

## Biography: Charles Webb

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**Charles Webb** is an author who has published several novels but is most famous for his first, *The Graduate*, which was made into an enormously successful film. Two recurring themes in Webb's work are coming of age and sexual awakening.

### Early life

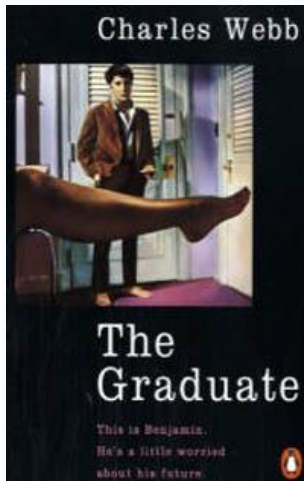
Webb was born on June 9 1939 in San Francisco, California. He attended Midland School in Los Olivos, California, and Williams College, in Massachusetts, from which he graduated in 1961, having majored in American history and literature. He declined an inheritance from his father, a wealthy doctor.

As of 2006, Webb has been with his long-term female partner Fred for some 43 years. Fred (given name Eve) shaves her head and calls herself by this name in a show of support "for men named Fred who have low self-esteem." Fred is an artist and her work includes illustrations for Webb's 2002 novel *New Cardiff*. The couple have two sons.

Webb and his wife were disenchanted with their own education and consequently removed their children from school so that they could teach them at home. This was an illegal act in California at the time, and to evade the authorities they embarked on an itinerant existence which at one point involved managing a nudist camp in New Jersey. They also divorced, not out of personal differences, but in protest against the institution of marriage.

The couple moved to England in 2000 and they currently live in Hove, East Sussex.

### The Graduate



Webb's first and still most famous novel was published in 1963. As with much of his work, it was perhaps most immediately notable for its flawlessly pitched dialogue, its wry (if not sly) humor, and its evocative and communicative understatement. The character of "archetypal seductive older woman" Mrs. Robinson and the "plastics" references have probably found a permanent niche in American cultural history.

The novel was made into a hugely successful film in 1967 by Mike Nichols, although Webb has stated that he never felt comfortable with the attention the movie brought him because he felt it distracted from his status as a serious artist.

Webb sold the film rights for a one-off payment reported to be \$20,000. He was rarely associated with the movie's publicity and not particularly with the growth of its reputation. Buck Henry and Calder Willingham, the script writers, assumed much of the credit for the work despite taking most of the dialogue direct from the book.

During the movie's enormous success, the producer, Joseph E. Levine, offered Webb token recognition by an additional compensation of \$10,000. Although the book was one of the most telling American novels of the 1960s, and mainly through the film one of the most quoted, it is generally excluded from the literary canon of the period, as are his other books.

### Home School

In April 2006 it was reported that Webb had written a sequel to *The Graduate*, entitled *Home School*, but refused to publish it in its entirety because due to a copyright loophole in the film rights he signed away in the 1960s, he also surrendered the rights to any sequels. If he were to publish *Home School*, Canal+, the French media company that now owns the rights to *The Graduate*, would be able to adapt it for the screen without his permission.

Extracts of *Home School* were printed in *The Times* on May 2, 2006. Webb also told the newspaper that there was a possibility he would find a publisher for the full text, provided he could retrieve the film rights using French intellectual property law.

At the same time as this news broke, Webb and his wife were also widely reported to be in such financial hardship that they were facing eviction from their home, owing rent of some £1,600. Webb said to *The Times* that although his writing had proceeded, "the selling [of his books] hasn't" because he spends most of his time caring for Fred, who has been clinically depressed since suffering a nervous breakdown in 2001.

In May 2006 however *The Times* reported that Webb had signed a publishing deal for *Home School* with Random House which would enable him to clear almost all his debts and instruct the French lawyers to attempt to retrieve his rights.

#### **Other works**

Webb's other novels include *Love, Roger*, *The Marriage of a Young Stockbroker* (also filmed), *The Abolitionist of Clark Gable Place*, *Orphans and Other Children*, *Elsinor* and *New Cardiff* (filmed as *Hope Springs*).

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