

RESOLUTION ON THE RETIREMENT OF DAVID CAVITCH
PRESENTED BY JONATHAN WILSON ON MAY 14 2001

*Adopted by the Faculty of Arts and Sciences and Placed in the Archives of
Tufts University*

David Cavitch was born in 1933 in Traverse City, Michigan, where his parents, immigrants from Russia, ran a grocery store. David's early years are beautifully and poignantly evoked and chronicled in his memoir American Pie. Watching in the grocery store, where "the clerks hustled in routines that kept them organized like a gun battery in the imperial Russian artillery, or studying at elementary school as the only Jewish child in a place where the new children were thrown together like a box of cherries and jiggled every day into making new acquaintances," David received his vital early education in American life, an education that has always been equal parts street and school.

In 1951, David enrolled at the University of Michigan, and graduated four years later with a degree in English. Soon after, he was drafted into the army and served two years. During his service, he answered the question about what one does with an English degree by becoming Editor of his Base newspaper in Missouri. In 1960, he took off to the University of California, Berkeley, to begin his graduate studies. He received his Ph.D. in 1966; his dissertation on D.H. Lawrence was directed by the eminent critics Mark Schorer and Frederick Crews. Two years earlier, David had taken up his first teaching post at Smith College, but he maintained close ties to California throughout the tumultuous campus years of the Sixties, returning not only to Berkeley but also to teach at U.C. Riverside. In 1969, David's first book was published. D.H. Lawrence and the New World was widely and favorably reviewed and a critical success on both sides of the Atlantic. The publication also led him into a correspondence with Anna Freud, a suitable and probably necessary prelude for arrival at the English Department at Tufts University.

David came to Tufts in 1972 as an Associate Professor. In 1982 he became a full Professor. Over the years, he has served the English Department in many roles: as Chair from 1976 to 1980, Director of Graduate Studies, and one of the shapers of the Writing Program which he extensively revised in partnership with Sylvan Barnett. Indeed, David's masterful text book Life Studies, currently in its seventh edition from Bedford Press, grew out of his interest in teaching in the Freshman Writing Program. Early in his career at Tufts, David tried to persuade senior members of the English Department to teach Composition at least once in a while- a task that can be compared in difficulty only to creating a new block schedule that would require senior members to come in on Fridays.

In 1985, his book The Inner Life of Walt Whitman, a superb study of the great grey poet, was published, to be followed two years ago by American Pie whose delectable slices I commend to you all. In the English Department we shall miss David's grand passion for teaching, intellectual debate, and above all, literature. To hear David Cavitch read a poem that he loves is to be unutterably moved.

David will be remaining nearby in Somerville, reading, writing, and, among other activities, listening to opera. His legacy at Tufts is a rich one, so too are his continuing contributions to the world of writing, but I know he is proudest of all of the fact that there are now three Cavitches listed in the Directory of the Modern Language Association. David himself, his daughter Elizabeth, who teaches in the French Department of George Washington University, and his son Max, an Assistant Professor in American Literature (tenure track no-less!) at the University of Pennsylvania.

On behalf of the committee, I move that this resolution on the retirement of David Cavitch be spread on the permanent record of this faculty and that a copy of it be sent to his son, his daughter, and Cathy Doheney, the Secretary of the Faculty.

