



WESLEYAN UNIVERSITY

# WASCH CENTER FOR RETIRED FACULTY

Newsletter Vol. 9, No. 2

Spring 2018

*This issue is largely devoted to the impressions of two retired faculty members, on (Dick Ohmann) from the greater world, the other (Jerry Wensinger), from the smaller world of personal friendships. Both speak to a time now gone.*

## WILBUR AT WESLEYAN

RICHARD WILBUR

*As Jerry Wensinger remarks, notices of Dick Wilbur's death have already been done to a fare-thee-well. Check out The Times, The Post, The Guardian, among many others. Instead of long lists of accomplishments, medals, trophies, and prizes during his twenty years at Wesleyan, we offer Jerry's memories of an assemblage of on-going, a cast of colorful characters that includes Dick's wife, Charlee, Please see "Wilbur at Wesleyan" beginning on this page.*

When we got the news last October that Dick had died, we thought that was an unlikely event for so young a ninety-six year old. Peter Frenzel cast about for someone to put together a timely memorial note for this newsletter. I was caught in the raking cross-light. "You knew them, Charlee and Dick, pretty well, and anyhow, who else is there on hand still breathing who knew them?" I said sure I could but I couldn't write an obit. That had already been done to a fare-thee-well in many papers and magazines, all the expected places. So the facts could be condensed for a formal accounting by you, Peter, we thought. But yes, I could set down a few recollections: Wilbur at Wesleyan. As I knew him. Without a rehearsal of book titles, proof of fame, listing the multifarious awards bestowed. Clearly no puffery was needed. But did I know him? I guess

*Continued on page 2.*

## A 1960s RADICAL REFLECTS

*Richard Ohmann describes two scenarios of what happened in universities and society, then and afterward.*

Activists from my cohort will soon mark 50th anniversaries of events that shook the world in 1968. We will recall, retell, reinterpret, revalue, reflect upon and draw lessons from those famous events, as well as from less famous ones that nonetheless changed alignments and life scripts.

One such event for me and other scholars in language and literature was a 1968 uprising within the Modern Language Association. It derailed the stately procedures of that learned society, infused it with rebellious politics and enraged or inspired 30,000 members. For me and others in the new MLA Radical Caucus, it helped open a pathway -- on which we joined many from other academic fields -- to what students were calling 'relevance' in education. A heady moment. We imagined ourselves struggling toward a just and democratic society. We thought of ourselves as the academic wing of international popular movements.

At a session of the Conference on College Composition and Communication, I thought to relive that rush of political euphoria and talk about its reverberations half a century later. But the conference took place this past March in a dysphoric rush instead, brought on by a decisive win of what for most academics was the 'other side'

*Continued on page 6.*

I did, a bit.

I can at least make one flat statement, one that Dick would only reluctantly countenance, though never say it himself, or of himself. Still, he would be bound to think it now and then: namely, that good writers and good thinkers know what they're about and what they're worth. Who here would gainsay that? So, flatly, here is the statement: Wilbur was the best lyric mind and practitioner Wesleyan has had. More than that, of course, he was among the important American and British poets of the second half of the twentieth century and the first decade of the twentieth-first, among whom we may count perhaps no more than a dozen and a half.

He knew the others, and most of them at one time or another were guests at the Portland house, and occasionally, I was lucky to be on hand. There were the much-celebrated and the good writers, and a few fly-by-nights and free-loaders – to whom Dick was unfailingly polite. Yes, to this extent I knew him.

He was about the most polite and elegant person I knew in all my 61 years here. And a cheerful gourmand and drinker. And buoyant host. And happy laughter. And cut-up; and botanist and master of names and naming; and one who gloried in our glorious language. And one incapable of vulgarity, try as he might. And a proficient gamester. Most of all he was a profoundly serious person who had earned and kept his intense patriotism and his deep private Christian belief. Something else: Dick was often suddenly not present with others or even only one other, not studiously remote, or rebuffing. But then the retreat was quickly rectified. It was mystifying.

But we must go back. Powerful in my recollection, he was a master gardener, in Portland and Cummington, one who knew all the herbs by name and use, a roistering player of games, tennis, *gioco delle bocce*, and do I recall a horse-shoe pitch there at the Portland garden? The lawns were alive with the sound of games, overseen by the denizens of the wide porches for food, drink, and civilized carousing. Later swimming – I'm at Cummington now where he knew, like the back of his proverbial hand, his woods and walks and wrote beautifully of

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them. There (the papers got some things quite wrong) they had not “restored an old farmhouse and silo” -- they had a new and ample house built and some few years later, having seen the celebrated silos built at Unadilla, NY, had a special one newly erected, the second storey of which became a sensational study and library for Dick.

He became a local treasure for that little Massachusetts town where, long before the great editor, translator, and to us today second-rate poet (we do honor and still memorize “Thanatopsis,” do we not?) William Cullen Bryant was born two and almost a quarter centuries ago. I never heard or read Wilbur on his forebear, but I like the conjunction. Cummington honored Wilbur abundantly. Of all the many obituaries, the one I found the best was by Brooke Hauser in *The Daily Hampshire Gazette* of Northampton for 20 October of this year. It can be found on line and is worth the search. All that uplifting and gifted personality was underwritten and amplified and endorsed by Charlee, his beloved helpmeet, who held the whole ménage together, large houses and small, gardens, kitchen, four children, Key West

house, travels and appearances local and abroad (Rome was especially important to them and for Dick's poetry), and Charlee was withal one lady who loved to chat and swear and richly laugh. She was a vibrant, vital, full 50% of the package. I have heard and observed, subsequent to their leaving us, that all of that continued -- but at reduced volume -- when they were off to Cummington and Smith, Amherst, and retirement -- and prior to that the endless touring -- the lot of celebrated poets on Western inlands and shores. They were early married, he still in college. Her death was an unfathomable loss taken valiantly in stride. Their unity was palpable – that was utterly clear as we saw the several times they were solitary weekend guests in Higganum. As for the rest, Dick was so often a silent man with that deep distant look in his eyes, far off somewhere.

They left Wesleyan after twenty years here. I had come in 1955, still in my twenties. Peter Boynton came the next year to the English Department and the Wilburs appeared in 1957 fresh from a short stint at Wellesley. How and why Dick was elected to join

*Continued on page 3.*

up I didn't and wasn't privileged to know. He can't have been all that dear back then, even though these years were Wesleyan's heyday, the bounteous Xerox period with new campus building afloat, the time of the three-pronged "Colleges"-of-this-and-that, the revamped Wes Press and the over-the-top Center for Advanced Studies days and money available for bold hiring. Dick fit right in. He was poetry's core here and started the renowned Wesleyan Press poets' series, and with Jean Maynard, *et al.*, saw to it that the choicest of guest poets performed here at the Honors College. Much of his own best poetry was written here.

Peter was Peter Boynton, novelist, dearest friend, and he balanced out the formality of the more sober (here unnamed) faculty and the splendid and staid Banks, Cowie, Coley, Greene phalanx of the English department. (Side note: Wilbur, it turned out, could out-formalize the lot if so disposed.) Anyhow, it was initially through Boynton that I was taken up and absorbed into the Wilbur mix. Then the Reeds arrived and spiced things up.

At first the friendship was between Charlee and me; I was "scooped up" by her (Boynton's phrase) and they liked feeding and drenching ("to give to drink") me. Dick and I were at first very tentative, even a bit stand-offish with one another. The block of ice was slow to melt. It has been my experience that early-March Pisceans tend quickly to recognize their ilk in each other and dance around each other in circles. That was us – joined in fact by Jimmy Merrill who was born less than a week before me; Wilbur on March 1, five years earlier. I find it an interesting observation for what it is worth – and



Richard Wilbur in 2006 in his home at the time in Cummington, Mass.  
Credit Nancy Palmieri/Associated Press

it is worth everything. And we three discussed that once in the terms of Goethe's little poem "Urworte. Orphisch," the planetary setting when/where one is born. We believed "*und keine Zeit und keine Macht zerstückelt / Geprägte Form, die lebend sich entwickelt.*" I still do. "*So musst du sein, dir kannst du nicht entfliehen.*"

Dick *had* to be the poet he was: luckily an exceptionally fine one. He began being that in the army in WWII and wrote, "It was not until [the war] took me to Casino, Anzio, and the Siegfried Line that I began to versify in earnest. One does not use poetry for its major purposes, as a means of organizing oneself and the world, until one's world somehow gets out of hand. A general cataclysm is not required; the disorder must be personal and may be wholly so, *but poetry, to be vital, does seem to need a periodic acquaintance with the threat of Chaos.*" Anyone who does himself the favor of seriously reading Wilbur must take that into account. He has been too often ranked among the easy-going lyricists, the formalists, the ultra-gifted masters of rhyme and meter. . . .an opinion asserted mostly by the practitioners of urgent confessionism and unending me-ism. Nothing could be further from the truth. Dick and his old friend Robert Frost – to whom in many regards Wilbur is close kin – share and suffer this idiotic misconception.

Thus did I become friends with both the Wilburs; buddies at first with Charlee; and I'm not certain it was altogether good for me – but their expansive parties were like that. Eye-opening it was to see some of their friends at play: Bill Meredith, Jimmy Merrill, Robert Lowell, even once, I believe, Elizabeth Bishop, even the earnest Ellisons and Philip Levine, T. Roethke; and a sprinkling of the foolishly elevated: Ginsberg, Corso and their fellow travelers – so unlike Wilbur – and (have we dropped enough names? No? Well, then: ) Kunitz, Eberhart, Spender, Berryman, Hecht, Dickey, Merwin, Snodgrass, Bly, William Jay Smith, Duncan – a rich sampling of the biggies of the 50s, 60s, 70s, a lot of whom ate, drank, smoked, and didn't talk much poetry at the Wilbur festivities. Some students of Dick's were also aboard. They, the students, honored, learned from, and adored him – That, for our purposes here, above all, is to be emphasized: Dick Wilbur was a masterful teacher and colleague. He gave and gave. Generosity

Continued on page 4.

incarnate, he was that.

One way or the other I seemed to fit into that household – more with some than with the others. Memorable for me was an evening when an overnight friend, Robert Lowell, more or less on good behavior, came tall and gingerly down in the stairs into the living room whose sofa was backed by long shelves crammed with innumerable thin volumes of poetry. Who are you, what do you do? Teach here? Yes. What? German. Do you do German poetry? Yes, I've done a course in early 20<sup>th</sup>-century. Do you know my imitations of Rilke? Yes, I like some very much, a few not so well. He didn't stalk away; he sat me down within earshot of Dick. Am I right that English/German translation lost a winner when Wilbur never picked up the language? You are very right indeed, Sir, I've said it more than once. Am I right Mr. . . . what was your name, ah yes, very German, am I right that Rainer Maria Rilke is poetry. I think Rilke is very likely the greatest poet, yes Mr. W. *the greatest of all poets I can think of right now*. He remade an entire lyric language. And so on. What I should have said (*Treppenwitz; esprit d'escalier* eluded me) was: Dick much prefers the French; Dick was in the thick of things you know, Mr. Lowell, on the French, Italian, German fronts in the war. The man was a fighter and saw too much. Dick hates anything about Germany in this century, including its language.

He had never said that to me point blank. And I always felt, considering my commitment to that language and literature and my love of a few of its writers, that he would never have taken my devotion amiss. Some years later he was commissioned to translate or adapt something from the magnificent Austrian, Hugo von Hofmannsthal. I spent several half-days with him and fancy I made some inroads

for him into an appreciation of Europe's (taken all in all) second great literature. (*Pace* Franco- and Italophile readers.)

That's about enough – an introduction. The Episcopal memorial service for Dick on 13 November in the white former Congregational church, on a gray day and after a cup of coffee in the "dairy" on the highway outside Cummington where Dick and his cronies met most days, filled the pews with a few eminences from out of town, many elderly local friends and some younger folk. I (together with Madeline, the wife of Joe Z., of the Class of 1988, and a Wilbur friend) seem to have represented the college where Dick and I both taught in the 50s-70s. Those others who would have done this memorial honor in a far different fashion were unavailable, being dead themselves. What moved me most was the appearance of a couple of Dick Wilbur's (and my) former students at Wes.U.: Bill Blakemore and, all the way from California, the poet Michel Wolfe. And there were a few others, maybe also former Wesleyan students unknown to me.

*Sic transit* indeed, *sic transit*. So, yes, I knew the man a bit, nothing more. I have little knowledge of what sparked him and what his fundamental need of the world was. I wonder who really did. This need is not possible to articulate when speaking of another. We all know that. This is what Joseph Conrad says on that mysterious point in *Lord Jim*, a Wilbur book:

*It is when we try to grapple with another man's intimate need that we perceive how incomprehensible, wavering, and misty are the beings that share with us the sight of the stars and the warmth of the sun. It is as if loneliness were a hard and absolute condition of existence; the envelope of flesh and blood on which our eyes are fixed melts before the outstretched hand and there remains only the capricious, unconsolable and elusive spirit that no eye can follow, no hand can grasp.*

Is that too hard a conclusion here? Would Dick Wilbur raise his hand and say, "One minute there? What of the promises from the pulpit?"

Or not? That is what we are always left to wonder at and to ponder.



Richard Wilbur, pictured third from left, taught English and literature classes at Wesleyan for 20 years. (Photos courtesy of Wesleyan's Special Collections & Archives)

# SPRING 2018 FILM SERIES

Films selected by Paula Paige.

*Theme: Midcentury Italian Masterpieces*

*Tuesday, February 6, 3:00pm*

**ROME, OPEN CITY** (1945). Directed by Roberto Rossellini. During the Nazi occupation of Rome in 1944, the Resistance leader, Giorgio Manfredi, is chased by the Nazis as he seeks refuge and a way to escape. 103 minutes.



*Tuesday, March 6, 3pm*

**THE BICYCLE THIEVES** (1948). Directed by Vittorio De Sica. Ricci, an unemployed man in the depressed post-WWII economy of Italy, gets at last a good job - for which he needs a bike - hanging up posters. But soon his bicycle is stolen and more trials ensue. 89 minutes.



*Tuesday, April 3, 3pm*

**NIGHTS OF CABIRIA** (1957). Directed by Federico Fellini. Rome, 1957. A woman, Cabiria, is robbed and left to drown by her boyfriend, Giorgio. Rescued, she resumes her life and tries her best to find happiness in a cynical world. Even when she thinks her struggles are over, things may not be what they seem. 110 minutes.



*Tuesday, May 1, 3pm*

**DIVORCE ITALIAN STYLE** (1961). Directed by Pietro Germi. A married Sicilian baron falls in love with his cousin and vows to wed her, but with divorce illegal, he must concoct a crime of passion to do away with his wife. A wonderful comedy! 108 minutes.



-- not our movement, but a nationalist one that might have been celebrating the 50th anniversary of a very different uprising and consolidation, post-Goldwater. I decided to juxtapose those two different takes on the last 50 years and suggest a few of the implications. Here are the two stories that I told.

### **Story No. 1**

The post-World War II boom increased the prosperity of all classes and groups. Economic inequality stood at a historic low. Social movements arose to challenge injustice, especially of race and gender, and to protest an imperial war. Those movements flourished in a society that had rapidly expanded to beat swords into TV sets and cars and suburbs; to return millions of people from military to civilian life via the GI Bill; to build a military-industrial complex and fight a Cold War; to organize research and make consumer goods for profit. The flow into college of new populations both resulted from the civil rights and women's movements as well as fueled their growth. The Vietnam War and the draft blew up a storm of antiwar activism on campuses.

With new kinds of students came demands for changes in college education. One demand was for a new kind of professor. More female, working-class and black students entered graduate study and college teaching. Their dissidence led to critique and revision of the arts and sciences curriculum: history from below, insurgent sociology, revised literary and artistic canons, the serious study of commercial culture, science for the people, African-American and women's studies, and much more.

New disciplines like gender studies sprouted. Old ideas like Marxism, banished in the 1950s, were recovered, refreshed and blended with New Left thought. Social forms and ideas that had seemed natural turned out to be socially constructed. The university became a freer, more stimulating place to learn and teach about the world.

At the same time, classroom routines and relations lost their unquestioned authority. Composition and rhetoric became a leading venue for critique of hierarchy and for pedagogical innovation in the name of democracy and of respect for the lives, cultures and knowledges students brought with them to college. Practices of student-centered education and collaborative learning flourished.

Those changes swept through academic

work and culture. They seemed liberating. When countermovements rose up against them -- like the culture wars waged in the humanities by federal officials like William Bennett and Lynne Cheney -- we were ready for, even a bit flattered by, the hostile attention. Higher education seemed to be developing in the direction we wanted. The university had become our neighborhood.

### **Story No. 2**

The robust economic growth that fueled expansion of universities after 1945 was itself driven by the conversion of wartime capacity to the making of consumer goods, by the dammed-up purchasing power of people who couldn't buy much during the war, by the big lead that U.S. capitalists had over the ruined industrialists of Europe and Japan, and by advanced scientific and technical know-how -- with universities eager to help corporations further develop it.

Those conditions weakened in the 1960s. Borrowing to pay for the Vietnam War was a burden. So was the seeming end of cheap oil. By the early 1970s, U.S. capital was in trouble: meager profits, too much equality. Business leaders sought remedial strategies. They moved production south and then overseas in search of unorganized cheap labor. They outsourced and subcontracted and otherwise weakened industrial unions.

Reagan broke PATCO, the air traffic controllers' union, in a show of toughness. Corporate leaders moved capital nimbly from one place to another, globalizing economic life. They fought successfully against the high marginal tax rates and support for public services that had prevailed for two decades.

Meanwhile, finances tightened up in education, especially at public universities. The party ended with the '60s. Neoliberalism took root.

It's no coincidence that the MLA job market in language and literature crashed in 1970, or that the crisis lengthened out into a 40-year depression. The job market in rhetoric and composition, which barely existed then, suffered less. But in both areas, the labor and rewards of teaching devolved from tenure-track faculty members to workers on contingent appointments with low pay, few benefits, little autonomy and almost no role in governance.

The degradation of labor has continued for 45 years in most of the arts and sciences -- and

*Continued on page 7.*

(unevenly) across the whole university. We approach the day when postsecondary education will be a marketplace where shoppers can buy credentials -- degrees, certificates, badges -- that promise the best return on investment.

Nor is this shift limited to the academy. Most established professions are in similar trouble. Even in law and medicine, most senior professionals are salaried employees, surrounded by technicians, paralegals and so on, with job security comparable to that of adjunct faculty members. The managers of economic life, having reorganized physical labor to their advantage, are now deporting, outsourcing and eliminating mental labor. Conservatives stigmatize 'academic elites' along with political and media elites. The professional-managerial class declines in cohesion and influence.

Story No. 2 has a political and ideological plot, as well. Beginning in the 1950s, and picking up steam after the Goldwater challenge of 1964, wealthy people such as Joseph Coors, the Walton family and the Koch brothers funded the Heritage Foundation, the Cato Institute and many other think tanks to incubate conservative thought, institutions and eventually political campaigns. The conservative movement worked for 50 years to gain control of the Republican Party -- through, for example, the Southern strategy, Reagan's charisma, the revolt against taxes and 'big government,' the mobilizing of a Christian 'moral majority' and then of the Tea Party, and the nationalist fervor of last year's presidential campaign.

Needless to say, none of those causes (even antitax purism) sits comfortably with the principles of the Republican Party's old leadership, which Donald Trump rudely dismissed in the primaries of 2016 and has marginalized since becoming president. Old-guard leaders like David Rockefeller believed that as long as the GOP safeguarded free markets, it could tolerate such frivolities as open-carry laws on college campuses, the defunding of Planned Parenthood, a Muslim travel ban and abandonment of the Kyoto Protocol.

But how can the corporate and Wall Street factions live with an 'America First' assault on the free movement of capital and labor? The tension is palpable. To be sure, many of us have grown old and hoarse forecasting a Republican Party implosion. And though one day we could be right, this band of

warring factions has more power right now than any U.S. government since 1945.

What does Story No. 2 imply for the hopeful plot of Story No. 1? Might the diverse and liberated university we built in and after the 1960s survive in the interstices of the new order? Unlikely. Big history tends to swallow and digest small history.

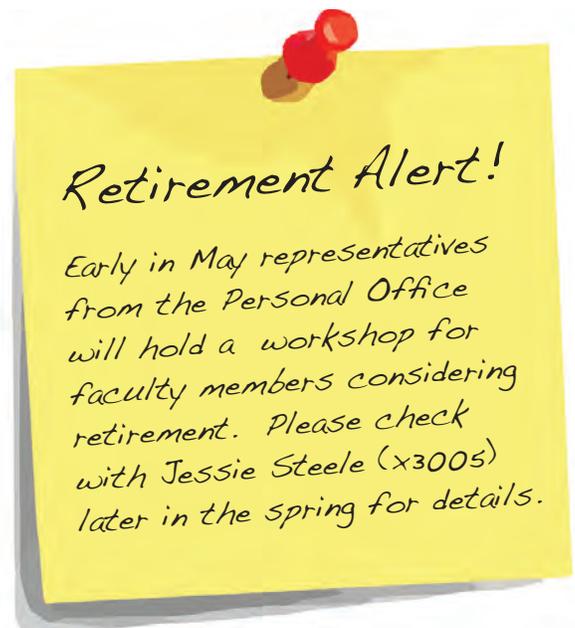
Moreover, the main agents of big history today have aspirations for education that sharply oppose those of academic radicals 50 years ago. They want college education to be of direct use to those who will hire its consumers and would like to replace the faculty with robots. They want school and college to be private, profitable, nationalistic, maybe pious. They do not want it to be a critique of power or a force for equality and cooperation. They don't want their taxes to support the humanities or most of the other liberal arts.

What's to stand in the way of their project, now that they have turned back ours? As you can imagine, this is not a happy question for an academic lefty from the 1960s to ponder.

Pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will. For years, I had Antonio Gramsci's motto on my office door.

Optimism of the will, anyone?

*The Conference on College Composition and Communication session in which Dick presented an earlier version of this piece was a collaboration with Christopher Carter and Russel Durst at the University of Cincinnati, who organized the panel, and Patricia Harkin at the University of Illinois, Chicago.*



# The Wesleyan Institute for Lifelong Learning Spring 2018

For additional information about dates, the one-day event, or enrollments, please visit [www.wesleyan.edu/will](http://www.wesleyan.edu/will) or call (860) 685-3005.

## Maybe it's My Imagination: Writing Memoir and Fiction

SARI ROSENBLATT

March 14, 21, 28, April 4, 11, 18 | 5:30 -- 7:30P.M. | \$170

Allbritton 103 | Class limited to 12 students.



## Meet me at Les Deux Magots: The Lost Generation in 1920's Paris

RICHARD FRISWELL

March 13, 20, 27, April 3, 10 | 6 – 8P.M. | \$170

Wasch Center, Butterfield Room | Class limited to 20 students.



## Once Upon a Time: Short Stories in Pairs

HOWARD EINSOHN

April 5, 12, 19, 26 | 4:30 - 6:30P.M. | \$95

Wasch Center, Butterfield Room



## Geoffrey Chaucer: The Canterbury Tales

HERBARNOLD

March 26, April 2, 9, 16, 23 | 4:30 - 6P.M. | \$125

Wasch Center, Butterfield Room | Class limited to 16 students

## Romantic Landscapes of Constable and Turner:

### Common Goals, Contrasting Outcomes

RHEA HIGGINS

March 1, 8, 15, 22 | 4:30 - 6P.M. | \$100

Wasch Center, Butterfield Room



## Masterminds and Martyrs: Women in Ancient Greek Drama

ELIZABETH BOBRICK

February 22, March 1, 8, 15, 22, 29 | 6:30 - 8:30P.M. | \$170

Wasch Center, Butterfield Room



## Shakespearean Romance: The Winter's Tale

ALTURCO

April 17, 24, May 1, 8 | 5:30 - 7P.M. | \$100

Wasch Center, Butterfield Room



## Russian Theater on the Eve of Revolution

JAROSLAW STRZEMIEN

March 19, 26, April 2, 9 | 6:30 - 8:30P.M. | \$110

Wasch Center Butterfield Room | Class limited to 20 students



**The Wesleyan Institute for Lifelong Learning Spring 2018 (continued)**



**All-day Course: Be Amused by the Muse of American Humor**

The fabled Goodspeed Opera House is our destination. Warm up your singing voice, get out your tap shoes and bring an appetite! This class will immerse itself in the art of the play for a day of fun and entertainment. Two hours of actor-led classes in the art of vaudeville, stage craft, and lyrical delivery will be followed by a box lunch on the deck overlooking the Connecticut River. Then, it's into the theater for balcony seats and a performance of the Tony Award-winning Best Musical, *The Will Rogers Follies*. A private session with the performers will follow.

RICHARD FRISWELL

Saturday, May 5

11 AM – 6 P.M. | \$150

**WASCH CENTER ENDOWMENT**

Since its beginnings the Wasch Center has received gifts from retired faculty members, alums, and others. We are building an endowment that we hope might eventually allow the funding of professional travel and research expenses for retired faculty members, including the maintenance of computers. If you are considering either a bequest to Wesleyan or an annual gift, you might designate such contributions, in full or in part, to be credited to the Wasch Center. One-time gifts, of course in any amount are, of course, always welcome. If you have questions, you can contact Mark Davis (ext. 3660), Wesleyan's Director of Planned Giving.



**SPRING 2018 LECTURE SERIES**

**Wednesday, February 14, 4:30pm**

*Karl Scheibe, Professor of Psychology, Emeritus*  
 "Wisdom in Lin-Manuel Miranda's *Hamilton*"

**Wednesday, February 28, 4:30pm**

*Gary Yohe, Professor of Economics and Environmental Studies*  
 "The Politics of Global Warming"

**Wednesday, March 28, 4:30pm**

*James McGuire, Professor of Government*  
 "Obstacles to Takeup in Ecuador's Conditional Cash Transfer Program"

**Wednesday, April 11, 4:30pm**

*Laura Gabel, Professor of Biology*  
 "Stem Cell Therapies: Where do we stand?"

**Wednesday, April 25, 4:30pm**

*Norman Shapiro, Professor of Literary Translation and Poet in Residence*  
 "Pierre Coran, Battle of the Belge"

**Wednesday, May 5, 4:30pm**

*Mattabesset String Collective Concert with Barry Chernoff, Marc Eisner, Rebecca McCallum, Gil Skilman, and Kevin Wiliarty*

# Necrology

## KIT REED

Kit Reed died on September 24, 2017, in Los Angeles at the age of 85. Resident Writer at Wesleyan, she was an acclaimed novelist and short story author who was best known for her science and fantasy fiction.



Born Lillian Craig in San Diego, she also wrote several thrillers under the pen name of Kit Craig. Her New York Times obituary called her “an author of darkly humorous fiction.” Kit herself said in an interview that she was “transgenred,” because she did not fit neatly into any literary category. She considered herself to be a writer of speculative fiction, grounded in contemporary reality but quickly leaping to the imaginative and satirical. In her opinion, she belonged to a group of writers that included Shirley Jackson, Ray Bradbury and George Orwell.

And she never slowed down: a collection of her short stories was published in 2013, and her last novel, *Mormama*, a Southern Gothic thriller that Kit read from at the Wasch Center in 2015, appeared last May. Her last short story, “Disturbance in the Produce Aisle,” was published online in September 2017 in Asimov’s Science Fiction. Her son Mack wrote on Facebook: “She loved like a child, worked like a stevedore, cursed like a sailor and sampled the world with Twainian zest.”

Kit moved to Middletown in 1960, when her husband Joe took a job with the Wesleyan English department. She herself became a Visiting Professor of English in 1974, an Adjunct Professor in ’87, and Resident Writer in 2008. Kit was partly responsible for Wesleyan’s Creative Writing Program, that brought notable writers to campus both during the year and at the Wesleyan Writers’

Conference. She and Joe lived in their big gold Victorian house next to the Wasch Center on Lawn Avenue for fifty-odd years, before moving to California in the spring to be nearer their children. They were a familiar sight, as they walked their black Scottish terriers on campus.

She is survived by Joe and their three children: her sons, Mack and John, her daughter Kate Maruyama, also a writer, and four grandchildren. Contributions may be made in her name to the Alzheimer’s Walk of Greater Los Angeles.

## ROBERT A. ROSENBAUM



Robert A. Rosenbaum died on December 3, 2017, in his 103<sup>rd</sup> year, at his home in Colorado. His passing marks the end of an era for Wesleyan. For many who were his friends and colleagues, his departure is something that we have allowed ourselves to deny, even as we recognized that his final days would not be long delayed. He was, hands down, the most influential and constructive faculty member at Wesleyan in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. He was a brilliant teacher, a superb athlete, and a voracious student of the life of mind, of nature, of art and music—with an infectious sense of humor. I am not alone in confessing that I have often addressed moral dilemmas or difficult problems by saying to myself, “What would Bob Rosenbaum do?” He was a paragon of excellence and a model of probity. He was superb in showing us the way. Now we shall have to make it on our own.

Now we are, at least for a season, in the shadow of Bob Rosenbaum at Wesleyan. When we visit the Science Center, the Center for the

# Necrology

Arts, the Center for African American Studies, or when we boast of Wesleyan's distinction, among liberal arts colleges, for its advocacy and practice of advanced research, we remember that all of these laudable features of Wesleyan were helped into being through the commitment and hard work of RAR. But historical memory is fleeting, and future generations will not easily recognize the leadership to which they are heirs and beneficiaries. Bob was a two-time national champion of masters-level squash. In recognition of his accomplishment, an anonymous donor assured that our squash courts be named in his honor. His name could easily have been affixed to many of our other facilities—but he was a modest man and would not have approved such a broadcasting. Even so, let us, his more recent colleagues, celebrate his rare and bountiful character.

When Bob retired in 1985, Dick Ohmann wrote an article about his Wesleyan career for our alumni magazine. Ohmann gave attention to Bob's critical role in guiding us through one of the most profound crises in Wesleyan's history—the period in 1970-71, between the administrations of Etherington and Campbell. Bob was then our Acting President. This period also included the general strike on campus in May, 1970—a sequel to the national turmoil created by the deaths of protesting college students and the extension of the war in Vietnam. Ohmann pointed out that Rosenbaum had a way of converting challenge into opportunity, and he argues that he seized this crisis as a time to advance the values of a free society. He used the strike as a means of positive change for Wesleyan, "...to recognize and remove from our society those practices which...do violence to the principles of justice and equality we profess." Rosenbaum helped usher in a positive transformation for Wesleyan. When Campbell became our president in 1971, he saw fit to ask

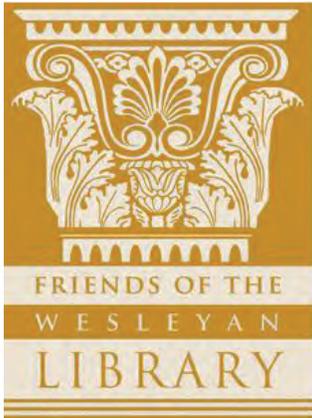
Bob Rosenbaum to continue with a major role in his administration for next two years. In 1973 he returned to full-time teaching. He retired from the faculty in 1985. But he was still a welcome presence on this campus for many years.

Any report about the life of Bob Rosenbaum ought to include reference to his mathematical genius. He once demonstrated to an admiring general audience at Wesleyan a proof of a mathematical model that would allow an astonishing and counter-intuitive extension of a stack of cards away from their point of origin on the edge of a table. This proof was a wonder to behold—as was the entire life of its author. His citation for the Baldwin Medal, Wesleyan's highest honor, includes reference to his "...enlarged and liberal mind", which indeed extended a long way—through Yale and Reed and Wesleyan --from its humble point of origin in Milford, Connecticut.

## **RICHARD WILBUR**

Dick Wilbur, a longtime professor in Wesleyan's English Department, died October 14 in Belmont, Massachusetts at the age of 96. One of America's most eminent poets, he was awarded the Pulitzer Prize twice (1957 and 1989) and appointed Poet Laureate of the United States for 1987/1988. His many achievements are reflected in the abundance of awards, among them the Bollinger Prize, the Robert Frost medal, the National Book Award for Poetry. After a BA from Amherst and an MA from Harvard, he taught at Wesleyan for twenty years and was the founder of the Wesleyan University Press's Poetry Series. Dick was also an accomplished translator from the French. Please read Jerry Wensinger's recollections on the first page for a subjective and illuminating impression of the man.

## FRIENDS OF THE WESLEYAN LIBRARY



The Friends of the Wesleyan Library are involved in a range of library-related activities including book preservation, digitization of some collections, sponsorship of talks, workshops and exhibitions related to books and libraries, book sales to support the Wesleyan libraries, and publication of a periodic newsletter for the library. The organization provides financial support for the Wasch Center's oral history program, and a prize for

undergraduate research based on the use of library material. A full description of the activities of the Friends can be found at <http://wesleyan.edu/libr/friends> A listing of upcoming sponsored events can be found at <http://wesleyan.edu/libr/friends/events.html> The Friends invite participation of emeriti and encourage membership.



### **BROWN BAG SEMINARS**

Inspired by Mike Lovell's sessions in the PAC some years ago, these are themed lunchtime sessions, meeting bi-weekly. Participants must sign up, attend the seminars, and read a short paper. For more information please call Duffy White at 860-685-3126.



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