

In Memoriam David Wilkinson (1925–2014)

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David Wilkinson (1925–2014) (Photo: Kees Hartmans)

At the age of 89, after a brief spell of declining health, David Robert McIntyre Wilkinson, a former member of our editorial board, passed away on 21 December 2014. David Wilkinson was born in Bulawayo (Southern-Rhodesia, now Zimbabwe), but grew up in Cape Town (South Africa). During World War II, he

was trained as an air gunner and helped to repatriate the South-African troops in the long flight from North to South Africa. After the war, he acquired a 5-year grant to study English Literature at the University of Cape Town. Once graduated, he worked as a teacher to earn a second round of study at Cambridge, where he fell under the spell of F. R. Leavis. From Cambridge, he went to Leiden in the mid-1950s and in 1964 he was appointed to the chair of English literature at Groningen. Wilkinson was a professed Leavisite and loved to teach his students to develop ‘a critical attitude, a healthy judgement and a feeling for historical developments’ (inaugural lecture). Wilkinson was averse to theory and preferred ‘close reading’. In his choice of texts he followed Leavis’ *The Great Tradition* and *The Common Pursuit*. His lectures were a joy to attend, not the least because Wilkinson was such a cheerful personality with a fascinating voice that easily seemed to bridge two octaves. As far as scholarly work is concerned, he did not publish much and his attitude towards research appears from the title of his PhD-thesis which he defended at the University of Leiden in 1964: *The Comedy of Habit: an Essay on the Use of Courtesy Literature in a Study of Restoration Comic Drama*. Notwithstanding the modest qualification of his thesis as an essay rather than a study or investigation, the book was well received and praised for its learning; in its field it has become a classic.

In 1981, Wilkinson succeeded Tom Birrell as editor of *Neophilologus*, a position he held until 1993. We will remember with gratitude and affection David’s love of and dedication to the study and teaching of English literature, his sense of humour and his team spirit, all of which he gladly devoted to our journal.