DOCUMENTS OF THE GENERAL FACULTY

REPORT OF THE MEMORIAL RESOLUTION COMMITTEE FOR
MAX WESTBROOK

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

John R. Durbin, Secretary
The General Faculty

IN MEMORIAM
MAX WESTBROOK


Max was born in Malvern, Arkansas on April 26, 1927, and spent his childhood years in the backwoods at an abandoned logging camp where his father was the caretaker. The experience of growing up in the natural world contributed to Max’s non-institutionalized sense of natural piety. Max moved on to something closer to city life, graduating from Pine Bluff High School. He served in the U.S. Navy during WWII, and saw active duty in the Army during the Korean conflict. Max did his undergraduate work at Baylor, received his MA from the University of Oklahoma, and his PhD from The University of Texas in 1960. After teaching at the University of Kentucky from 1960 to 1962, Max returned to The University of Texas in 1962 as an assistant professor.

Max’s scholarship focused on late nineteenth and twentieth century American fiction. Especially noteworthy was his work on Hemingway, Stephen Crane, and Western American literature. William White singled out the bibliographical and critical essay Max co-authored with Robert Lewis on Hemingway’s “The Snows of Kilimanjaro” as “the outstanding textual study of a Hemingway story, long or short.” Marston LaFrance declared in American Literary Realism (1974) that “Among Crane’s published critics, the two best consistently have seemed to be James B. Colvert and Max Westbrook.” Perhaps Max’s most celebrated essay was “Grace Under Pressure: Hemingway and the Summer of 1920,” his wittily entitled account of the strained relations between Hemingway and his mother, Grace. When first presented as a paper to an audience of Hemingway scholars, Max’s challenge to the orthodox critical hostility to Grace Hemingway was met with stunned silence. But on publication it was recognized by the distinguished Hemingway biographer Michael Reynolds as “the most important Hemingway biographical essay of the year,” one that related “biographical information to the family conflicts of Hemingway’s early stories in such a judicious way that it should become a model for scholars.”

Of Max’s work on Western American literature, Don Graham observed that “he is at the top of a quite small number of important critics in the field.” Max served a term as President of the Western American Literature Association and received its highest award, the Distinguished Achievement in Scholarship, in 1988. Max undertook a major theoretical project on Western literature of the kind now much celebrated, the retrieval of marginalized discourses and writers. His essay in theoretical definition, “Conservative, Liberal, and Western: Three Modes of American Literature,” so impressed the writer, Frederick Manfred, that he stayed up all night discussing it and then mailed Max all his novels. When Walter Van Tilburg Clark read Max’s study of him, Clark felt that finally he had been understood. He wrote Max that his critique “relieved me a great deal and encouraged me toward writing again.” Warren French noted in American Literary Studies, An Annual, 1973 “that only a brave or foolhardy person would undertake a new survey of Walter van Tilburg Clark’s fiction in the wake of Max Westbrook’s noteworthy study.” Max’s critiques could also be severe, as in his persuasive
moral analyses of the dishonest political implications of John Ford’s film *Fort Apache*, and of John Wayne’s screen persona.

As a teacher, Max was a lifelong influence on some of his students. He also served the University as an effective administrator, becoming assistant and then associate dean of the College of Humanities from 1971 to 1974. He served six years as chair of the English department Graduate Studies Committee, establishing new graduate specializations in rhetoric, linguistics, and folklore. His administrative work attracted the attention of other institutions, which extended offers to him that he refused.

In later years Max turned to the writing of chapbooks of poetry and fiction, always in his unmistakable personal voice. Perhaps the most notable of these were his fine poetry collection, *Country Boy* and his entertainingly wry take on academia, *For Whom the Bell Rings*. Max’s poetry reflects his love for his wife, Frankie, and his children, Lynn, Brett, and Max Jr. Brett’s obituary remembrance conveys the interrelation of Max’s literary and family life perfectly: “Papa would take us children out for walks on Sundays and talk to us about or read to us from Emerson and Thoreau. I knew what an oversoul was before I was seven years old.”

This memorial resolution was prepared by a special committee consisting of Professors Anthony Hilfer (Chair), Don Graham, and Joseph Moldenhauer.

Distributed to the dean of the College of Liberal Arts, the executive vice president and provost, and the president on November 27, 2002. 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/](http://www.utexas.edu/faculty/council/).