

DOCUMENTS OF THE GENERAL FACULTY

**REPORT OF THE MEMORIAL RESOLUTION COMMITTEE FOR
ROBERT NEILL MEGAW**

The special committee of the General Faculty to prepare a memorial resolution for Robert Neill Megaw, professor emeritus, English, has filed with the Secretary of the General Faculty the following report.

John R. Durbin, Secretary
The General Faculty

**IN MEMORIAM
ROBERT NEILL MEGAW**

Robert Neill Megaw, professor emeritus of English, died January 18, 2001. Neill, as he was called by friends and family, came to The University of Texas at Austin as professor of English and chair of the English department in 1969, after nearly 20 years of teaching at Williams College in Williamstown, Massachusetts. He retired in 1985.

Neill was born on October 7, 1920, in Ottawa, Canada, and came to the United States in 1925. He attended Duke University as an undergraduate and, after service as a bomber pilot in the United States Army Air Force during World War II, received his MA (1947) and PhD (1950) from the University of Chicago with a dissertation on "Shakespeare's Last Plays." The focus of his teaching was dramatic literature. At The University of Texas, Neill taught just about everything related to the theater, from Shakespeare to contemporary drama. He was a great help to younger faculty and graduate assistants seeking guidance on teaching plays. In 1973 he team-taught (with Professor Douglass Parker of the classics department) a tutorial course in reading drama from the Greeks to the present. He was an active member of the faculty playreading group that met on Sunday afternoons and a frequent speaker on the subject of theater, appearing (for example) on KUT's series "Theater and American Society." The many trips Neill and his wife, Ann, took to England always included attending plays, and in 1981 he helped to bring actors from the Royal Shakespeare Company to The University of Texas for performances.

Throughout his career Neill was very actively involved in curricular revision, always thinking about how students could be better served by courses and programs. He was especially dedicated to teaching lower-division students. He directed the sophomore literature program for the English department, and designed for this program an introduction to literature course that focused on the major genres illustrated by selections from different historical periods. Beyond the English department, Neill developed interdisciplinary courses for Plan II and for the Humanities Program, including Humanities 320, "Identity, Creativity, and Uses of the Past." During the early 1960s Neill helped to design an experimental curriculum for the University of California at Santa Cruz.

Neill was exceptionally active in professional organizations that worked for the benefit of higher education and for the welfare of its faculty. A longtime member of the American Association of University Professors, he served as president of the organization's Texas conference from 1976 to 1978, authored various articles for the AAUP journal *Academe*, and tracked legislation affecting faculty through many legislative sessions.

Upon his retirement, Neill found time not only to maintain his interest in drama but also to write and publish poetry. Like Richard Wilbur, whose work he particularly admired, Neill enjoyed the challenge of exercising his imagination within the constraints of conventional forms, including the Petrarchan and Shakespearean sonnet. His fund of words was enormous. He collected new ones avidly, and used them with precision in poems that are craftsmanlike, often witty, always informed by vast reading and infused with deep understanding of human experience. "Odysseus Returns" is a splendid example:

The strange beggarman easily strings the bow

Impossible to string, he plucks the cord --
 The sound, swallow-clear, but low,
 Wings swiftly down the hall, returns,
 Echoing through the hush as every lord
 Puts down his cup, appalled, white to the bone,
 Hearing in that rapturous tone
 The arrow-hiss through flesh to the heart
 Of rage, so long suppressed, ripened apart,
 And fate, ageless, set in stone.
 Late to school, now at last they learn.

His poems were published throughout the U.S. and abroad, and many have been anthologized. On the occasion of Neill's eightieth birthday, his family presented him with a volume of his poetry titled *Other Voices* (Austin: McNeill Press, 2000).

Neill Megaw brought to the English department knowledge and experience that served to broaden departmental horizons and to encourage the faculty to think of literary study in relation to the other humanities disciplines. In 1980 Neill gave the Phi Beta Kappa lecture at Texas Christian University on "The Future of the Humanities," making a case for education that is broadly conceived, opening doors from one discipline to another for our students. For the many ways in which Neill Megaw made this kind of education work at The University of Texas, and for his legacy of concern for the future of higher education and the welfare of the faculty, the English department will always be grateful.

This memorial resolution was prepared by a special committee consisting of Professors James D. Garrison (chair), James N. Loehlin, and Joseph J. Moldenhauer.

Distributed to the Dean of the College of Liberal Arts, the Executive Vice President and Provost, and the President on October 17, 2001. Copies are available on request from the Office of the General Faculty, FAC 22, F9500. This resolution is posted under "Memorials" at: <http://www.utexas.edu/faculty/council/>.