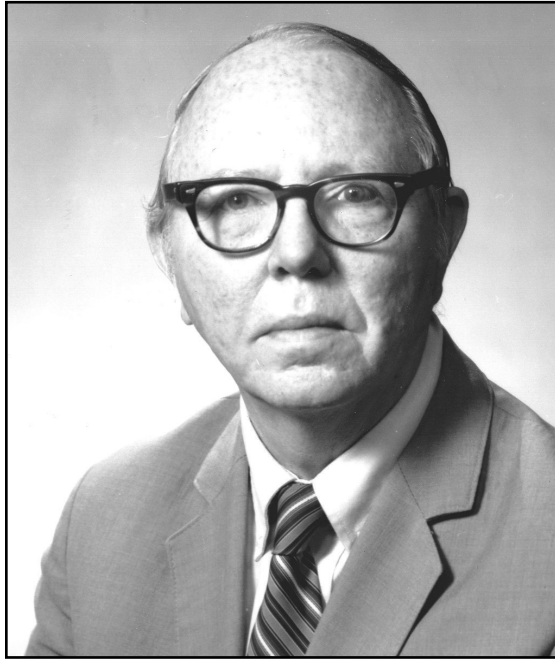

ARTHUR WALTON LITZ



31 OCTOBER 1929 · 4 JUNE 2014

Arthur Walton Litz, the Holmes Professor Emeritus of Belles-Lettres in the Department of English at Princeton University, died in Princeton on June 4, 2014. He had been in intermittent poor health since before his retirement in 1994. Walt Litz, as he was known to generations of admiring colleagues on both sides of the Atlantic, was born in Nashville on October 31, 1929, and grew up there and in Little Rock. His distinguished career in the Princeton Class of 1951 culminated in his election as a Rhodes Scholar. At Merton College, Oxford, he took the degree of D.Phil. in 1954, with a distinguished dissertation on James Joyce. After spending two years as an intelligence officer in the Army, he returned to Princeton as an instructor in English in 1956. Here he would spend the rest of his long career, rising rapidly through the professorial ranks and assuming numerous important roles in university governance and administration. The Holmes chair, which Litz occupied from 1977 until 1994, is Princeton's oldest endowed professorship.

In his nearly 40 years at Princeton, Litz conspicuously exemplified the institution's dual professional aspirations of distinction in scholarship and excellence in teaching. As an undergraduate teacher his precisely organized lecture courses were heavily subscribed, but he was equally sought after as a mentor and director of independent work. He was of the last generation when even the most distinguished faculty spent half their teaching hours in preceptorials, and he was an acknowledged master of the art. No less conspicuous was his success as a graduate teacher and director of dissertations. His former graduate students include several of the most distinguished experts in American and British modern literature both in the United States and England.

He was a person of broad intellectual interests who enjoyed his interactions with fellows in many different academic and artistic fields. His teaching prowess, which gained him so enviable a local reputation, was recognized by the larger academic world with notable honors: the receipt of the E. Harris Harbison Award for Gifted Teaching in 1972, and an appointment as a Phi Beta Kappa Visiting Scholar for the year 1978–1979. In 1989 Litz was in Oxford occupying the prestigious Eastman Visiting Professorship. For many years Litz taught on the summer faculty of the master's program at the Bread Loaf School of English at Middlebury College, where he deeply influenced hundreds of the country's most outstanding secondary teachers of literature.

His extensive published work covered an exceptionally large field, chronologically and stylistically. He was a great lover of Jane Austen, but he always seemed to regard the three books he devoted to her in the category of the *jeu d'esprit*. His principal focus was on the thorny masters of Anglo-American modernism in both prose and

poetry—especially James Joyce, Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, and Wallace Stevens. He was among the relatively small number of critics who have devoted serious attention to the major modern achievements of the short story. The genre of the memorial minute allows no room for a detailed bibliographic account of his publications, but they fall chiefly into three categories. The first is the critical study, such as his famous *Art of James Joyce* and *Introspective Voyager: The Poetic Development of Wallace Stevens*. The second is the commented or critical edition, of which there are some dozens; and the anthologies, especially those devoted to modern American writers. Finally, there are the numerous collaborative contributions to fundamental literary research, ranging in size from the seventh volume of the *Cambridge History of Literary Criticism* to the 63-volume archive of James Joyce manuscripts.

No scholar is adequately represented by a catalog of external achievements, but the influence exercised by Litz, perhaps more than for many others, was everywhere connected with personal qualities of generosity and professional savoir faire. He was supremely effective as a mentor to younger faculty as well as to graduate students. In his office in Princeton he kept what generations of beneficiaries thought of as a magical telephone, with which, it seemed, he could reach editors and department chairs throughout the world. His abundance overflowed, his encouragement was effectual, and his influence on scholarship and teaching in the humanities extended well beyond even his own copious production.

He occupied numerous important roles in national and international academic life. He served on the executive council of the Modern Language Association, and for several years he was a prominent member of the board of Oxford University Press. But his indelible mark is most easily seen in the institution in which his whole career played out. His two terms as chairman of the Department of English (1974–1981), during which he negotiated several brilliant faculty appointments, saw a dramatic rise in the department's international reputation. As one of the earlier chairs of the Council of the Humanities after its transition from the old "Special Program," he helped lay the organizational foundation for which the Council now enjoys national admiration.

Litz was a past master of the art of academic politics, which he practiced with such effortless aplomb as to render it nearly admirable. Though he held some firm ideas concerning literary study, he was essentially a pragmatist who understood both the institutional and the human natures of a university and who prized the power of consensus. He was an impressive speaker—with an eloquence usually soft-spoken and inexorably persuasive, but not wholly innocent of an acerbic wit.

His energies and ambitions perfectly coincided with the goals and aspirations of the larger whole. A colleague of almost extravagant intellectual generosity, he appeared tireless in making nominations, writing recommendations, reading manuscripts, pointing out opportunities, suggesting helpful revisions, making useful introductions, and giving away editorial projects and bright scholarly ideas. Both in the distinction of his individual achievement and in the energy of his contributions to the national cultural project, he exhibited the aspirations of the American Philosophical Society.

Elected 1991

JOHN V. FLEMING

Louis W. Fairchild Professor of English and Comparative Literature Emeritus
Princeton University