IN MEMORIAM

GORDON H. MILLS

Gordon H. Mills, Professor of English, died suddenly of a heart attack in Austin on September 11, 1978, at the age of sixty-four. At the memorial service conducted by four of his colleagues, one of them summed up Dr. Mills's career in these words: "In my fifty years at The University of Texas I have never known a man who gave more of himself to others than did Gordon Mills." Friends who knew him intimately were agreed that no other memorial would have pleased Gordon Mills so well. He is survived by his wife Violet (Vody), son David, a grandson, and a sister.

Like many Americans who later make their mark in their chosen field, Gordon Mills began the world inauspiciously: he was born on a farm in central Michigan on February 9, 1914, and first attended a rural school in which a number of his classmates were Indians. Shortly afterward the family moved to Lansing, where the father was employed in a truck-body factory and the son attended public schools while working in his spare time at a great variety of jobs in the factory town. After a year at Michigan State University (then called Michigan State College) he worked for a year on an automobile assembly line until he had accumulated enough savings to pay tuition at the State University of Iowa, the curriculum of which appealed to him. There he received the degrees of B.S. in 1939, M.A., in 1940, and Ph.D. in 1942. He had been virtually self-supporting from early high-school days and was personally acquainted first with the bitter hardships of
unemployment characteristic of a factory town during the great Depression and later of supporting himself with various campus jobs as an undergradu-
ate until he attained the comparative affluence of a teaching assistant-
ship as a graduate student.

Friends of recent years were often unaware that Dr. Mills's undergradu-
ate major was history; it was sometimes assumed to have been physics be-
cause of his extensive knowledge of the subject. In fact that was a subject in which his knowledge was largely self-acquired, though his mastery of it was sufficient to enable him to teach physics (as well as English) in a cadet officer training program during the early years of World War II. Later he applied for and was granted a commission in the Navy, but before being called to duty he was persuaded that he could be of greater service as a research assistant in physics in the newly-organized Physics-Engineering Development Project, a highly secret government project based on the State University of Iowa campus. As member of a research team he helped develop a number of devices important in the war effort and later served as head of the editorial department for the entire project, a position that he held at the end of the war. This experience was subsequently turned to good use in the joint publication, with his colleague John Walter, of Technical Writing, which has gone through four editions and is believed to be the most widely used textbook in its field.

In 1945 Dr. Mills came to The University of Texas as an instructor in English; in the years that followed he was promoted through the several
ranks to professor. From 1962-64 he served as associate chairman of the Department of English, the duties of which he performed admirably. It was characteristic of the man, however, that he accepted the office out of a sense of duty rather than a liking for administrative work. His first love was always teaching, and having served his turn in administration, he returned to the classroom full time.

Even so, "full time" did not mean that he was able to be free to devote himself solely to teaching. His good sense, his balanced judgment, his fairness, and his integrity caused him to be in constant demand as a member of committees, often as chairman. The number of these was legion, but a few deserve special mention: the Executive Committee of the department, the Graduate Assembly, the Advisory Committee on Tenure and Promotions in the College of Arts and Sciences, and chairman of the Committee on Graduate Studies in English and of the Committee on Graduate Courses in English. In the early 1970's he foresaw the impending decline in majors in English (as well as in the Humanities in general) and the consequent decline in employment for future Ph.D.'s in English, and he undertook the thankless task of persuading reluctant colleagues to limit the number of graduate admissions and the number of graduate offerings. His work on the graduate program in English may well have been responsible for his appointment in 1977-78 to chair the committee to review the graduate program in Speech Communication. Withal, it is possible that, aside from his role as teacher, nowhere did Dr. Mills perform more valuable service than in committees and departmental meetings, where he
came to be regarded as the Voice of Reason.

Despite this heavy load of extra-classroom activities, Dr. Mills never neglected his commitment to teaching. Enrollment in his classes, undergraduate and graduate, established him as one of the popular—in the best sense of the word—teachers of the department, and when in recent years the innovation of students evaluating their teachers was introduced, the ratings and students' comments merely supported what was already known by his colleagues—that he was one of the fine teachers of the department. Students were not slow to discover him to be a man of erudition and judgment whose classes and dissertation advising were distinguished by original thought. In manner he was quiet, low-keyed, but intensely stimulating, for his mild and diplomatic manner concealed an open, independent, even aggressive intellect. Nor was his role as teacher limited to students enrolled in his courses. Colleagues sought him out for critical judgment and advice on manuscripts, and when the department instituted an orientation program for inadequately trained teaching assistants and assistant instructors, Dr. Mills was one of the first volunteers and won high praise for his contribution. Graduate students too were frequently found to be insufficiently trained in composition, and again, as volunteer, Dr. Mills met once a week with small groups of them to help them improve their writing.

Such qualities and talents as these could not fail to attract attention beyond the confines of the University, and over the years Dr. Mills received numerous invitations to deliver lectures or to read papers to various groups or associations, many of them out of state. The subjects were sometimes
technical or scientific and sometimes literary, for Dr. Mills was one of the few among his colleagues who could speak with authority on what C. P. Snow has called the two cultures. Although he regarded American literature as his primary interest, he never lost his concern for students in the sciences and professional schools, for whom, at the time of his death, he was scheduled to offer a course—"The Role of the Humanities in Decision Making"—under a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities.

**Technical Writing**, which first appeared in 1954, is an instance of how some of Dr. Mills's writing reflected and met the needs of many students in the sciences and professional schools, one segment of his students. The culmination of his thought to the time of his death, however, was the book *Hamlet's Castle*, which was, like its author, wise, learned, and quietly revolutionary. It is chiefly concerned with the study of literature as social experience. That experience, he believed, can most often be observed in the classroom, and he uses responses in the classroom to illustrate the principles or theoretical positions he is discussing. It is not a book about pedagogy or presentation; rather it is a book in which experience illuminates and corrects literary theory. Indeed it illustrates the way teaching and scholarship reinforced and fed one another in his own professional life. At the time of his death Dr. Mills was engaged upon a study of literary theory, with special reference to the novel, which promised to be an important treatise on the subject.

In recognition of Dr. Mills's contributions to the Department of English and The University of Texas his colleagues, students, and former students
have joined together to establish the Gordon H. Mills Memorial Lecture in Science, Values, and the Humanities.

Lorene L. Rogers, President of The University of Texas at Austin

Bill D. Francis, Secretary The General Faculty

This Memorial Resolution was prepared by a Special Committee consisting of C. L. Cline (chairman), W.O.S. Sutherland, and John A. Walter.