

IN MEMORIAM
GEORGE G. WING

Professor George Gordon Wing died during the night of December 19, 1991, at his home in Austin. A Latin Americanist literary scholar, Professor Wing had been a member of The University of Texas faculty since 1962. His faculty appointment was in the Spanish and Portuguese Department and he enjoyed a lengthy association with the University's Institute for Latin American Studies. He is survived by his wife, Lucila López Wing, an educator whose special concerns are bilingual education and the entry into Texas classrooms of children of recent immigrant groups.

Professor Wing was born August 31, 1922, in Philadelphia, where he was graduated from Northeast Catholic High School in 1940. From 1942 to 1946, he served in the United States Navy. After completing his military service, he began his undergraduate studies at Temple University in Philadelphia, completing his undergraduate degree in 1949 with a major in Journalism and a secondary concentration in English literature.

In his post-graduate studies, Professor Wing shifted his scholarly focus to Spanish-language letters. During the year 1949-1950, he attended the Graduate School of Mexico City College, pursuing coursework in philosophy and Hispanic literature. In 1951 he was awarded a fellowship from the International Institute of Education for travel and study in Latin America. When in 1952 he began his doctoral work at the University of California at Berkeley, he entered through the Sociology Department. The next year, though, he transferred into the program in Romance Languages and Literatures, with a concentration in Spanish and Spanish American writing.

Professor Wing received his doctorate from the University of California at Berkeley in 1961 with a dissertation on Octavio Paz. In his subsequent scholarly writing, he monitored with close, knowledgeable, and critical attention the changes in the outlook and literary practice of the celebrated Mexican poet and essayist. Over the years, he maintained a knowing, generally sympathetic, sometimes admiring and at other times polemical relation with this figure.

In 1962, Professor Wing began his career as an Assistant Professor of Spanish at The University of Texas and was promoted to Associate Professor in 1968. During his years at The University of Texas, Professor Wing most frequently offered courses on contemporary Latin

American narrative and Mexican literature. In addition to teaching in his research areas, he offered beginning and intermediary Spanish instruction and served as undergraduate adviser both in Latin American Studies and in Spanish and Portuguese. At the graduate level, he developed a number of seminar topics. He was particularly drawn to a research concern that resulted in a course entitled "The Disappearing Hero in Spanish American Fiction." He was especially eager to give graduate students a sense of the changes that had taken place, over the course of the twentieth century, in the novelistic treatment of space, time, and person. Consequently, many of his advanced courses were designed to show a historical evolution over the course of the century, with the emphasis upon the features that most distinguish twentieth-century narrative innovation.

Determinedly comparatist in his approach to teaching literature, Professor Wing would often require students to read one or two European or U.S. novels along with the Spanish American narrative that was the primary subject matter of a course. His Spanish American reading lists frequently included works by John Dos Passos, whose fragmented and disjointed construction of time and space exemplified for him a quintessentially twentieth-century line of experimentation. André Malraux's *La condition humaine* enjoyed a central place in Professor Wing's vision of twentieth-century narrative; he not only placed it on required reading lists, but also encouraged his colleagues and advisees to read and reread the novel.

Late in his career, the longtime Latin Americanist Professor Wing surprised some of his colleagues by cultivating a scholarly and teaching interest in Spanish peninsular writers of the Generation of 1898. He successfully offered on several occasions a senior seminar on this group of writers.

In his research, Professor Wing concentrated on Mexican and other Spanish American writers of the twentieth century, with special emphasis on the ways in which tendencies in contemporary social thought intersected with the creation of imaginative writing. Some publications that show his characteristic range of interests are "El viudo Román y la niña Romelia" (1990), "Some Remarks on the Literary Criticism of Carlos Fuentes" (1982), "Octavio Paz, or the Revolution in Search of an Actor" (1973), "*Trilce I: A Second Look*" (1969), and "El teatro de Solórzano y el mito" (1963). His work appeared in such outlets as *Revista Iberoamericana*, *Revista Hispánica Moderna*, and *World Literature Today*. At the time of his death, Professor Wing had in progress a book-length study under the working title, *The Short Novel of the 1950s and 1960s in Mexico: A Critical Reappraisal*.

While regarded primarily as a Mexicanist, Professor Wing was also a student of the work of the celebrated Argentine writer Jorge Luis Borges. He served as Vice President of the International Jorge Luis Borges Society and directed graduate students working on Borges. He cultivated a number of other literary specialties; for example, he was a dedicated reader of crime fiction and a defender of the scholarly examination of this subgenre. When already well advanced in his career, he taught himself Portuguese and became an enthusiastic follower of Luso-Brazilian literature and intellectual life.

Professor Wing was a dedicated, careful, and highly judgmental reader of both creative literature and literary criticism. He was an advocate of a literary criticism not too technical for a general educated public, yet detailed enough to account for subtle features of literary language and construction. He was a great admirer of literary critics who expressed a broader vision of culture and society through wide-ranging, meditative essays. He especially appreciated Irving Howe, Edmund Wilson, André Malraux, Leslie Fiedler, and Isaiah Berlin. Professor Wing prized, and often applied in his own studies, Berlin's famous dichotomy between thinkers who were "hedgehogs," knowing only one thing, and those "foxes" who knew many things. He also admired C. Wright Mills for his humanistic, interdisciplinary essays in sociology and for his willingness to make straightforward judgments. Professor Wing often turned to those New Critics, such as R. P. Blackmur, whose work revealed their wider outlook on society and literature; he praised these generalists for their refusal to become "technicians" of literary analysis. In his own critical writing, Professor Wing proudly persisted in setting forth his ideas with an essay-like, plain-spoken elegance, rejecting with disdain the notion that a student of literature should define his or her methodology. He felt that his scholarly writing had benefited from his training in journalism, and he defended the principle that literary critics should enjoy no more license to be obscure than do working journalists. He viewed evaluation as an indispensable element in literary analysis; he delighted in unsettling colleagues by pronouncing trenchant judgments on the most respected literary works. While his electrifyingly negative verdicts on works were the most remembered, he could also be an enthusiastic advocate of those authors, such as the novelist Roberto Arlt, to whom, in his estimation, literary fame had been unjustly denied.

Professor Wing's office was a museum and something of a shrine to the great practitioners of humanistic thought. From within its apparent chaos, Professor Wing could produce articles out of yellowing issues of *Partisan Review* or *Saturday Review*, reminiscences of a time when little magazines, rather than academic journals, were the vehicle of expression for

the nation's literary intellectual. The walls and door of his office were covered with portraits of intellectuals who exemplified the type of critical analysis and expression of which Professor Wing was a stalwart defender, juxtaposed with excerpted citations that highlighted either Wing's intellectual ideals or his often dark, grotesque sense of humor.

During his twenty-nine years on The University of Texas faculty, Professor Wing directed to completion six doctoral dissertations and upwards of sixteen master's reports and theses. He frequently gave away to his students ideas for research projects that he had been turning over in his own mind for a long time. Some of Professor Wing's doctoral students, such as Carter Wheelock and Didier Jaén, went on to become well-established figures in the profession. Of the doctoral dissertations that students wrote under his supervision, several later became books or were the source of articles. These include *The Mythmaker: A Study of Motif and Symbol in the Work of Jorge Luis Borges* (1969), the much-cited analysis by Wheelock, and *Detective Fiction from Latin America* (1989), Amelia S. Simpson's development of a research theme that Professor Wing had long been cultivating. Jaén utilized in his research career a good deal of material developed while completing his 1964 dissertation under Professor Wing's supervision. *The Poetry and Poetics of Jorge Luis Borges* by Paul Cheselka, published in 1987, also exemplifies the research carried out by doctoral students under Professor Wing's guidance.

Robert M. Berdahl, President
The University of Texas Austin

H. Paul Kelley, Secretary
The General Faculty

This Memorial Resolution was prepared by a special committee consisting of Professors Robert Brody (Chair), Frederick G. Hensey, and Naomi Lindstrom.