!) and tracking the divergence it documents among a new literary high culture, a popular domestic literary culture, and a more working-class reading culture based on story papers and dime novels. Next I was asking about the strange proliferation of regional writing after the Civil War, including the work of Charles Waddell Chesnutt, the principal African American writer of the postbellum period. Chesnutt kept a diary that offers a unique glimpse of the assets and obstructions a black author faced trying to imagine a literary career in the resegregating society of the 1880s. I spent a year transcribing the diary and tracking down its local references. My graduate seminars had become the laboratory for exploring literary-cultural connections with wonderfully gifted student partners.

I've never been one for movements, but having sat out theory, I was deeply involved with the next waves in literary study, the yoking of literature, history, and social theory dubbed the New Historicism and the opening of the field to excluded voices. It had taken this long for social issues crashing in around us in 1970 to change the books being read and the questions being asked in the literary curriculum. I was fully engaged in this new order. Then something happened that affected my trajectory.

Three years after I was made full professor, Benno Schmidt asked me to chair the English department. My plan was simple: continue everything I had liked and do everything else the way I wished it had been done all along. A large part of the job involved combing the land for rising talent to hire for our ever-numerous junior faculty. I found an unexpected new outlet for my love of teaching in mentoring junior colleagues, a need I had learned the hard way. Eventually the chair had to acknowledge that the giants who established the department's preeminence were beginning to retire, so we had to get serious about senior rebuilding—which meant coaxing people whose intellectual disagreements had festered for a decade to see the need to work together. Having lived through three versions of the literary-critical enterprise, each proud of its strengths and blind to its blinders, I wanted to build a pluralistic department, with many approaches represented with bracing excellence, none with a title to hegemony. This was harder than it appeared, but we had significant success, and I view with satisfaction the colleagues promoted and recruited in my time.

But the biggest difference it made to be chair lay in the larger exposures that it gave. As head of a large department, I was asked to serve on the University Budget Committee in 1988. This was new territory, and a revelation that one can work in a university for decades without understanding the most basic things about how it functions. Not long after, hard times were back, and I and other chairs were named to a committee tasked to recommend a 15 percent reduction in the Arts and Sciences faculty.

The Restructuring Committee was education on a whole new scale. Suddenly I was working closely with my parallel numbers, the young leadership generation across the Yale faculty, most of whom I scarcely knew before we joined this project. Educating each other as we went, we had to assess a range of scenarios. The going-in position of the administration favored avoiding uniform cuts by eliminating weak units, Sociology and Engineering chief among them. It took time to articulate why this suggestion would prove disastrous. (An urban university without sociology? Snuffing out engineering just on the cusp of the technology revolution? Are you serious?) We then had ringside seats as the enraged faculty responded.

In the spring of 1992, the exercise came to a dramatic finish. Frank Turner resigned as provost in March. A month later, Don Kagan resigned as dean of the college. At graduation, Benno Schmidt told the Yale community what he had already shared with the *New York Times,* that he would leave the presidency more or less at once.

In short order, the whole authority structure of the university had melted away. This was disconcerting, but it created unexpected opportunities. Restructuring Committee member Judy Rodin, previously chair of Psychology, became the new provost. Chair of Economics and committee member Rick Levin replaced Judy as dean of the Graduate School. In December, Acting President Howard Lamar invited me to become dean of Yale College. In April Rick Levin was named president. When Judy left to become president at Penn, committee member and Chair of Anthropology Alison Richard became the new provost.

So here we were, a gang of people near in age who had become friends by coping together with a university in distress, handed Yale University to run as we pleased! I told you I had always known what I wanted to do, but when we reached this point, I blew past the limits of known ambitions. There was much to do in such a demoralized institution. When I went here, Yale College boasted that it offered the best education in America. My job was restoring that aspiration, then doing everything we could to deserve that boast. Many precincts I had minimal awareness of—admissions, athletics, student counseling, career services, the Yale Symphony Orchestra, and dozens more—these were my business now, eager to learn the key we were going to play in. This gave me a massive education in the multiple dimensions that enrich each other in liberal arts education. Rick's generosity allowed me to be the principal spokesman on Yale's philosophy of education to alumni, students, and their families. Speaking to people not enrolled in my classes about subjects other than American literature was new to me and yielded powerful self-discovery: this was a chance to learn what I deeply believed and to tap into powers I did not know I had.

The new administration countered the faculty's distrust of administration in an ingenious manner. Oversight of searches in the Faculty of Arts and Sciences was moved from the deputy provosts to the deans of Yale College and the Graduate School. This meant that when I held the job, the dean acquired an expansive knowledge of individual faculty and their sense of their discipline's future. I was not shy about

reminding colleagues of the imperatives for scholarly excellence and finding excellent teachers as well as scholars. In exchange, I had the chance to learn about fields beyond English and to make a new universe of friends.

My enthusiasms, I was learning, had inscribed my early life within a rich but limited horizon. My teaching career and my first years as chair brought new roles without fundamentally altering that horizon. It was university administration that blew those limiting bounds wide open and gave me the vast further education I never knew I wanted. Meanwhile, I had stumbled into what proved to be the most absorbing of my scholarly projects: a study of people who have taken themselves or been taken by others to be prophets, privileged bearers of an ignored truth, a group that in America would include the lunatic fringe (Jim Jones, David Koresh, the Unabomber) but also other distinctive types of leaders: Joseph Smith, the prophet of the Latter-day Saints; Nat Turner, leader of the most important slave revolt; John Brown, antislavery terrorist and martyr; Martin Luther King, the man who had been to the mountaintop. I got deeper and deeper into this project until, in the summer of 1999, I was writing on it eight or ten hours a day.

Coming up from this deep rabbit hole to start the new school year, I found that I faced a choice. If I wanted to give this work the time and attention that would be needed to finish it, I would have to take a leave from the deanship and maybe not come back. If I wanted to follow the paths administrative work had opened, I would have to cut back hard on my personal projects.

We only fully know ourselves by watching the choices we make when faced with close calls. After a short while, I decided not to take the leave Rick had approved and soon I was back, more invested than ever as dean of Yale College. Prosperity had returned to the university for the first time since the mid-1960s, so instead of just fixing what was broken, we could do great new things. It was inspiring to have a hand in reenvisioning and rebuilding the residential college system and expanding need-based aid worldwide. Then I was asked to lead a comprehensive review of Yale College education, the first in decades. Like the Restructuring Committee, this was a chance to educate faculty about the university and its choices and to cultivate potential future leaders, this time with a less dismal occasion.

As the report was being approved by the faculty, something happened. I had been asked to consider major university presidencies as early as my fourth year as dean. The first times I found it fairly easy to say no. I loved the Yale we were helping to build. I didn't see why I should go somewhere I would see as like Yale but less. And I didn't have any craving to be a president as such. Anchored in the world of faculty and students, the job I had suited me to perfection. But Duke approached me in the fall of 2003 and after a preliminary interview, I quickly found myself a finalist. The trustee chairing the search then asked: Would I take the job if offered? I brooded over a long Thanksgiving weekend, but when the time came to give my answer, I could not bring myself to say yes. The search chair was not delighted, but he agreed that if I had further thoughts, I could phone back in a day or two.

And now I had to choose, once and for all, between two mutually exclusive lives. Here was Yale, my home since I was seventeen, a place perfectly resonant with my values that had given me unimagined opportunities. Everything I loved was here. Why would I leave that? But this time, my decision did not sit right with me. At this late date, how much more was there for me to learn or do at Yale? And there was Duke, superficially similar but actually quite different—a rising university, a university still in the process of making itself, with all the freedom that brought for defining new priorities for a new time. Plus, the surprise lesson of my career had been that holding responsibility for shaping institutions and articulating their missions brought me my deepest education and the fullest use of my gifts. How could I pass up what I might learn in a new job at a new place? And lo, it came to pass: having phoned Rick Levin on Monday to tell him I was staying, I had to phone on Wednesday to say that I would be leaving. In a week I was announced as the ninth president of Duke; and in summer 2004, forty years after arriving, I drove away from here at last.

The Duke chapter of my trajectory is beyond the scope of this talk. Suffice it to say that I got what I bargained for: a new life; an introduction to thousands of new people and situations in and out of the university including around the world; immersion in the issues facing every school across a comprehensive university; a firsthand lesson in the hard new facts universities have had to respond to since 2008—financial challenges, cultural challenges, the challenges social media have created, a newly negative attitude toward education itself; and a chance to help determine how the resources of a great university can be best deployed to uphold traditional functions grown more crucial than ever and to meet new human needs that require new forms of knowledge and students differently trained.

I would not know my life if it had not included my thirteen years as president of Duke. Seen from this vantage, my life to age forty-five looks strangely self-enclosed, self-impoverished in its inability to guess how much more there was beyond my academic niche. But would I have had the opportunity for this broadening without the tight focus of my earlier years? Realistically, no: my road to institutional leadership lay through my devotion to scholarship and teaching; I would not have got there by any other route. So I close by sharing what I told the Yale chapter of Phi Beta Kappa last spring as the lesson of my trajectory. May you find something you love to do; may you then have the chance to do it; and may you then find your way past that to unseen further possibilities and further uses for your gifts.

Notes

1 Theodore Roethke, "The Waking," in *The Collected Poems of Theodore Roethke* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1966), 104.