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James A. Grimshaw, Jr.: In Memoriam

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James A. Grimshaw
(1940 - 2018)

"Remember when you're East our latch-string is out."

-- Warren to Grimshaw, Sept. 9, 1978

"Bo" Grimshaw passed from this life to the next on Sunday, April 8, 2018. The world is a much-diminished place.

To say that Robert Penn Warren studies would scarcely be the vibrant and rewarding enterprise it is today without the foundational contributions of James A. Grimshaw is an understatement. His magisterial *Descriptive Bibliography* of writing by and about Warren appeared in 1981, nearly four decades ago, but its value has never been eclipsed; it continues to serve as an indispensable point of departure for new explorations into Warren and his work. In subsequent volumes of incisive criticism and hard scholarship--edited and authored--Grimshaw perennially shaped and reshaped the substance and boundaries of our field. He was instrumental in establishing the Warren Circle and the Center for Warren Studies at Western Kentucky University, and his vision and characteristic energy brought to life the journal *rWp: An Annual of Robert Penn Warren Studies*. His role as founding co-editor was nothing short of inspired as he accepted and commissioned articles and essays of germinal importance. At the time of his death, Grimshaw, twice "officially" retired, was preparing an edition of the letters between Warren and Albert Erskine, both of whom regarded him with equal measures of respect and affection, as did their mutual friend Cleanth Brooks. For Bo Grimshaw, the life of the mind was at once a privilege and consuming passion. The man and his work were one. His was a fully *associated* sensibility, a fact made manifest with the publication of his collected poems (*Relationships: Ricocheting Toward Infinity*) this past year.

A native Texan, Bo earned his B.A. from Texas Tech in 1962. He assumed active duty in the United States Air Force in 1963 and after assignments in Saigon and elsewhere, he was identified as a likely candidate to join the faculty at the Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs. He took the M.A. (again at Texas Tech) in 1968, and began teaching at the Academy the same year. The Air Force later sent him to LSU for the doctorate, which he completed in 1972 under the direction of the legendary Lewis Simpson. His record of teaching, service, and research at the Academy was distinguished, and he was regarded as indispensable by superiors and cadets alike. He retired from the service in 1983 with the rank of Lt. Colonel.

Back in his home state, Grimshaw entered upon a second academic career, this time in civilian higher education. He was selected to head the Department of Literature and Languages at East Texas State (now Texas A&M University at Commerce). Once again, Bo proved adept at meeting every challenge, consistently bringing out the personal best in colleagues, students, friends, and the scholarly community at large, all the while pursuing a research (and creative) agenda a less versatile and determined individual would have found too daunting. Duty was a virtue Bo understood very well, and he always insisted on going beyond it.

Bo Grimshaw displayed a natural affinity for animals as well as people, and his new life in Texas enabled him to establish a virtual menagerie on his "gentleman's farm" in the country. In addition to the usual range of household pets, there were chickens, peacocks, horses, calves, a pig, and--most notably--a pair of breeding bison. He retired from A&M - Commerce in 2005, leaving behind an impressive program in literature and language and accruing many honors, including a Regents Service Professorship, the highest commendation the Texas A&M System can confer on a faculty member. He and his wife Darlene ("Dee") relocated to San Antonio, taking up residence in a community set aside for retired military officers. Not surprisingly, his proved to be an active and productive retirement.

Bo and Dee had married in 1961. They were together for 57 years, and Bo always insisted that Dee was at the heart of his every accomplishment and success. Those who knew them both would readily agree. Theirs was more than a partnership. It was an intimate and

dynamic collaboration in the fullest sense. The early American poet Anne Bradstreet--speaking of her husband--famously wrote, "If ever two were one, then surely we." The line might well be recast to read "If ever two were one, then Bo and Dee."

Bo's last years were marked by a Job-like suffering. There was the inconsolable loss of the Grimshaws' brilliant daughter Courtney, and the unintended consequences of earlier cancer treatments led to increasing debility. Still, without self-pity or complaint, Bo persisted in reading, researching, and writing up to the end. If Hemingway was right in defining courage as "grace under pressure," Bo Grimshaw's example was nothing short of heroic.

William Bedford Clark

