

Jack Lowcock

— "Not An Academic" —

A Tribute by **Dr Douglas Kerr**
Associate Professor, Department of English

Jack Lowcock (BA 1961; MA 1966) was just 65 when he died in May this year. Several people I've talked to since then have said not only how much they miss him, but that he seemed to stand for an older Hong Kong, and an older Hong Kong University - a more enjoyable and a more forgiving place and time. That may be so, but in other ways I have felt that Jack was always ahead of us and we have yet to catch up with him.

He was indeed a man of Hong Kong, coming from a family that is part of many Hong Kong traditions and histories, and dedicating his life to education and culture in this city. Education and culture are boring words, but they came to a warm and vivid life in Jack, a man who was quite incapable of doing anything impersonal.

Perhaps it all began with a dramatic babyhood, as a refugee during the Second World War. Later Diocesan Boys' School and Hong Kong University gave him his training, but the inspiration was inward and intuitive. After a spell at Stanford, he came back to Hong Kong to teach in the University. For generations of students, he is one of the most vivid memories of their student days, in the lecture room or the drama laboratory. He had already embarked on his other career as a drama producer, and here his achievements were collaborative and very important indeed, not only in terms of artistic creation, but of seeds planted in the mind and spirit of the young people who worked with him, and of the community to whose life he contributed vitally.

More than most, his life was all of one piece. For him his family came first, but I would guess that his

family, his friends, his students all encountered the same qualities in him - a brilliant inventiveness, a gift for sympathy, humour, and a certain melancholy, a sometimes ruthless knack of bringing out the best in people. We could add his vivid enthusiasms, a surprising attention to detail, his love of good talk, an often hair-raising frankness, especially after dark. He couldn't see any point in teaching unless it was connected with feeling (the rest was literature), so all his work really was dramatic. Meanwhile he was not above creating and relishing drama in his own life. His teaching was continuous with his friendships - so many of his former students became his good friends - and both could be theatrical. On a famous occasion he was heard to declare loudly and often that he was not an academic. Unfortunately, this was in the presence of the then Vice-Chancellor. But it was true. Though he was a wonderful teacher, there was nothing in him of the academic in the cloistered and theoretical sense. He was too much of a humanist. In more ways than one, he is irreplaceable.

The death of someone we love makes us feel, against all the evidence, that the world is getting emptier. It was a feeling that, as a lifelong and profound student of Samuel Beckett, Jack knew all about. But he also shared, with Beckett, the courage of facing up to things to the end. 'The end is in the beginning and yet you go on.' Those of us who knew Jack Lowcock have every reason to feel sorry for ourselves, but no reason to feel sorry for him, a man remembered with love by so many people. ■



Jack Lowcock and students.



After a performance,
outside the Drama Lab