IN MEMORIAM

KATHERINE ERNESTINE WHEATLEY

Katherine E. Wheatley, professor emeritus of Romance Languages, died in Austin, the city of her birth, on October 3, 1977 at the age of eighty-three. Though she had come to embody for her students and her colleagues the very essence of seventeenth century French classicism, she always took equal pride in her southern heritage. A staunch defender of the polished cadences of classical French to which she was attuned like few others in her day, Katherine was no less zealous a champion of a kind of southern speech similarly beleaguered. A more knowledgeable defender of its rich inflections was scarcely to be found; as she used her native English, it seemed to take on all the expressive range and precision of a chastened classic tongue whose every nuance and variation in tone could be defined and codified. Her dramatic sense, derived from her close study of French classical dramatists, her wit, and her sense of the comic made her one of the great raconteurs of Austin society. When Katherine spoke, all conversations in a room stopped and people gathered round about her like courtiers in the salon of Madame de Rambouillet. It mattered little if one had already heard her anecdote: one listened as one does to a thoroughly familiar classic French play to savor every perfection of timing and inflection.

In the classroom Katherine instilled in her students such admiration and love for the French classics that when they moved on to graduate schools with possibly greater reputations to study with scholars of wider renown
rivaled the art of Ruth Draper. We are the poorer for not having insisted on
she record some of her repertory.

Professor Wheatley's teaching and scholarly career was pursued almost ex-
clusively at her alma mater. A Phi Beta Kappa graduate of the University of
Texas in 1915, she received her Master's degree a year later from the same
institution and was appointed to the staff as a Tutor in 1917. In 1921 she
got to the University of Chicago to do advanced work. Two years later she
won a scholarship to the prestigious Ecole normale supérieure de Sèvres,
where she was the first American admitted to study. On her return to America
in 1924 she was appointed an Adjunct Professor at the University of Texas.
She was awarded the PhD from the University of Chicago in 1930. Professor
Wheatley taught forty-four years at the University of Texas and was one of
the relatively few women in her day promoted to Full Professor. That recog-
nition in 1961 seemed to colleagues and students alike long overdue. She re-
tired officially in 1963, but continued an active life of scholarship and
came out of retirement to serve as visiting Professor of French at Rice Uni-
versity for the Spring semester of 1965.

Though mainly known as a Racine and Molière scholar, Professor Wheatley
was no narrow specialist. Following her first book, Molière and Terence,
published in 1931, she turned her attention to American speech. Her several
articles published in American Speech were important contributions to our
knowledge of southern and East Texas speech and established her reputation
as a linguist and phonetician. Already in the Thirties, she taught a highly
needed an orthographic crutch and publishers dismayed at the prospect of textbooks without words determined that it should remain only a brilliant experiment. This unique method, quite distinct in many ways from any other, deserves careful study by language scholars and serious consideration for use in intensive courses in oral French.

Professor Wheatley's principal titles to scholarly and pedagogical fame lay, however, in her intimate knowledge and understanding of classical French esthetics and her ability to communicate compellingly a vision of art essentially alien to the experience of her American students and readers. In doing so she demonstrated the unique educational value of foreign language study, that of coming to know and love another valid vision of man and society. Her book, Racine and English Classicism, showed her to be an incomparable Racine scholar, and demonstrated that Racine's English contemporaries had as difficult a time in understanding his peculiar genius as modern Americans. The publication of her book inspired a British lover of Racine, Mr. Samuel Solomon, to persevere in his verse translation of Racine's complete works. On completing that monumental task he submitted it to Professor Wheatley whose judgment for Random House was that "Racine has found his translator and ..., the untranslatable has been translated for the first time in the three hundred years which have gone by ..." Naturally the publishers insisted that Professor Wheatley write the prefaces for the two-volume edition. The critic Lon Tinkle described her introductory essay on Racine as "distinguished by subtlety of insight and vigor of thought (matching) in
created the role in German repertory, to play Monsieur Jourdain. Though the play met with enthusiastic acclaim, Professor Wheatley deplored Sleazak's cavalier attitude that rehearsal was unnecessary and his unfortunate inclination to ad lib.

In retirement Professor Wheatley remained the alert, quick-witted observer of life and letters she had always been. A few years short of her death she published an insightful article on Molière's *L'Ecole des femmes* and made one more pilgrimage to New York to see Eva LeGallienne in *The Royal Family* and visit with her. At the time of her death she was writing a review of Eva LeGallienne's *Sarah Bernhardt* and preparing a translation of La Roche-foucauld's *Maximes.*

Lorene Rogers, President of The University of Texas at Austin

Bill D. Francis, Secretary of The General Faculty

This memorial resolution was prepared by a Special Committee consisting of Willis Pratt (Chairman), Mildred Boyer, Donald Sellstrom and James Stephens.