DOCUMENTS OF THE GENERAL FACULTY

REPORT OF THE MEMORIAL RESOLUTION COMMITTEE FOR
EDWIN TURNER BOWDEN, JR.

The special committee of the General Faculty to prepare a memorial resolution for Edwin Turner Bowden, Jr., professor emeritus, English, has filed with the secretary of the General Faculty the following report.

Sue Alexander Greninger, Secretary
The General Faculty

IN MEMORIAM
EDWIN TURNER BOWDEN, JR.

Edwin Turner Bowden, Jr., professor emeritus of English, died May 27, 2006. Ed, as he was known to friends and family, joined The University of Texas English Department in 1956 and retired in 1994. After receiving his B.A. from Harvard University in 1948, Ed was honored with a Fulbright Fellowship at Cambridge University, where he studied with F.R. Leavis. In 1952 he received his Ph.D. from Yale University, where he taught from 1952-56, before being recruited to Texas by Harry Ransom.

Ed was born on June 5, 1924, and belonged to the ‘great generation’ that fought to protect and secure our freedoms in World War II. Ed served in the U.S. Army Air Force from 1943-46. At the memorial service held for him on May 31, 2006, his casket was appropriately draped with the American flag.

The focus of Ed’s scholarship and teaching was American literature, especially of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. His first book, The Themes of Henry James (Yale University Press, 1956), addressed the question of the visual arts in James’s fiction. Arguing that the visual arts “provide a link between biography and literary criticism” and “a means of interpretation of the novels themselves,” Ed devotes special attention to the later novels: The Ambassadors, The Wings of the Dove, and The Golden Bowl. “These final novels . . . provide the natural summary of James’ development and presentation of theme, and by implication the development of his own esthetic consciousness.” In his next book, The Dungeon of the Heart (Macmillan Co., 1961), Ed turned to the problem of human isolation in American fiction. Considering the whole range of American fiction from James Fenimore Cooper to J.D. Salinger, Ed suggests the different ways in which American novelists represent the perennial “problems of individualism and conformity.” The special merit of this book is its willingness to engage a topic of real interest to most Americans and to address this general audience in a way that is respectful as well as clear, insightful, and interesting.

To help make more American literature available to general readers, Ed next turned his attention to writers whose work had either gone out of print or was available only in hard-to-find editions. In 1962, he thus published The Satiric Poems of John Trumbull (University of Texas Press, 1962), making available to many readers (the Perry-Castaneda Library at UT has nine copies of this volume on its shelves) the adventures of Tom Brainless, Dick Hairbrain, and Miss Harriet Simper. That Ed’s literary interests should extend beyond fiction to poetry in the tradition of Pope suggests his intellectual and aesthetic breadth. This breadth is also evident in Ed’s later bibliographical work on James Thurber, Peter DeVries, and (especially) Washington Irving. A long labor of love, his Washington Irving Bibliography (Twayne, 1989) appeared as volume thirty in The Complete Works of Washington Irving, for which Ed was the textual editor.

While dedicating himself to American literary scholarship, Ed also facilitated the scholarship of others in a variety of ways. Throughout his career, he was active in working with the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center (HRC) on exhibits and publications. In 1960, for example, he organized an exhibit titled ‘Familiar Books: A Bibliographical Exhibit for the Undergraduate,’ aimed at bringing students to the HRC and acquainting them with its collections. Ed also had a long association with the English department’s flagship journal Texas Studies in Literature and Language. After years of various editorial service to this journal, he was appointed its editor in 1975-76 and later as co-editor with William J. Scheick from 1977-1986. Professor Scheick observed that Ed was extraordinarily conscientious as an editor, sometimes even writing detailed reports to the authors of manuscript submissions. Ed was elected chair of the department’s Graduate Studies
Committee in 1974, and, in addition, served several terms on the Graduate Programs Committee, influencing in important ways the direction of graduate education in English for the benefit of our graduate students.

The range of his professional accomplishments and abilities served Ed well as mentor to younger faculty and as advisor to students. In the classroom, his approach to teaching American literature was typically interdisciplinary, as he always encouraged students to reach beyond the literary to the larger culture. Ed’s teaching covered the full spectrum of English department courses, from freshman English to graduate seminars, and he was highly esteemed by his students, especially so in the upper-division American literature courses for English majors. In the words of one student in E338 (American Literature from 1865 to the Present): “Professor Bowden is awesome.”

In his later years, Ed developed a range of interests beyond the classroom and library. He discovered recycling long before it became popular, collecting stray soft-drink cans left on campus so that they wouldn’t simply go into the landfill. He was a conservationist in other ways as well, eventually developing an informed amateur’s interest in the fossils of Central Texas, and in retirement, even becoming secretary of the Austin Paleontological Society. Conservation went together with a social conscience, evidenced by his work as a volunteer at El Buen Pastor Food Pantry. As a scholar, teacher, colleague, mentor, and friend, Ed Bowden made a valuable and enduring contribution to the English department and the larger community of which it is a part. For this legacy, the English department will always be grateful, counting Edwin T. Bowden as one of its most distinguished members.

Major Publications


“The First Hundred Publications of the Humanities Research Center of The University of Texas at Austin.” Humanities Research Center, 1971.


Listings

*Directory of American Scholars*

*Who’s Who in America*
This memorial resolution was prepared by a special committee consisting of Professors James D. Garrison (chair), William J. Scheick, and Joseph J. Moldenhauer.

Distributed to the dean of the College of Liberal Arts, the executive vice president and provost, and the president on June 26, 2006. Copies are available on request from the Office of the General Faculty, WMB 2.102, F9500. This resolution is posted under “Memorials” at: http://www.utexas.edu/faculty/council/.