

THE CAREER OF A LIFETIME STUDENT

Alexander Welsh

Looking back, I guess I've always been a student, and a fortunate one at that. I was a skeptical student from the start and over time set forth my thoughts in articles and books.

194

Neither of my parents went to college. My father was born in Kirkcaldy, Scotland, and as the youngest of four brothers emigrated to this country while still a teenager. His father, after whom I was named in the traditional manner, was a ship fitter, or skilled woodworker, and mine first worked in a Philadelphia shipyard. He enlisted in the army in World War I and that way earned his citizenship, ending up in charge of the crew that built and maintained military barracks that filled the National Mall in Washington. My mother was one of seven daughters of a farmer in upstate New York. They briefly owned a house and a car in Albany, but there was no work, and a year before I was born my father pulled up stakes and returned to Kirkcaldy for some months with my mother, their two daughters, and one of my mother's sisters in tow.

A steady job opened up at the Boston warehouse of the Pittsburgh Plate Glass Company when I was two, and the family moved to an apartment in Brookline, two blocks from Commonwealth Avenue, then a length of U.S. Route 1 from Maine to Florida. My father's office was within easy walking distance, adjacent to Braves Field—but one could also walk in less than an hour to Fenway Park, home of the far more popular Red Sox. My sisters, Mary and Janet, and I attended the Edward Devotion School; summers were largely devoted to time with my mother's extended family around Albany, yet we were brought up to understand that we were Scots rather than Yankees. I apparently did very well in grade school, called to the stage three times at graduation to be awarded prizes for the best student in math, history, and geography. My mother, a true Christian, was embarrassed, but my father took it in stride. More important, I actually had some debating experience by the eighth grade. My teachers of history and geography, Miss Funk and Miss Weeden, were truly inspiring. It took me about thirty years before I realized that perhaps the reason I scored both there and in high school was that my two sisters had prepared the way.

Alexander Welsh, Professor Emeritus of English, rejoined the Yale faculty in 1991 after an earlier stint at Yale and teaching positions at Pittsburgh and UCLA. From 1975 to 1981 he edited *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, the journal devoted to British and American fiction. His early works include studies of Scott, Thackeray, Dickens, and Eliot. Two subsequent books on Dickens, *From Copyright to Copperfield* and *Dickens Redressed: The Art of "Bleak House" and "Hard Times,"* take off from biographical criticism. He treated themes of criminal justice and literature in *Reflections on the Hero as Quixote* and *Strong Representations: Narrative and Circumstantial Evidence in England*. *Freud's Wishful Dream Book* is a close reading of Freud's famous book of 1900. *Hamlet in His Modern Guises* shows how Shakespeare's play was recast in novels by authors from Goethe to Joyce. *What is Honor?* includes analyses of major figures of classical antiquity and the Enlightenment. Welsh has been the recipient of Guggenheim, National Endowment for the Humanities, Rockefeller Foundation, and National Humanities Center fellowships. He was a Harvard National Scholar and served with the U.S. Army in Germany.

Brookline High School was never a drag. There was an understanding that if one expected to go to college, one should take Latin and ancient history in the first year. I had in all four years of Latin, with Miss Perkins in the first and fourth years. This being before Sputnik, there was just one fourth-year math class, well taught by Miss Bates. I was something of an amateur chemist and learned nothing I didn't already know in chemistry class, but enjoyed the experiments. A new speech teacher with a Ph.D., who would eventually become chancellor of SUNY, coached the debating team, in which my sister Janet and I both took part. I was head of the Student Forum, an organization modeled on the Ford Hall Forum that invited guest speakers, and I was president of the honors society. In my sophomore year I started working afternoons at the Brookline Public Library, where the head of circulation, Miss Thompson, was my boss. This work supplied my first real spending money. The most important purchase was a Raleigh three-speed touring bike, with which I explored New England and its surrounds for perhaps twenty years. Moreover, I worked full-time for the library every summer until my junior year at Harvard, when I found that one could get a job with the Forest Service in summertime just by signing an application and mailing it to Montana.

My sister Mary commuted to Radcliffe for three years before I made it to Cambridge. Janet sought out Smith College, much to our father's surprise and even a little anger, since he had never heard of Smith — though he read the *Boston Globe* and *Christian Science Monitor* every day, had subscribed to the *New Republic* ever since it was founded, and purchased a radio in 1939 when World War II began. I took it for granted that I was headed for Harvard and applied nowhere else. Eleven of my class of about five hundred at Brookline High successfully applied, and three to Radcliffe. And I was rewarded with one of the Harvard National Scholarships established by James B. Conant, famous chemist and president of the university from 1933 to 1953. The scholarship paid for everything, stipulated that I be in residence, and not work for pay except during the summer.

Harvard made a deep impression on me, looking down on the steps of Widener Library from my room in Weld Hall, eating with the other freshmen in the Harvard Union, and checking out the reserve lists in the recently opened Lamont Library for undergraduates. Almost every course had a syllabus featuring two lists: A. Required reading, and B. Recommended reading. Sometimes the latter went on for pages: how could so many books and articles ever be mastered? And at seventeen, I was being addressed as Mr. Welsh. Professors also were addressed as Mr. So-and-so, never as Professor without name attached. Those addressed as Dr. were either M.D.s or non-ladder faculty.

I had heard that students were not limited to courses recommended by the Freshman Handbook as long as they had the instructor's permission. I thereby enrolled in a new course by Willard Van Orman Quine on symbolic logic. His textbook *Methods of Logic* had been published a month before, and at least half the takers were graduate students, as was true of most philosophy courses. General Education was still

being phased in at the time, and I was only required to enroll in two of these yearlong courses. I elected Soc Sci 1, which was modeled after the former History 1, from the fall of the Roman Empire to about 1900; and Humanities 3, four quarters devoted to epic, tragedy, philosophy, and the novel, taught as a seminar. Quine was as accomplished in the classroom as he was as a writer, and as a result I became a philosophy major. But there were other things in store. I had never even heard of Milton in high school; in the spring semester Douglas Bush was lecturing on Milton, prose as well as poetry, and I took that. Also a course on modern drama, because I was fond of Shaw's plays but scarcely knew anything of Ibsen, Chekhov, and others. In the fall of my sophomore year I had an inspiring course devoted to the philosophical works of David Hume, and lectures by Walter Jackson Bate on Johnson and his circle. And so it went, settling on an English major before my senior year.

I was tempted by law school. One slightly older resident in Eliot House changed his candidacy for a Ph.D. in political science for enrollment in Harvard Law School. Some days I accompanied him and sat in on first-year classes; I was fascinated by the case-study method, and by the way students had fixed seating and were called upon by name by the professor in charge. But there was the Korean draft to think about. Any full-time student qualified for a deferment, but local draft boards were required to draft the oldest on their lists first, and one was eligible through age twenty-six (the army would have preferred age seventeen). Perhaps if I enrolled in med school I would still be a student at twenty-six, but I had failed to keep up with chemistry! I shrugged and let myself be drafted. The notice came in the mail on commencement day. So it was Fort Dix, New Jersey, for basic training along with two hundred other draftees, a good many with bachelor's degrees because of the season and some with law degrees as well. Basic training was basically a physical workout, and then—because I had been to college, I was told—another eight weeks at clerk typist school, largely devoted to learning how to fill out the Morning Report as a company clerk. The one intelligent thing the Department of the Army did was to allow us to choose which zone of service we would prefer among those available. Most preferred to stay as close to home as possible, a few asked for Korea, where an armistice was in place, and I was for Europe. So in December 1954 I embarked from Staten Island on a small troop ship for a twelve-day, pounding up-and-down, decks off-limit journey across the North Atlantic to Bremerhaven, Germany. From there it was overnight by train to a town in the Rhineland where the army's human resources unit was located. Now I first realized the value of a Harvard degree: the interviewer looking over my papers said, "Wait a minute, my sergeant went to Harvard," and disappeared behind the scenes. The result was my assignment to SGS (Secretary General Staff), Headquarters USAREUR (U.S. Army in Europe), Heidelberg.

In short, I became a file clerk and office boy, but with an absorbing situation. It was a significant turning point in our relations with Germany, as the occupation came to an end and NATO got under way. When President Conant stepped down at Harvard, he became high commissioner for Germany, and in 1955 his title changed to ambassador.

In both roles he came to Heidelberg once every month to brief the commander-in-chief and his staff; officers only were admitted, but I could read what Conant said the next morning before filing it away. Given this nine-hour workday, I also learned the value of my own time. I got along with less sleep, staying up attempting to read Goethe's *Faust* or Mann's *Der Zauberberg* in the original! By scheduling thirty days of annual leave time in five-day segments, these could sometimes be stretched to eight or nine days, and I managed to visit my father's siblings, nieces, and nephews in Scotland and to explore other European destinations. It seemed somehow obvious after all this to apply to Harvard Graduate School and study more English literature. I was not really thinking in terms of a career. But for Harvard I needn't take the GRE or ask anyone to write letters for me. And speaking of good luck, 1956 was the last year that honorably discharged GIs were eligible for the GI Bill.

While in Germany I had corresponded with Katharine Tower, a Radcliffe graduate, and on my return we were married. I pressed ahead, taking as many courses as I could, including reading courses during the first two summers. In my second year I had a three-fifths-time teaching fellowship, devoted to tutoring undergraduates and teaching a section of the required survey course. In my third, I was called upon to be the acting senior tutor for commuting students, a half-time administrative position, while reading for my Ph.D. orals that spring. This appointment bestowed the longest directory listing of a lifetime: "Teaching Fellow in English, Member of the Board of Freshman Advisers, Acting Allston Burr Senior Tutor in Dudley House, Member of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences." The newly created Dudley House had no master until January, so there was plenty to do. Becoming involved with administration also alerted me to a fresh opportunity: Frank Knox Traveling Fellowships, hitherto available to one graduating senior, would now be available to grad students as well. The funding was still for a single traveler, but the dollar in those days was strong, and Katharine and I had actually been able to save some of our earnings; the fourth year was thereby spent – along with one-year-old Molly – in Edinburgh, where I wrote my dissertation on the novels of Walter Scott.

Lectures by David Owen on British history of the long nineteenth century first stirred my interest in the Victorians while I was still an undergraduate. As a graduate I poured over the works of Thomas Carlyle, John Ruskin, Walter Pater, John Henry Newman – so-called sages. I soon realized that Victorians were far more familiar with the novels of Scott than we were; except for a few classic films, Scott went out of fashion by the end of the nineteenth century. Next I enrolled in a graduate lecture course by Perry Miller on antebellum American literature. Twice a week Miller would enter the classroom with armfuls of Scott novels from the library and proceed to read from them, sometimes with a snicker but also impressed by what he read. Historians of American literature were indeed more aware of Scott's influence than workers in the incipient field of English novel criticism. I began reading the novels and asking myself, Why were the proper heroes so passive? Scott's novels regularly concluded with marriage and inheritance of property in land. They might each contain a romantic excursus, but

Scott was a conservative thinker in an era in which the right to landed property was celebrated as the basis of social stability by such as Edmund Burke. Harry Levin agreed to direct the dissertation from afar. As it happened, John Butt had just become Regius Professor at Edinburgh. He invited me to sit in on a seminar devoted to Dickens, while urging me to present one of my draft chapters on Scott, and he too was extremely helpful.

That winter Maynard Mack met me on the steps of the British Museum, and lunch served as a job interview with Yale. An opening occurred in June after I returned to the States, because Geoffrey Hartman was going off to Chicago. I spent the first two summers revising my dissertation as a book, *The Hero of the Waverley Novels*, which was solicited for the Yale Studies in English series. The readers were Martin Price, Gordon Haight—and Cleanth Brooks. Haight was a friend of Gordon Ray of the Guggenheim Foundation, who also happened to be the general editor of the Riverside Series of textbooks, and that brought me the opportunity to edit and annotate Scott's *Old Mortality*—the kind of task that perhaps every serious student of literature ought to attempt at least once. Initially, my teaching at Yale was limited to sections of the rather remarkable yearlong freshman English courses. There were no lectures, but the staff met together over each text to discuss how to go about it. In my second year I took over the leadership of English 24 from Tom Greene, a brilliant teacher as well as classicist and comparatist. English 24—these days 129 plus 130—was the department's world literature offering, from Homer to Joyce. Typically graduate seminars were also yearlong. The only graduate course I taught in this first incarnation at Yale was "Nineteenth-Century Literature." This did not include the Romantics (Cleanth Brooks was conducting a yearlong seminar in romantic poetry). I was filling in for Dwight Culler, whose seminar featured Victorian poetry and those aforesaid sages. Yet the leading nineteenth-century genre was surely the novel. I threw in Thackeray and Trollope, Dickens and George Eliot, and added to the pile center-right political works by J.S. Mill, Walter Bagehot, and Herbert Spencer. The theme was historical consciousness, so we began by comparing *Waverley* with Austen's *Mansfield Park* and concluded in the spring with Hardy's *Dynasts* and the first three episodes of *Ulysses*. From preparing and teaching this seminar, I learned just about everything I know about the Victorians, and much of this went into the book on Dickens that I started putting together on a Morse Fellowship. As for the grad students, they learned also—by writing three papers per semester in courses like this and reading twice as much as required today.

Meanwhile I had good luck freelancing articles, and reviews as well, for the *New Republic*. I had come upon a copy of Jack Kennedy's *Why England Slept* in the Sterling Library stacks, inscribed by the author to Colonel Lindbergh! Kennedy had just been elected president, a paperback brought the book back into print, and that became the subject of my first review. At a cocktail reception in 1960 I was introduced to René Wellek, who asked me what I was working on, told me about Georg Lukács, and loaned

me his copy of *Der Historische Roman*. Lukács was just beginning to be translated into English; I spotted the forthcoming translation of this book—in which the Marxist theorist featured the achievements of Scott and Balzac!—in a catalogue and reviewed it for the *New Republic* also. Needless to say, part of this game was to surprise and please my father back in Brookline when he would receive his issues of the weekly.

I was in the first cohort of junior faculty at Yale to receive three-year appointments as associate professor. This came right out of the blue, though the practice was then adopted by Harvard and Columbia. My first year as an associate coincided with Maynard Mack's first year as chair of the department. He had long been an *éminence grise* and, I suspect, was no longer able to avoid the chairmanship. Maynard was notoriously hardworking, and that summer he started laying out what I was to do in the coming year. First, to be acting director of undergraduate studies (DUS), so that Ben Nangle, a perennial DUS and associate professor at the time, could get some rest; then to chair the Honors Committee—the three of us had to read each honors thesis, anywhere from one hundred to two hundred pages in length; but also to chair the flunk committee that reread failed departmental exams by seniors who had satisfied their course requirements for the English major. (These committees were not part of the DUS's job.) At the beginning of the summer one heard that Geoffrey Hartman was returning to Yale, which was good news. At the end of the summer, Richard Ellmann was said to be joining the faculty a year later. I understood that there was only one tenure position open, that of Gordon Haight, who was retiring—my field, Victorian novels. So I confronted Maynard on that one, and he explained that the department would be borrowing on a future retirement. But Hartman's work was devoted to the early nineteenth century and Ellmann's to the later; and I didn't like the idea of these men, most of whom I knew very little, deliberating whether they should borrow on another retirement; and I had in hand two offers of full professor. So I accepted the one at the University of Pittsburgh, which had come out of bankruptcy, had other positions to fill, and offered a 60 percent pay increase, more than I ever had again in this lifetime. Both my parents had passed on, only months apart. Katharine and I had two more children, Tom and Doug, making three.

On the Morse Fellowship I had read all of Dickens just as I had read all of Scott (or as much as I could) in Edinburgh. Dickens's early writing quickly persuaded me that this project could not be another book on the hero. The focus was on the city, both London and eventually the city in *Hard Times* he named Coketown. My sister Mary, who majored in architecture and in her last year at Radcliffe turned to city planning, introduced me to the work of Lewis Mumford, who both in *The City in History* (1961) and in an earlier book had unabashedly adopted "Coketown" to designate the industrial cities of northern England. Urban history was on the rise in Britain, and in 1967 I contributed a paper to a conference on the city sponsored by *Victorian Studies* at Indiana University—a paper comprising roughly the first two chapters of my new book. Ironically, the historians assembled at Bloomington disparaged Mumford

because, under the leadership of Asa Briggs, the new urban history claimed to show how each city was unique. In any case, industrialization and urbanization in England anticipated developments in this country and elsewhere. And by focusing on Dickens's novels, journalism, and speechifying, I could achieve a unified approach to the matter. One reward of studying hugely popular writers of the past like Dickens or Scott is that it yields an overview of what their readers as well as the authors believed.

200

The City of Dickens I divided into three parts: "The Metropolis," "The Earthly City," and "The Bride from Heaven." The argument thus ranges from the historical city that Dickens and his contemporaries experienced, to an earthly city of providential design, to the Victorian ideal of home, and the heroines of the novels. The worship of hearth and home that culminated in the nineteenth century, and which survives in our own lives, was not fully explicable without the pressures that the modern city brought to bear on it. Successive chapters of part two treat of the Victorian and Dickensian association of money with death, and then work, charity, and forgiveness, completed by a chapter devoted to the protagonists as sojourners in the earthly city. Part three took off from an article, "The Allegory of Truth in English Fiction" (*Victorian Studies*, 1965), that I had worked hard over. A female figure representing truth can be traced back in art and literature to the Renaissance. So too, in English novels written by any number of hands, heroines had a way of standing for *truth* in both senses of the English word, loyalty and truth-telling. But now I had begun to ask what such heroines were supposed to achieve. So besides chapters on hearth and home and the spirit of love and truth, I wrote on the two Victorian angels of death – in graphic art the male angel with a scythe conveying destruction, but the female angel, salvation. Most Oxford books at the time had plain brown-paper dust jackets, if any. This jacket comprised Gustave Doré's engraving of Ludgate Hill, with a horse-drawn hearse in the foreground and the dome of St. Paul's as a backdrop. Publication coincided with the centenary of Dickens's death in 1970, with notable exhibits at the British Museum, the Victoria and Albert, and elsewhere; and the author was fortunate to be residing in London then on a Guggenheim Fellowship.

At Pittsburgh, with the book off my hands, I taught a graduate lecture course on Victorian literature. Other than that I carried on my lifetime as a student. Outside of Chaucer and some of his immediate sources, I knew nothing of medieval narratives, so I offered an undergraduate course in medieval literature in translation. For a small honors program I was asked to do something, and I decided on the afterlife of Cervantes's extraordinary knight errant. Among the latter-day tales of quixotic gentlemen, the only ones I had read before were those of Parson Adams and Mr. Pickwick. And then there was the matter of Samuel Richardson. Like many students of the novel in that era, I had never read the unabridged *Clarissa*. This was readily available in a four-volume Everyman edition, and I embarked on a graduate seminar on the novels of Fielding and Richardson, which needless to say included *Shamela*, but also some Fielding that I had never read. I also picked up a seven-volume reprint of *Sir Charles*

Grandison, which I did not assign but was handy for bedtime reading. Parts of it did help put one to sleep, but it too is pretty impressive. Jane Austen admired it. I took a poll at the end of the seminar: Fielding or Richardson? A majority were for Richardson: unthinkable at Harvard, but soon becoming the academic fashion.

The city of Pittsburgh had an undeserved bad press. The smoke and fallout reminiscent of Coketown had been cleaned up after the war. The cultural center surrounding the university included the Pittsburgh Symphony under Steinberg performing every weekend in the Syria Mosque, the Carnegie Museum, and Forbes Field, home of the Pittsburgh Pirates. But this was coming apart while I lived there: both the Symphony and the Pirates moved downtown. I had made friends in the Pitt Philosophy department, but it was a losing game in English, where I failed to persuade any leaders in their fields to join us. Due to Ada Nisbet, a fine Dickensian who approved of my book and was about to retire, I received an offer from UCLA, flew out there to be driven about the freeways, and subsequently accepted it. Los Angeles was another place with a bad reputation in New York or New England. I thought I was sacrificing my family, but they would just have to live with it. What a mistake! True, when it rains in southern California it rains, but it was outdoor living year-round. UCLA is five miles from the Pacific – with thirty miles or so of beaches – and the prevailing wind is onshore. We settled down on Veteran Avenue across from the back fence of the university, about a mile to the English department and half a mile to Pauley Pavilion.

The teaching load for senior faculty was remarkably light, but my specialty and a reason for hiring me took for granted another responsibility, the editing of *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, an academic quarterly founded by Bradford Booth as *The Trollopian* in 1945 and since then expanded to include American as well as British fiction. I renewed the editorial board and appointed Ruth Bernard Yeazell, who saw eye-to-eye with me on most issues, as associate editor so that she could take over for me in 1977 when I had an NEH fellowship. Since this was a specialized journal, and every academic journal has difficulty putting together enough first-rate articles – as I can testify from serving on the editorial board of *PMLA* a decade later – I resolved to review every book in the field instead of five or six per issue, and this we proceeded to do as nearly as possible by using smaller print. I hate to say that I failed to persuade the MLA to review any books at all in their widely circulated journal, and that when I stepped down from NCF, it went right back to the earlier format.

The NEH project was ambitious if nothing else: the first volume of a two-volume study of honor, a subject that had intrigued me ever since, in revising my dissertation on Scott's heroes, I felt it necessary to include a chapter on honor in that book. This volume was to run from Homer to Richardson. I had read *Sir Charles Grandison*, hadn't I? The second volume was to include not only such novelists as Scott, Thackeray, and Trollope but also real-life careers of such as William Gladstone; the anchor text was to be Charles Doughty's *Travels in Arabia Deserta* (1888). When I cleared my desk and sat down to sort out volume one, I came to my senses and realized that even that was more

than I could manage. So I determined to write about quixotic heroes along the lines of the course I taught at Pitt and once again at UCLA: Fielding's Parson Adams, Sterne's Uncle Toby, Goldsmith's Vicar of Wakefield, Dickens's Mr. Pickwick, Thackeray's Colonel Newcome, Flaubert's Bouvard and Pécuchet, Dostoevsky's Prince Myshkin, and others. I matched their adventures and misadventures with those of Don Quixote thematically rather than chronologically. The result was my one genuine bout with comparative literature and was published by Princeton in 1981 as *Reflections on the Hero as Quixote*.

A number of graduate students had been asking for a seminar on George Eliot. The ten-week term allowed time for *Scenes of Clerical Life* and each of the novels that followed. We had got as far as *Felix Holt* when it dawned on me that, beginning with *Silas Marner*, all of the novels dealt in one way or another with reputational blackmail. And she was not alone. A blackmail threat often supplied the main action in so-called sensation novels in the 1860s, and blackmail occurs as a subplot in *Bleak House* and earlier than that in Dickens's *Martin Chuzzlewit*, and in novels by Trollope and others. But never by that name. The word *blackmail* for extortion with a threat of violence goes back to the sixteenth century, but its common meaning today as a threat of revealing a secret does not appear in the first edition of the *OED* in 1887. In fact, blackmail in this sense was not a crime, and only gradually became so in the common law in the long nineteenth century. Why should threatening to tell the truth about another's past be a crime? It became so because urbanization and industrialization vastly increased the mobility of the population – in a village everyone already knows their neighbor's secrets. I have almost never repeated a course the following year, but there was so much more that I needed to learn that I kept teaching George Eliot for three years running.

The book that resulted, called *George Eliot and Blackmail*, begins with a critique of Alfred Hitchcock's first talking film. His *Blackmail* appeared in 1929, and this might seem anachronistic, but here is the word in its most common modern usage, and in fact stories of blackmailers and detectives in pursuit peaked in the early twentieth century. Moreover, Hitchcock seems to have intuited the relation of this newly codified crime to the culture of information. After a stirring chase through the streets of London, the blackmailer runs into the British Museum past familiar ancient works of art and somehow makes his way to the outside of the dome, with the police in full pursuit. At the top he turns around and points at the detective in the lead, and with the words, "I say, it's not me you want. It's him," he falls backward to his death in the Reading Room far below. The British Museum is a repository of information about the dead, you might say, and Scotland Yard of information about the living. Victorian intellectuals were more accustomed to thinking in terms of pathology than we are. Just as surgeons and doctors have discovered so much of what we know about the human body, so we understand social relations better when they go wrong. The second part of *George Eliot and Blackmail* is accordingly devoted to the pathology of information, the extraordinary growth and communication of knowledge. A print culture riding the

success of the steam-driven rotary press, and a rapidly expanding postal service, were other factors. Liberals trusted more in public opinion than in legislation to improve society, yet by 1859 John Stuart Mill was writing of the dangers public opinion posed to individual liberty.

Marian Evans experienced a sharp break from her provincial beginnings when she traveled by herself to London, moved in with G.W. Lewes, and resorted to a pseudonym. The longest part of my book is devoted to her fictions of discontinuous lives, beginning with *Silas Marner* and concluding with three chapters on *Daniel Deronda*, then about to come under more scrutiny from other critics as well. Gwendolen Harleth in effect murders her blackmailing husband, Grandcourt. (In a footnote to his essay “Raffles and Miss Blandish” of 1945, George Orwell observed that in detective stories, murdering a blackmailer is not regarded as a crime.) I sent off the manuscript to Harvard without mentioning a last part that would be devoted to the psychopathology of information: one chapter inspired by H. Stuart Hughes’s *Consciousness and Society* (1977) and a second titled “From Chillingworth to Freud,” pointing toward still wider nineteenth-century implications of blackmail. Chillingworth, the cuckolded husband who turns up in *The Scarlet Letter*, also happens to be a doctor. In a devilish action of blackmail, Hawthorne locates the kind of inner suffering that Freud would attempt to relieve a half-century later. When Freud in *The Interpretation of Dreams* invoked the figure of censorship, he committed himself to a constant “upward drive” of unconscious thoughts to make themselves known. But that’s counterintuitive: don’t we mostly want to forget guilty, shameful, or otherwise unpleasant memories? If the metaphor were blackmail instead of censorship, the case would be different. A blackmailer may threaten, but unlike a censor – or a detective – he offers to please a troubled patient when paid for his silence. As for the information revolution, Freud sometimes writes in later years of “news” from the unconscious.

My three seminars on George Eliot and the resulting book became possible after my resignation of the editorship of *NCF*. My three children were off to college. And this became the most prolific time of my life, as far as writing is concerned. The experience of editing the journal also brought me up to date with current criticism of prose fiction. While *George Eliot and Blackmail* was still in press I wrote most of a second book on Dickens that was essentially biographical criticism. To say nothing of *Sketches by Boz* and shorter pieces, Dickens had serialized five novels nonstop until 1842, when he traveled to this country with his wife in tow. He told no one exactly why he wanted to visit America, but a week after he landed in Boston he spoke out for international copyright, and again a week later in Hartford. A few of the American newspapers whose interests were threatened struck back, impugning the author’s motives and implying that he was ungrateful! From Dickens’s account one would think that all the publishing media turned against him, but he continued to deny, even after he returned to Britain that summer, that he had journeyed to America for this purpose. Neither gentlemen – especially not self-made gentlemen – nor Christians were ever selfish. In

From Copyright to Copperfield: The Identity of Dickens I argued that this imbroglio when he was thirty years old was more traumatic than that of the blacking warehouse when he was twelve. His next two novels, *Martin Chuzzlewit* and *Dombey and Son*, were the only two devoted to themes that he designated with a single word: *self* and *pride*, respectively.

I next became curious about evidence at common law. In Samuel Johnson's *Dictionary* the second definition of the word *circumstance* reads, "The adjuncts of a fact, which make it more or less criminal; or make an accusation more or less probable"; that was in 1755, and the phrase "circumstantial evidence" has been popularly associated with crime ever since. Witnesses in a court of law might give false testimony, but as William Paley would rant in his *Principles of Moral and Political Philosophy* of 1785, "Circumstances cannot lie." Yet one of the earliest uses of "circumstantial evidence" I knew of occurs in Joseph Butler's *The Analogy of Religion* of 1736, where he wrote of the same in conjunction with "the Evidence of Probability." There had recently been published histories of probability by Lorraine Daston, Douglas Lane Patey, and Robert Newsome, as well as a reprint of Ian Hacking's *The Emergence of Probability*. A Rockefeller Foundation Fellowship afforded me eight months to take advantage of the Institute of Advanced Legal Studies in London as well as the Reading Room of the British Library once again. I thereby started putting together an advance token of the law-and-literature movement that would be titled *Strong Representations: Narrative and Circumstantial Evidence in England*. Four of the five chapters draw on novels or other uses of narrative from both the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Chapter 4 features James Fitzjames Stephen's *Introduction* to the Indian Evidence Act of 1872, a law that he himself had drafted as the legal member of the colonial Governor General's Council. The Evidence Act applied to civil as well as criminal trials in India, yet Stephen selects five English *murder* trials to illustrate in detail what he means by the relevancy of evidence! With the help of Butler's *Analogy of Religion*, still current in Victorian times, I argue that natural religion may account for this special application of circumstantial evidence to murder. The last chapter represents the literary retreat of circumstantial evidence in Robert Browning's *Ring and the Book*, Wilkie Collins's *Moonstone*, and Henry James's *Golden Bowl*. (Courtesy of the Rockefeller Foundation again, I was able to draft this last chapter in Bellagio.) "Circumstantial evidence" never became a term of the art in law practice, but it followed roughly the same curve as narrative styles in literary history. By the nineteenth century, British novels in the first person were giving way to narrative from a more withdrawn and supposedly objective point of view. In science, too, first geology and then biology evoked a narrative of circumstances – mere fragments of evidence – that survived from eons ago. Although circumstantial evidence in trials at law had that prosecutorial thrust, once criminal defendants were allowed to be represented in court by lawyers, the jury was treated to an alternative narrative. By the end of the nineteenth century, "mere circumstantial evidence," as they say, had lost its clout.

In June 1990 I picked up the phone in L.A., and it was Dick Brodhead calling to say that I would be receiving in the mail an offer from Yale. It was clearly too late to disrupt plans for the coming academic year, so I asked whether I should come and visit. Dick replied that there was no hurry, and from the way he said it I surmised that the department was also intending to make an offer to Ruth Yeazell. And about nine months later, the usual pace of appointments at Yale, this proved to be correct. Much as we both liked teaching at UCLA and the changes in administration that had just been put into place, Ruth and I did visit for a week in April and decided to make the move. We were too close in field to be likely to receive another such offer from the same university, same department. Curiously, before the visit, no one had ever asked me about work in progress. *Strong Representations* was published by Johns Hopkins in 1992, however, and duly identified my new employer. It was awarded the British Council Prize for that year.

My friend Bill Schopf, who was director of the Center for the Study of Evolution and the Origin of Life at UCLA, had volunteered to be dean of a new honors program and asked me to teach a course. Inspired by Frank J. Sulloway's *Freud, Biologist of the Mind* (1979), I had been rereading Freud, and hit upon the idea of conducting a close reading of *The Interpretation of Dreams* along with *David Copperfield*, his favorite Dickens novel and itself a virtual catalogue of wish fulfillment. In my first semester back at Yale I wanted something I had taught recently and offered this as a senior seminar in English. Since the term lasted three more weeks than at UCLA, I was going to add *The Adolescent* by Dostoevsky, but when I found that only one student in the room had read *The Brothers Karamazov*, we went for that instead. When the seminar was over, however, I decided not to teach it again because it seemed wrong to keep focusing on the loose ends or shortages of the principal text under study. In the spring as I was filing away my notes (by then I owned about three yards of books by and about Freud), I thought, why not write it up? My brief commentary on Freud's masterwork became *Freud's Wishful Dream Book* that summer. But I had trouble publishing it until Princeton sent it to Frederick Crews at Berkeley. Crews signed his enthusiastic report, and it was obvious which of his words were meant as an endorsement. The commentary is not anti-Freudian, so I handed the page proof to Harold Bloom and asked him what he thought. Harold not only endorsed it but also helped make the argument clearer to the author.

Considering how much I had learned writing *From Copyright to Copperfield*, I sometimes idly thought I should devote my time to a semibiographical account of Dickens's later novels. I would obviously have to begin with *Bleak House*. When I actually sat down with the typewriter to see what I could do, I drafted seven chapters on *Bleak House*. At that rate the rest of my lifetime would be spent on the later Dickens. So I wrote three chapters on his next, much shorter novel, *Hard Times*, and left it at that. This segment (which did not preclude working more on Dickens) became *Dickens Redressed: The Art of "Bleak House" and "Hard Times,"* published by Yale in 2000.

Back in the fifties in the heyday of new criticism, Maynard Mack contributed a much-cited essay to *The Yale Review* called “The World of Hamlet,” a fine reconstruction of the imagined world of the play. Twice at UCLA and once again at Yale I had offered a course about Hamlet. About thirty undergraduates would show up each time, until they found they would have to cope not only with *Hamlet* but Shakespeare’s sources, other revenge tragedies of the time, and three or four novels from the eighteenth to the twentieth century narrating Hamlet-like dilemmas. Purposefully echoing Maynard’s title, in 1980 I wrote an essay for *The Yale Review* called “The Task of Hamlet” – that is to say, mourning. Freud’s paper on “Mourning and Melancholia” of 1917 is much more relevant to Shakespeare’s drama than the footnote to *The Interpretation of Dreams*, later raised to the text, about Hamlet’s Oedipus complex. Mourning for a lost one takes time; even *thoughts* of revenge help out; if my father had been murdered, at least I would know whom and what to blame for death. *Hamlet in His Modern Guises*, published by Princeton in 2001, begins with how Shakespeare builds on his medieval sources and how other revenge tragedies, notably Kyd’s *The Spanish Tragedy* and Marston’s *Antonio’s Revenge*, deal with mourning. Later chapters are devoted to “History, as between Goethe’s Hamlet and Scott’s,” “Hamlet’s Expectations, Pip’s Great Guilt,” and finally “Hamlet Decides to Be a Modernist,” featuring Melville’s *Pierre*, Jules Laforgue’s Hamlet, Joyce’s Stephen Dedalus, and one of Iris Murdoch’s novels.

The book that I intended to coincide with my retirement but which Yale took two more years to publish was addressed (in vain) to moral philosophers: *What Is Honor? A Question of Moral Imperatives*. The appeal to honor that has intrigued me ever since I tackled the Waverley Novels has little directly to do with fame, prizes, or reward. Rather, honor compels one to act, or to refrain from acting, in certain ways. The word itself, in this sense, became obsolete after the mockeries of World War I. It is better to substitute *respect*, and as I argue, mutual respect, the respect of a peer group. The book takes the form of a selective genealogy. It contains chapters on Aristotle’s ethics, Cicero’s mediation of the same, Shakespeare’s recourse to Roman honor in the tragedies based on Plutarch, honor in Mandeville and Montesquieu, some Enlightenment fiction, coming-of-age in neoclassical drama, Rousseau’s *Emile* coming-of-age, two chapters on Kant, Adam Smith’s impartial spectator (same root as the word *re-spect*, looking back and forth) in his *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, more on Smith and contemporary social science, and a direct appeal to present-day philosophers to come to terms with honor. *What Is Honor?* provocatively begins with the hypothesis that moral agents have only one alternative ground to stand on, namely obedience. Since homo sapiens requires anywhere from eighteen to eighty-one years to grow up, naturally morality begins with obedience or disobedience, not with respect or disrespect. Someday – though perhaps not in my lifetime – maybe philosophers will put my hypothesis to the test.

The last two seminars I conducted for the English department were devoted to the “Literature of Folly” – the director of undergraduate studies’ title for the course I

thought of as “Clowns and Fools.” Everyone was supposed to have read *Don Quixote*, and we began with clown scenes from Shakespeare’s comedies, as well as *Hamlet* and *King Lear*. Then Erasmus’s *Praise of Folly*, which I had never taught before, became the earliest text we dealt with. We spent a couple of weeks on Richard Wilbur’s verse translations of Molière. We focused on various chapters from Dickens’s early novels before turning to *Hard Times* for the circus and to Flaubert’s *Bouvard and Pécuchet* for its quixotic updating. And finally Charlie Chaplin’s *Modern Times*, Buster Keaton’s *Steamboat Bill Jr.*, and Fellini’s neglected semidocumentary *The Clowns*. Shortly after I retired, the National Humanities Center offered Ruth Yeazell and myself senior fellowships, which we accepted for a spring semester only in 2009. I had no major project in hand, so I promised to work on comedy. I reread all Shakespeare’s comedy, ancient and modern theory of comedy, works of Swift and others that I had never read before, and (a couple of years later) finally settled on what I call humanist comedy: historic attempts to make light of belief in divinity and cheerfully admit the truth of our own passing.

207

Thus my new book is on religion and mortality, rather than morality. *The Humanist Comedy*, also published by Yale, rehearses a number of philosophical as well as literary classics and is a paperback addressed to the general reader. The comedy unfolds in three acts, as follows: “Laughter at the Gods in Classical Times,” “Humanist Games in Christian Times,” and “Laughter at the Passing Generations.” The first features Aristophanes’ *Clouds* and *Birds*, Lucretius’s *De rerum natura*, Cicero’s *De natura deorum*, and dialogues by Lucian. The second and longest act presents key works by Erasmus, Montaigne, Hobbes, Spinoza, Bayle, Hume, and Matthew Arnold. The third offers a fresh look at New Comedy as taken up by Plautus and Shakespeare, the doctor plays of Molière, novels by Scott, Hugo, Dickens, and others, before concluding with *The Gospel According to Jesus Christ* by José Saramago, in which historical novel most of the miracles enacted in the synoptic gospels take place, but Jesus challenges God about the necessity of the role he has been made to play. Jesus and both biological parents are emphatically mortal, like the rest of us.