

*Resolution on the Retirement of
Professor Michael Fixler*

Adopted by the Faculty of Arts and Sciences

May 16, 1994

The members of the English Department, and the Faculty of Liberal Arts and Jackson College of Tufts University, hereby record our warm appreciation for our retiring colleague, Professor Michael Fixler. Tufts University has benefitted from his loyal contributions throughout the past thirty-three years -- a remarkable span of academic, advising, and administrative contributions to our university community.

Michael Fixler was born in Kisvarda, Hungary on August 14, 1927. On his father's side he is descended from an unbroken rabbinical line (unbroken until Michael that is) tracing itself back to Rabbi Akiba, who as Professor Fixler has remarked was "Justifiably crucified" at the age of 94 for encouraging Jews to bite off their left thumbs. Other ancestors include a crypto-Sabbataian and a nineteenth century Wunder-Rebbe with a large court and a repertoire of miracles.

After military service in the U.S. Army, Michael received his own undergraduate education at the University of Wisconsin, where he majored in Biology. This wasn't enough for him, however, and he pursued further undergraduate and graduate studies at the Sorbonne, the University of Maryland, and the University of Oxford. He holds a B.A. from Wisconsin, an M.F.S. degree from Maryland, and both a B.A. and M.A. in English from Oxford. His graduate studies were carried out at the University of Chicago and he received his Ph.D. in English in 1961.

He took up his first teaching post in 1951 as Director of the Information and Education program for the United States Army in Frankfurt, and shortly after he held the same position for Strategic Air Command at the U.S. Air Force base in Upper Heyford, near Oxford. Both these positions clearly prepared him well for the rigors of teaching in the English Department at Tufts. He held the post of Instructor at Northwestern from 1957-61 and arrived at Tufts in the Fall of 1961 to take up the position of Assistant Professor.

A brilliant academician, Michael has published two books and numerous articles, most focussing on his twin broad areas of scholarly interest John Milton (he has been a member of the Editorial Board of Milton Studies since its inception) and the Bible. He has no less than three new books going at the moment: Incomprehensible Intimacies: A Neo-Formalist History of the Aesthetic Transaction, The Cryptic Muse: Implicit Form and Allusive Texture in Milton's Art, and The Metamorphoses of God: Divine Signifying in the Hebrew Bible. We wish him well in all these projects.

As a teacher Mike was twice nominated by the university for the E. Harrison Harbison National Distinguished Teacher Award and shared a Mellon Grant with Joel Rosenberg for curriculum development in Jewish Studies. Teaching in a field that these days is hardly fashionable, Michael's brilliance has nevertheless assured him a broad and loyal following. When he began at Tufts, the dead white males that wrote the Bible (although Professor Harold Bloom might demur here) and the poet John Milton were not the pariahs that they are today, and it is to Michael's credit that he has continued to open great texts to students who arrive filled with skepticism and expecting to be bored. Mike's success as a teacher has come not only because he is intellectually compelling, but also because he has always taken the time and opportunity to become well-acquainted with his students.

Throughout his career in the English Department Mike has always clung to the highest standards of education. He has stood by the traditional canon when it has come under attack

(he still thinks Shakespeare should be compulsory reading!) and while his views on literature have not been trendy or even popular, he has defended his position with enormous integrity and intellectual authority -- he has kept up, where so many have fallen by the way, on all the vast new developments in literary theory.

Over the past thirty years Mike Fidler has had a hand in hiring almost every current member of the English Department. He has treated each new arrival with great courtesy and respect. Whatever intellectual struggles -- and there have been many -- Mike has maintained a high degree of collegiality. He has always shown a masochistic willingness to read and comment constructively on the work of his colleagues. He has also always been a mine of information: directing his interlocutors to the latest review in the *TLF* or scholarly details. Somehow, in thirty three years in our Department, he has managed to keep his sense of humor, and more than anything, it seems to me, he still enjoys a good joke, especially a Jewish joke, and most especially where the punch line is in Yiddish. I am sure if we asked him he could come up with the appropriate phrase to describe today's proceedings.

We hope that retirement will allow Mike more time for reading, writing, thinking, joking, playing with his grandchildren. We wish him every happiness in this next phase of his life and interests. We hope that he will continue contact with his many friends in this academic community.

Be it resolved that this resolution be spread on the minutes of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences and that a copy be sent to Professor Fidler.

For the Department of English