

MEMORIAL RESOLUTION WILLIAM A. LYELL

(1930-2005)

William A. Lyell, Associate Professor of Chinese language and literature, died in Palo Alto on August 28, 2005 at the age of 75 of complications from esophageal cancer.

Lyell was born on June 29, 1930, in Rahway, New Jersey, to Mary, an Irish immigrant, and William Lyell, who was proud of his American Revolution ancestry. After earning a bachelor's degree in French and English literature from Rollins College, Winter Park, FL, he enlisted in the U.S Air Force during the Korean War, expecting to become a pilot. At the time, however, no more pilots were needed, but tested to be gifted in language ability, he was enrolled in the Air Force Language Program at Yale, where he completed the course in Mandarin Chinese with the highest average ever achieved. He was sent to Korea as a Chinese interpreter, saw combat and was awarded several medals. After leaving the service he enrolled at the University of Chicago to continue his study of Chinese. He was awarded a fellowship to study Chinese philosophy and literature in Taiwan for three years. He attended classes at National Taiwan University and lived in the student dormitories, perfecting his command of Chinese to native fluency. After returning to the University of Chicago, he married Ruth Granetz, a graduate student in the Comparative Human Development program at that university, his wife for the next 44 years.

Lyell taught Chinese for a year at Chicago Teachers' College, North, and then taught for nine years in the Asian Languages and Literature Department at Ohio State University, where he received the Distinguished Teaching Award. Lyell came to Stanford University in 1972.

Lyell was a recognized authority known worldwide for his work on such major modern Chinese writers as Lu Xun, Lao She and Mao Dun, and other contemporary writers. Lyell attended a number of conferences in China dealing with these writers, and in 1987 was invited by Peking University to teach courses on modern Chinese literature. He taught in Chinese, of course. Among his publications were such analytical works as *Lu Hsun's Vision of Reality*, and translations, such as *Diary of a Madman and Other Stories* by Lu Xun, *Cat Country: A Satirical Novel of China in the 1930's* by Lao She, *Blades of Grass: The Stories of Lao She*, *Shanghai Express: A Thirties Novel* by Zhang Henshui, creating translations that stand as works of art in their own right. He also compiled a pedagogical work, *A Lu Hsun Reader*. He had a wonderful ear for language, retelling Irish stories and songs with an Irish brogue, and stories of old Beijing with an authentic Beijing accent. He loved Chinese fiction and poetry, good writing of all kinds, flying his plane, his dogs of course, and the underdog.

Lyell displayed in his teaching his enthusiasm and zest for life, and a wonderful lack of pretension. A colleague who taught courses with him spoke of his being deceptively casual and disorganized but how once he began lecturing he could turn an ancient text into a living document, that he was amusing, imaginative, and at the same time learned in an off-handed and unassuming way. He had a commitment to his students that earned him the love and respect of those who studied with him. Both in his teaching and in his writings, he

held himself to the highest standards and even to that level of perfection that characterized his linguistic abilities. This combined with his openness to experience and adventure without an ounce of guile or sense of self-interest made him such a rare individual.

Lyell is survived by his wife Ruth, two daughters, Miriam Lyell Boisa of Stockton and Deidre Lyell of Palo Alto, two sons, Sean Lyell of Lake Oswego, OR, and David Lyell of Playa del Rey, CA, a sister, Mary Anne Elliot of Toms River, NJ, and seven grandchildren. He was remembered at a memorial service in Stanford's Memorial Church on August 28, 2005.

Committee:
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