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# Paul Schwaber Oral History Interview, Jun. 4, 2015

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Professor Paul Schwaber interview

4 June 2015

Recorded in his office in the Wasch Center

NANCY SMITH, Interviewer: Today is Thursday, the 4th of June, 2015, and I am speaking with Professor Paul Schwaber in his office at the Wasch Center.

I'd like to begin by asking how you became interested in your field of study. Did it start at Wesleyan when you were a student?

PAUL SCHWABER: Well, I think I got started from my father coming home to Brooklyn from work in Manhattan every night, with stories about his clients. He was an accountant, and I used to find those anecdotes fascinating. He had a fascination with people, and people's adventures; he was kind of an excitable storyteller, and made it a great deal of fun.

I was never really very interested in Literature as such until I got to college, here at Wesleyan in 1953, and I ran into Norm Rudich who was an avowed Marxist and a very very bright fellow; blind and with a superb capacity for listening and for thinking aloud. He taught me the Humanities course, the Great Books of the Western World, and then I became an English major after having a brief fling at pre-med. Physics ended my medical career.

Smith: I can understand that.

Schwaber: I ran into John Hicks, especially, in the English Department, who was a wonderful man. Very enthusiastic, very down to earth, and not at all differentiating himself. He had a very pleasant democratic manner. Small D. So I really warmed to him, and indeed he became not only my very own "master dear," as Chaucer would have put it, but he became a good friend all through our lives until he died about ten years ago. Over the years, we would have get togethers.

Smith: He stayed around after he retired?

Schwaber: He left here and went to the University of Massachusetts, where he became Editor of the *Massachusetts Review*. He didn't get tenure here; I don't know whether he was turned down or whether he just went elsewhere. But he left, I think, the same year I left, 1957.

Another person here who was very impressive to me was George Creeger, who had a more differentiating manner to him. He was a superb lecturer, a little distant personally, but I was fascinated by his ability to look closely at a text. He also was a kind of thespian. I don't know whether he was in fact, but he would love to read dramatic monologues aloud---especially Browning. I remember his reading Browning's "My Last Duchess": "That's my last duchess hanging on the wall..." yes, and he was very good at communicating the *evil* and *excitement* in the man.

So those were my immediate inspirations, and I just continued that path with a Woodrow Wilson fellowship to Berkeley. And then I read Lionel Trilling at Berkeley, and I wrote a love letter to Columbia saying I must come to Columbia and study with Lionel Trilling. That was before the bureaucratic days of corporate styles of universities---so they wrote back and accepted me!

Smith: Really? That was you application?

Schwaber: So far as I remember it. They were really very hospitable.

Smith: How marvelous. I can well understand about Lionel Trilling--but what a good idea!

Schwaber: So then I taught for a year at Wellesley, when I finished my PhD.

I taught at Wellesley and I had a wonderful time. I was a single man about thirty years old, and I could feel waves of libido coming at me. That was very gratifying.

When I got a note from Norm Rudich---I had sent Norm Rudich something that I had written on Thoreau, and he wrote back, or called me, and asked whether I would

come for an interview for the College of Letters. And the thought of teaching in this lovely enterprise that had been started by Vic Butterfield, with other teachers that I was very fond of like Norman O. Brown and Rudich and Peter Boynton, was compelling.

Smith: That was the Golden Age here--or so I've always been told.

Schwaber: It was the Golden Age. And at the end of the Butterfield era, when Wesleyan had enormous amounts of money, with this superb Humanist in charge of the University, who, in my day, knew every student, by his first name... He would say hello to us by our first names, and he would chat with us. He was a marvelous guy. It isn't that he was bumptious. He was just kind, I think, and really interested in people.

So, anyway, they interviewed me---Ihab Hassan was another kettle of fish. Ihab played chess with Alvin Keibel while interviewing me. He didn't look at me. And at one point he said: "Schwaber, are you an Apollonian or a Dionysian?" I guess I was flustered in that I didn't know what I was supposed to say, and I didn't know what the answer was, but finally I said: "I think I'm an Apollonian." More rational than excitable. He didn't look up, he just said: "Too bad."

I thought I had lost the job, but I hadn't. They assured me that Wesleyan was going co-ed. I was not going to come back to an all-male school. I didn't think that I had a great future at Wellesley--but I had a wonderful present.

Smith: What year was this that they told you it was going to go co-ed?

Schwaber: Well, 1965 it must have been, because they started going co-ed in 1966.

Smith: So they really meant it; they weren't just trying to lure you with an empty promise.

Schwaber: No, no, they had the plan all set; and I made it very clear that unless they were very serious, I wasn't serious. It isn't that I helped bring co-education to Wesleyan, but co-education helped bring me to Wesleyan.

So. That's how I got interested, and during my early years here, I went into psychoanalysis because I was having trouble getting married, and I was having trouble with my inner life. And I found that the two fields really fascinated me in similar ways. They were about people's stories and about comments, and particular words and metaphors that are revealing, perhaps more revealing than originally intended. I just found the two disciplines playing off one another very nicely. And I essentially built my career on that basis.

Smith: Can you tell me something about your publications?

Schwaber: Well, I've published lots of articles, but my book is about James Joyce's *Ulysses*, and it's about the narrative styles and the way in which the narrative styles always express and never interfere with the unfolding of character and the consistency and richness of the characterizations in the books.

And it fascinates me that he and Freud were writing at the very same time, and Freud didn't know anything about Joyce and Joyce claimed that he didn't know anything about Freud---though he made fun of him. But it was found in his library after he'd died that he had several of Freud's books in German.

But they proceeded in their own ways. One thinking scientifically, one thinking as a narrative artist, and that marvelous language.

Smith: So here you are. You're going into psychoanalysis because---among other things--- you're having trouble getting married. Are you saying that you couldn't settle down?

Schwaber: Something like that. I mean, I just wasn't content, and I was having some problems with depression. Anyway, my problems are unimportant. People go into analysis for all sorts of reasons, and it was very helpful over the long run.

And it gave me a second career. All through my post-tenure years, I would see patients in New Haven in the morning and then come up here in the afternoon and teach courses in the COL. All the COL courses were in the afternoon.

Smith: Sorry, I hadn't realized that you had these dual careers. I know you said you had studied psychoanalysis, but I didn't know you also became qualified. That's very impressive.

Schwaber: Yes. A colleague offered me the use of his office early in the morning, and I took it, and things went on from there.

Smith: I'm always surprised at how flexible Wesleyan has been in matters like this.

Schwaber: Wesleyan never gave me any trouble about it. Insofar as I was questioned about it, I said: It's just another way of doing my work, in the same way that members of the Economics Department or the Political Science Department may go to Washington one day a week, it's just another aspect of doing the job. I said: This is my field work.

Smith: And was the Department congenial?

Schwaber: Very. The COL was always terrific. I thought the senior people---they were mostly senior people when I came in as a young one---and the senior people were very supportive, very pleasant to work with. We all taught colloquia, the basic required courses in each stage in the COL major. They were team-taught courses, and so I would team up with Dick Vann, a historian, or Norm Rudich, a French teacher and committed Marxist, and Phil Hallie for a while. The only thing that got in the way was that Wesleyan lost some of its money and we lost Vic Butterfield, our protector, and it became harder to get appointees and harder to get faculty.

Smith: Really! Nobody's mentioned that before, that's very interesting.

Schwaber: Well, and the COL, being a small and in some way an unusual department, experimental in a way, and as such, seen as Butterfield's heritage, was, I think, resented as such by some of the larger departments.

Anyway, many of our positions thereafter were joint appointments, and we had trouble getting some key people tenure because the traditional department looked askance at our person.

Smith: I know there has always been politics at this place, but I'd always gathered that, before the Sixties, it was pretty subterranean.

Schwaber: When I was Director of the COL, I thought it was ferocious at times. I was furious, for example, at Tom Huhn not getting tenure.

Smith: I'm not familiar with that name.

Schwaber: He's now the head of interdisciplinary studies at the School for Visual Arts in New York, run by David Rhodes, a College of Letters graduate. And Tom has really developed essentially a College of Letters there.

Smith: That must have been frustrating.

Schwaber: It was frustrating. And now it's part of history. There were presidents afterwards who were very bright people, but who were more bureaucratic than educators, I think.

Smith: And, with the exception of Etherington, most of them stuck around for quite a while. I should know but I don't know how long Butterfield was president.

Schwaber: Butterfield retired in 1967. Etherington was here for a few years, then Campbell. Campbell was a lovely man. I liked Campbell. And Bob Rosenbaum was his Provost.

Smith: And Rosenbaum served as Acting President as well.

Schwaber: And he was kind of tough on COL Tough on me, anyway.

Smith: In what way? He questioned finances or...?

Schwaber: No, this gets in to my battles for tenure, not very exciting. So, let's get on with what you want to know.

Smith: This is all relevant. We're here to talk about your experiences during your fairly long tenure at this university. It's an Oral History Project, and it really is covering a fairly broad spectrum over more than 50 years. Your experiences cover more than 50 years here.

Schwaber: Started in 1953.

Smith: So, closer to 60 years. The object is to learn how different participants in the history of this place perceived and interpreted the changes or advances---or mistakes---that occurred in their departments or on the campus during their time here.

Schwaber: Wesleyan obviously moved in the direction of graduate studies in the sciences. And increasingly, in my experience anyway, straight disciplinary---people getting tenure in particular departments.

When I was an undergraduate, Norman O. Brown taught in Classics and he was all over the lot, and Carl Shorske taught in History and he was all over the lot, Bob Cohen taught in Physics and he was a philosopher, and so, there were Humanists everywhere. Carl Viggiani, in Romance Languages, had been a friend of Camus. An outstanding biologist, Ernst Caspari, taught Freshman Humanities (Great Books).

Smith: And that was a Golden Age of teaching here.

Schwaber: It seemed to me to be indeed a Golden Age, and it was Butterfield's creation. He brought all these people and in some ways during the McCarthy days he, as a Republican, defended them.

I know there was a fellow, a Chaucerian, who went back to Berkeley before I came to Wesleyan. His name was Charles Muscatine. I know he was hired at Wesleyan for a few years when he had trouble with the House Un-American Activities Committee in California.

Smith: I knew Mr. Butterfield was unusual, and he was long deceased when I came to the campus in 1981, but Mrs. Butterfield was still a considerable force on campus.

Schwaber: I didn't know her very well.

Butterfield had a great way of appreciating people's uniquenesses. For example, he loved the fact that I came here as an Orthodox Jew from Brooklyn, and I could get Kosher food nearby on Pine Street. And that's the reason I came here to Wesleyan. In addition to my older brother coming here. I wanted very much to go to Amherst, but I couldn't get Kosher food there.

Smith: That's truly interesting. And your older brother was in what class?

Schwaber: 1954.

Smith: What was his name?

Schwaber: Jules.

Smith: I didn't know there was a legacy here. In Brooklyn, how did you learn about Wesleyan?

Schwaber: My brother heard about Wesleyan as a way for a Jew to get into medical school. He wanted to be a doctor and he became a doctor. He came here to study in

the sciences, and sure enough, he got into a first-rate medical school—Cornell. You knew things like this about colleges by way of rumor in Brooklyn. And then we had a very nice impression of Middletown—and, again, there was this woman who made Kosher meals for us...

Smith: That's an aspect that no one's brought up before. Quite fascinating.

Schwaber: Well, there was a small proportion of Jews; never more than 10 percent in my undergraduate years. There were fraternities on campus we couldn't get into---and we didn't want to get into.

Smith: My husband taught at Swarthmore College for much of his career, starting in 1968. It was very small, and at that time was very proud of the fact that it had a comparatively large proportion of Jewish students. Certainly not from its inception, but probably post-war. But nobody was talking about black students then.

Schwaber: Exactly. There were one or two blacks at Wesleyan in my undergraduate years. Ed Beckham was one of them. Of course everybody thought he was Jewish because he came from West Hartford.

Smith: From what I remember of Ed Beckham, he could have been anything, and been welcomed anywhere. He was a very versatile man.

When I was working here, I wrote two articles for the alumni magazine that were great fun to work on. One on the advent of women, and how that was engineered. And the other article was on the introduction of African Americans and other minorities. In the case of the women, faculty wives played a significant role; not that they could set policy, but they were a considerable force in raising the issue and pressing it forward.

When blacks came, there were certainly a number of individuals who worked hard to make it happen, but there was also a groundswell of opinion for it on campus and among many faculty.

Schwaber: Well, the times were ready, people were ready for it. Generations were ready for it.

Anyway, my career involved some colleagues I was very fond of, liked working with, Herb Arnold being one of them; Bill Firshein in Biology was one of them. We didn't really work together but we joked together. Barry Kieffer in Biology was a good friend, so there were many connections that were possible and there was pleasure in the work.

I started teaching seminars on Freud and psychoanalysis in which we read essentially through Freud's representative works and studied the way in which his own capacities as a writer seemed to be part and parcel of the way in which he argued with himself and advanced his theories.

And I started teaching *Ulysses*. I started teaching James Joyce because I had never read *Ulysses*, so I decided to teach it. And that became a seminar that I taught often and that was very popular.

I was teaching also in the English Department for years until I got tenure. It was the understanding when I was hired that I was teaching in two departments, but when I got tenure, I would teach in the COL solely, and that indeed is what happened.

I was turned down first and then got it on appeal. My case was a good one but not a great one; it could have gone either way, but I think it was seen that I was involved in the next generation of COL people, and I was important that way.

And I had taught in the English Department, and my courses were open to English Department students. I did some Shakespeare teaching; a course on tragedy which involved mostly Shakespearean tragedy, but not solely.

I was very fond of a course called English 13-14, which was the survey of English literature from Chaucer to Yeats. That was a required course for the English major until the English Department threw over Great Britain and divided themselves into different groups not necessarily focusing on English Literature. That course was finally taken away from me because they stopped teaching it, which was a great loss to me because I enjoyed it very much.

Smith: You couldn't persuade them to bring it back every few years so future students could enjoy it?

Schwaber: Well, they didn't. I guess there was a real push for American Studies, Black Studies, Feminist Studies. There were other groups that wanted recognition, but the trend had turned away from Empires, so Britain suffered.

Smith: That's a pity because, when you're an undergraduate you don't see trends happening around you; you only see that in hindsight.

Schwaber: And I gradually wrote my Joyce book, which was essentially chapter by chapter, and paper by paper, and then bringing it together. I had a wonderful editor at the Yale University Press who finally said to me: "Well, Father Christmas, what about it?"

Smith: She felt you had done enough tinkering? That it was ready to become a book?

Schwaber: Well, she felt that it was. And she was right. And it's done well. In fact just this morning, I called up the Yale Press trying to find somebody in this mechanical age, trying to get hold of a person to explain to me how come the book suddenly went into paperback. I assumed it's been selling, but I didn't know anything about it. They never told me that they were going into paperback. I'm still trying to find out.

Smith: That's odd. I've never worked for a publisher, but I've know publishers and they usually coddle their authors, especially if they are producing well.

Schwaber: Joyce was bedeviled in his time by being published in America by pirates, by publishing houses that essentially were not paying him, that were not legitimate. One by a man named Roth (no pun intended), and so it's possible that some pirate company is turning my book into paperback. But, no, it has Yale written all over it.

Smith: But you do get royalties?

Schwaber: Well, I will find out if I'm going to get royalties. Once a year I get royalties. Last time I think it was three dollars and seven cents.

To take a psychoanalytic perspective on a great book and not write about the author's psyche but write about the characters, that is not everybody's idea of a good time. Freud's popularity has dropped off considerably, so has the popularity of psychoanalysis.

Smith: Really?

Schwaber: Sure. Shorter treatments are more valued---and paid for by insurance companies.

Smith: But it is still very popular in terms of literature, as the basis for story telling, and movies.

Schwaber: It's a very good theory of mind. It does illuminate a good deal. You can't just prescribe it. You have to arrive at it jointly. The person has to in some way recognize it implicitly, if not explicitly, over time. As a text has to bring back your theory with some verification over the course of it.

Smith: You did get married, I gather.

Schwaber: Oh, yes. My wife is a psychoanalyst. I met her in psychoanalytic school. I carried her books, and took her to lunch....

Smith: It's interesting to think of what your life together might be like. Do you question each other's motives?

Schwaber: Often enough. We have a good time together. We do a fair amount of laughing. And she's Irish. She's my native speaker, you might say, with Joyce. And our daughter used to entertain us with stories. She would have some friends over and she'd

say to us: “You know, Mom and Dad, it’s not every parent who has on his shelves a book called *Masturbation from Infancy to Senescence*. And whatever you do, please never say ‘P---- envy’ in front of my friends!” So we behaved ourselves.

Smith: I love this picture of your home life!

And you decided to live in Hamden?

Schwaber: Yes. Well, she is connected to Student Health Service at Yale and has a private office for her own career. My office is a block away from hers in New Haven. Again, a male colleague of mine in that class let me share his office, and he eventually moved away and I now have the office to myself.

Smith: But that hasn’t in any way interfered with you social life here at Wesleyan?

Schwaber: With social life, I think it has. I was involved a great deal with it for a while. And COL was very involved for a while.

Smith: A lot of people I’ve talked to live in town or very close to town. Not many travel.

Schwaber: It’s a half-hour drive. It became a bit of a chore, but it also became a time to spend by myself, or listening to the news, and wondering what the hell was happening in the world. It’s a very bad time in the world, I think. It’s becoming very dangerous. But human history is devastating. It’s true there have been wonderful progressions and wonderful countries like ours, but the capacity for hatred, and the capacity for piety that masks hatred, and gives expression to it—that seems to be endless.

Smith: And depriving other people of work or housing or congenial association. Just listening to the radio this morning to stories of refugees paying thousands of dollars to be transported across the Mediterranean, then sending them out with no guidance or protection, to be drowned... It seems they were never intended to be saved. It is a terrible world.

Schwaber: And always has been. Cruelty. That's one of the reasons that psychoanalysis is such a serious theory of mind. Freud thought it a science. Whether it is a science is arguable; but, one way or another, it's got a very important emphasis on life drive, libido, and it's got a very important emphasis on death drive and destructiveness. Destructiveness to others, to oneself, cruelty of the superego; you know, the extremity of it, the certainty that people can have that their god is right and everybody else's god is wrong. And they deserve beheading for that.

Smith: Well, our side, as it were, went off on the Crusades.

Schwaber: The Crusades were very much a part of that. And they were responding to Muslims overrunning large portions of the earth, including the Christian territories.

Smith: This may not be a conversation for this meeting, but, looking around me, I find it difficult to believe in any Higher Power. I think we are all floundering.

Schwaber: Well, I sort of agree with you. My favorite book in the Bible is the book of Job: it's the man who argues with God about God's injustice.

Smith: You spoke about how congenial you thought President Butterfield was in so many aspects of the University. We know that Etherington's heart was largely engaged elsewhere quite quickly, but he did start--or inspire--the Etherington Scholarships, which brought a satisfying number of older students to the campus to start or continue their undergraduate education. He had an impact. Then Colin Campbell came, and my sense is that he impressed enough people to be elected president, but he was very young, and initially rather shy and even unimpressive in some ways.

Schwaber: Yes. He had to grow into the job.

Smith: But in my view he became an amazing force in and on this community.

Schwaber: I liked him a lot. I thought he was a very nice fellow. And that he had grown in the job and that he had a sense of Wesleyan as an expanding enterprise. Which was appropriate. It expanded in a way that many universities have expanded. And I think that some of the original flavor that really moved me about Wesleyan, Butterfield's Wesleyan, and the kinds of people who were hired here and could have a career here, was lost.

But that wasn't just his doing, It was a whole faculty, essentially, agreeing with this turn. You know: big departments essentially running the place.

But, you know, when I started teaching here, when Butterfield held faculty meetings, it seemed that the entire faculty was there. Butterfield would sit in the Science Center at the front table and hold forth. He would introduce topics, he would listen to people, he would comment, he was essentially the central force in the discussion. Over time, that was lost. With Colin, I think Bob Rosenbaum ran the meetings, and subsequently the president of the faculty would run the meetings, and the president of the University would just sit among the faculty.

In fact, very few people come to the meetings now, and very few people know one another or know one another's characteristic impressions and attitudes, which made for a much more convivial campus. Even if there was hostility, there was known argument, rather than just sort of memos sent back and forth.

Smith: I didn't know that Colin didn't run the meetings.

Schwaber: As I remember it. I'm getting hazy.

Smith: Well, that's fair. I don't believe I ever went to any--or perhaps I went to one when a particular professor asked me to listen to a pertinent discussion.

Schwaber: But now they have a problem rounding up a Quorum.

Smith: Really?

Schwaber: Yes. Maybe it's changed with Michael. I haven't been going to meetings.

Smith: You retired in?

Schwaber: Two years ago.

Smith: So you've known him, and you've worked with him. He's been here since 2002 perhaps? He arrived after I left, so I haven't experienced his style of leadership.

Schwaber: I know that the few meetings I did go to before I retired, he sat with the faculty, and the president of the faculty presided. That essentially put a representative of the faculty as a buffer between the Faculty and the Administration. He didn't speak for a faculty cause.

Smith: What I don't know is: What's the hot topic on the campus right now?

Schwaber: I don't know either. You'll have to ask somebody else.

Smith: We've managed to rattle through a lot of years pretty fast! Unlike some of your colleagues, you don't seem to have many complaints about the performances of different presidents or the removal or alteration of different programs...

Schwaber: Well, I got pretty angry at times about funding for the COL and getting good faculty. For example, to get Howard Needler--when he retired---to get him replaced. He and I were retiring about the same time, and we got one position! My position, if it were going to be filled, or if it was filled, would be filled by someone half-time with the English Department.

It's a very small staff, at a time when individual careers are essentially the basis of success, people move off. They get tenure in the College of Letters and then they

move off. I don't want to mention names, but you know, you lose people who you would assume would be full-time in the COL.

Smith: I think you may mention names if you wish to, because the audio portion of this project will go into the Archives at Olin as is, but after I type this up you have the opportunity to edit or augment it or smooth it out in any way you wish. And the written material is probably what most future students of these interviews will refer to, or use in their research.

Which I hope they will, because it really is a wonderful kaleidoscope of impressions and anecdotes and stories about this University over the second half of the 20th Century--and beyond.

Schwaber: Well, I think that in some ways Laurie Nusdorfer in the History Department and the COL was far more involved in History as a discipline than with the broad scope of Humanistic Studies from the COL point of view. Ethan Kleinberg, conversely, is much more interested in running the Center for the Humanities. And he was certainly crucial to my sense of what would be done at the COL after me.

But it's a difference in generations, and it's a difference in the reality principle. When you have a president like Butterfield who's overseeing what is going on and who has a vision of education that's really influencing the way the school is run, and the tone of the school, and the shared communal aims of the school---well, it's a different matter from something that is just competing for dollars and applicants and publications.

Smith: When I was here I worked in what was then called the Office of Public Information. Our job was bringing all the pretty strawberries to the top of the box, making the University look brilliant and fascinating--academic and social life and the arts and sports, all of it.

Schwaber: Well, one of the things that has really changed over the years is that the Arts area has developed enormously. World Music, The Center for the Arts, Cinema Studies. That's enormous growth and change.

Smith: But remember you were talking about Nobby Brown and the sterling faculty who were here when you were an undergraduate. The place was surely considered to be very hot at that time.

Schwaber: Yes, and Carl Shorske was here. They were a very impressive crew.

Smith: When I worked here, people used to talk about those as the great years of fantastic faculty and a lively, if not even glittering, social life among Wesleyan faculty and administrators. There were parties and things like Arts Balls, with exotic costumes and food and sometimes skits or readings.

Schwaber: That was before my time. But it was a smallish school with a lively and imaginative campus life.

Smith: Are you feeling this is enough for today?

Schwaber: If you do.

Smith: We seem to have accomplished quite a lot, but after I type this up and you read it, you may feel that there are questions I haven't asked or areas you still want to discuss or cover. We're wide open.

Schwaber: And where is this destined to be placed?

Smith: In the Archives, which are in Olin Library, in the Special Collections.

Schwaber: Thank you. I look forward to reading what you send me.

Smith: It's been a true pleasure.

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Interview concluded at 12:30 pm.