

DOCUMENTS OF THE GENERAL FACULTY

**REPORT OF THE MEMORIAL RESOLUTION COMMITTEE FOR
MIGUEL GONZALEZ-GERTH**

The special committee of the General Faculty to prepare a memorial resolution for Professor Emeritus Miguel Gonzalez-Gerth, Department of Spanish and Portuguese, has filed with the secretary of the General Faculty the following report.



Alan W. Friedman, Secretary
General Faculty and Faculty Council
The University of Texas at Austin
Arthur J. Thaman and Wilhelmina Doré Thaman Professor of English and Comparative Literature

**IN MEMORIAM
MIGUEL GONZALEZ-GERTH**

Miguel Gonzalez-Gerth (1926-2017), Professor Emeritus of Spanish and Portuguese, taught for over thirty years in the Department of Spanish and Portuguese at the University of Texas at Austin, where he also maintained a strong involvement with the Harry Ransom Center (HRC). Born in Mexico, he received his undergraduate degree in 1950 at The University of Texas at Austin, where his mentor was Harry Ransom. He completed his Ph.D. in 1973 at Princeton. He returned to UT Austin as a faculty member in the late 1960s. As well as being a classroom teacher and dissertation director, he was known for his poetry, his translations, and his successful efforts to maintain an intellectual and cultural life. He organized numerous symposia and conferences and arranged visits to the University of such luminaries as Octavio Paz and Elena Poniatowska.

Gonzalez-Gerth was Acting Chair of Spanish and Portuguese during 1983-4 and Associate Dean of the College of Liberal Arts during 1985-8 as well as serving on numerous University-wide committees.

Gonzalez-Gerth was instrumental in the founding of the Harry Ransom Center (HRC), then known as the Humanities Research Center. He was Harry Ransom's right-hand man, both as Ransom's assistant in the founding of the Humanities Research Center in 1957 and as the last editor (1972-8) of the *Texas Quarterly*, which Ransom had created in 1958. His office in the HRC, which he shared for decades with William Roger Louis, was always open to students, colleagues, and friends from Mexico and throughout the world. He took great pride in being a founding member of the Faculty Seminar on British Studies, which he attended without fail Friday afternoons from its beginning in 1975. He once wrote that British Studies had become "my intellectual home away from home."

Gonzalez-Gerth's poetry won international praise for its refinement and formal experimentation. Whether originally composed in English or in Spanish, it bears witness to his vast culture and humanism. He explained his extraordinary grasp of both languages, stating that poetry should work with delicacy and erudition each language according to its syntactic structures as well as its sounds.

A list of the poets Gonzalez-Gerth studied, translated, or admired shows his universalism. Among them figure Ezra Pound, Federico García Lorca, Pablo Neruda, and Octavio Paz.

Nature also inspired Gonzalez-Gerth, starting with his first book, *Desert Sequence and Other Poems* (1956), about the silent landscape of Big Bend. In several works, Gonzalez-Gerth expresses his philosophical and poetic thought, as in "The Art of Poetry," where he concludes that "Poetic art is soft as silk and cutting as a knife / And every poem a tender blow against the chains of life."

His collections of poetry include *En vísperas del olvido* (*On the Eve of Forgetting*, 1967), *Palabras Inútiles* (*Useless Words*, 1988), *The Musicians and Other Poems* (1991), *Natural Selections* (2006), translations of

poetry by Enrique Fierro, *Looking for the Horse Latitudes* (2008), and *Between Day and Night: New and Selected Poems 1946-2010* (2013), a collection that touches upon different phases of the life of the poet and the subjects that inspired him. It includes an interview with Gonzalez Gerth by David A. Colon.

As a literary critic, Gonzalez-Gerth focused on the work of the Spanish writer Ramón Gómez de la Serna (1888-1963). In 1986, he published the monographic study, *A Labyrinth of Imagery: Ramón Gómez de la Serna's "novelas de la nebulosa."* His translation of the extremely brief and often whimsical *greguerías*, a genre created and developed by Gómez de la Serna, was published in 1989 as *Aphorisms*.

Gonzalez-Gerth received the Pro Bene Meritis Award, the highest honor bestowed by the College of Liberal Arts, in 2006. He is survived by his wife, writer and musician, Tita Valencia.

This memorial resolution was prepared by a special committee consisting of Professors Naomi Lindstrom (chair), Lily Litvak, and Wm. Roger Louis.

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