

Fred Colson Robinson

Fred Robinson is the Douglas Tracy Smith Professor of English Emeritus at Yale University. He is the foremost North American scholar of the earliest recorded period of English language and literature.

Robinson earned his Ph.D. in English and comparative linguistics from Carolina in 1961, under the tutelage of Professor Norman Eliason. His colleagues at Carolina agree that he is the most distinguished living alumnus of our graduate program in English. Within two decades of completing his doctorate, Robinson had held faculty appointments at Stanford, Cornell and Yale, and had been elected a fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences as well as a fellow of the Medieval Academy of America. Over the course of his career, Robinson has been a philologist in its original sense — a lover of words. His ability to bring to life old words from the past, in turn, underlies his criticism of literature in English in all periods. His reputation is based not just on his large output of scholarly books and articles, but more so on the quality and originality of the research they contain. Almost everything he has written has contributed new knowledge and perspectives to the field. His scholarship ranges from editions of Old English works, a major literary reappraisal of “Beowulf,” philological notes and an introductory grammar for students of Old English.

All these endeavors have been informed by meticulous scholarship, judicious interpretative skills and a broad humanistic approach to Old English language and literature. His contributions to scholarship have been recognized by fellowships from the American Council of Learned Societies, the Guggenheim Foundation, the Haskins Medal of the Medieval Academy of America and the Sir Israel Gollancz Prize of the British Academy. Robinson’s excellence as a teacher won for him Yale University’s William Clyde DeVane Medal in undergraduate teaching and is further evidenced by the distinguished company of scholars who pursued graduate studies under his direction. Two of them— Peter Baker, now on the faculty of the University of Virginia, and the late Nicholas Howe, of the University of California at Berkeley — edited a book of essays in Robinson’s honor in 1998. Its title, “Words and Work,” aptly echoes a passage in “Beowulf” explaining that one must judge others both by their words and by their works. In the preface the editors wrote, “His achievements as a scholar emanate from his love of words as the resonant constituents of language and his love of works as the larger forms into which words cohere.”

Robinson’s service to the world of scholarship includes serving as president of the Medieval Academy of America, founding member of the advisory board of the International Society of Anglo-Saxonists, chief editor of the journal *Anglistica* and founding editorial board member of *Anglo-Saxon England*.

Robinson’s wife, Helen Wild Robinson, is also a Carolina alumna, having received her M.A. degree here in 1957. They have a son, a daughter and three grandchildren.

In recognition and deep appreciation of his outstanding contributions to scholarship in the humanities, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill is pleased to confer on Fred Colson Robinson the degree of Doctor of Humane Letters *honoris causa*.