Eugene F. Rice, Jr.
An Appreciation

JOHN HINE MUNDY

Eugene Rice was born in Lexington, Kentucky on August 20, 1924. His father, Eugene Franklin Rice, Sr., a descendant of two signers of the Declaration of Independence, one of whom contributed the name Franklin, was also from Lexington, a town that remained home in the eyes of his wife Lula Hammond Piper. Employed by a Boston-based sugar company, the Rice couple moved to Puerto Rico in 1920, living in plantations in and around Central Aguirre, a center of the sugar industry on the island's southern shore. Gene was soon joined by a sister named Lucy, born in Puerto Rico. Essential persons in and around Aguirre were a Doctor Bonelli, an Italian, living in the nearby town of Guayama, who delivered Lucy and saw the young Gene through diphtheria; Miss Elizabeth Watkins from Lexington, who taught first through fourth grades in a school for the children of the company's managers; and Miss Sally Ann Claiborne from Lynchburg, Virginia, for grades five through eight in another school the children attended. Eugene Rice Senior remained in the service of the sugar company until his retirement in 1965, when he and his wife returned to live in the United States until their deaths in 1977.

In a foreign world with few friends, Eugene Junior early became interested in books. Lucy was more gregarious, soon speaking very colloquial Spanish. After eighth grade in Puerto Rico, Gene was sent to the Eaglebrook School, Deerfield, Massachusetts, entering in 1937, graduating in 1939. While there, he became seriously interested in music and headed the Glee Club. At the conclusion of his Sixth Form, he was voted "best student" and "most likely to succeed," and was among the "most popular." He was also secretary of the Town Council and managing editor of the school newspaper, and once played Nanki-Poo in the school production of The Mikado. He then went to Phillips Exeter Academy in New Hampshire, from which he graduated in 1942 with honors, after serving in the choir, glee club and senate, and also as manager for the soccer team. Of the eight students whose pictures appeared on the page of the yearbook where this information was recorded, three opted for Harvard, two for Princeton, one each for Dartmouth and Amherst, and one for Michigan.
Gene entered Harvard in June 1942 but was soon drafted for service in the Second World War. In the European theater of Operations, he served as sergeant (T3) in the Intelligence Section of a Signal Corps cryptanalysis company. His sister recalls an older person sharing their table in a railway diner who, after looking at Gene for a time, finally said “Son, I know you must be older than you look, but you’re the youngest dam sergeant I’ve ever seen!” Gene and I shopped out together to spend a month or so in and about London in the latter part of the war, when the V-1s and V-2s were falling. Our friends in the unit handled that grey, dangerous and unhappy wartime city in different ways. One bought second-hand scholarly books, another busied himself meeting the aristocracy and still another searched out and found elegant restaurants. Gene enjoyed what he does today: music, ballet and opera, delighted by the sounds and scenes of the London theater.

When he returned to Harvard, he was again active in the Glee Club and Music Club, graduating in 1947 magna cum laude and Phi Beta Kappa. At Harvard in 1948 he completed his masters and won the doctorate in 1953 under the direction of Myron Gilmore. During his graduate years there, Gene shared quarters with Bernard Bailyn, now Adams University Professor. Bailyn remembers that Gilmore, “on his way to ice-skate, called on him in our graduate dormitory room, skates in hand, to tell [Gene] personally that he had just read his first term seminar paper, that it was excellent, and that it should be published.” It was: “Erasmus and the Religious Tradition” in the 1950 Journal of the History of Ideas.

Before gaining the doctorate, Gene went to France, registered, in fact, at the École Normale Supérieure from 1951 to 1953. In Paris he met and married Charlotte Bloch in 1952. Born in Prague in 1918, Lotte was the daughter of a successful lawyer, Arthur Bloch. Sometime in 1941, both he and his wife, Louise Stein, died in the infamous Nazi ghetto at Lodz. The Blochs had three children, all of whom escaped. One son reached Sweden and the other the United States. Lotte left Prague in 1938 for Britain, where she studied at University College, London, and received the baccalaureate. She enlisted in British service during the war and was teaching English and attending the Sorbonne in Paris when the two met. Typical of their travels in later life, they met on a train going to Geneva. The Rices had three children, Eugene, John and Louise. All three eventually received doctorates, respectively, in physics, music and art history.

Lotte and Gene delighted in travel: their children especially remember a trip on a freighter to Norway with a heavy schedule of tourism there and in Sweden. This was followed by a sleeper rail trip to South Germany and then on to Venice, where the family stayed in a pensione on the Giudecca with a spectacular view. Typical of Gene’s attitudes about his environment is a remark in the preface to his Saint Jerome (p. xi). He thanks the officers of the American Academy at Rome for assigning “my wife and me a home on the summit of the Gianicolo, an enchanted
spot protected by the Aurelian wall and hedged with laurel.” I myself remember Lotte’s passion for South German rococo buildings and churches. With deep conviction, their interests were centered on Europe and European civilization, but they once went as far afield as Istanbul, really, I suppose, for Justinian's Hagia Sophia.

From their earliest days in Paris, both were art collectors, initially of contemporary French tapestries (Lurçat), later of Italian seventeenth-century drawings. Had she not been cut off prematurely by the cancer that killed her in 1982, Lotte planned to write her dissertation on the seventeenth-century Italian painter and print-maker Salvator Rosa. Both loved opera. Since I rarely go to concerts, ballet or opera, I cannot add much when Gene talks about them, and it worried me that a one-sided conversation might soon peter out. Such is Gene’s extraordinary enthusiasm, however, that one merely starts him talking about a performance, a conductor or a singer, and he’s off, full of joy, criticism and description. About music and the theater, Lotte and Gene had only one divergence: she did not share his love of ballet, a devotion especially directed to Balanchine’s New York City Ballet. But everything balances. Gene’s passable as a cook, but Lotte was extraordinary. Mary and Israel Shenker were good friends of the Rices, Mary having met Lotte in the Maison Franco-Britannique in the Cité Universitaire in Paris in 1947. The Shenkers record: "Lotte was a superb cook, one of those wonders of nature who was fantastically quick and knowing. Gene loved good food and did very nicely on the regime. The one thing he took charge of in the kitchen was making the pancakes for breakfast on Sunday – Lotte’s concession to her American husband. At Christmas they would serve goose – the traditional Czech dish for the holiday.” Having taken refuge there during the war, Lotte loved England, and Gene did also. With a flat in Oxford, they spent summers there.

Gene has had a full share of academic honors. After teaching for two years at Harvard, he went to Cornell in 1955, where he was promoted professor. In 1963, he came to Columbia and, after his chairmanship of the History Department from 1970 to 1973, was given the title of “William R. Shepherd Professor of History.” A fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, he has had fellowships and memberships in the American Academy at Rome, American Council of Learned Societies, Fulbright, Guggenheim, the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, and the National Endowment of the Humanities. He was Executive Director of the Renaissance Society of America from 1966 to 1982 and again from 1985 to 1987, and is on its board as ACLS representative. From 1979 to 1981, he was also Vice-President for Research of the American Historical Association. He is currently a member of the editorial boards of the Journal of the History of Ideas and the Renaissance Quarterly.

The present volume is a testimonial to Gene’s ability as a trainer of scholars in Renaissance history. What strikes me about
his work is its balance between monographs, general history and text editing, the last surely the noblest part of a scholar's enterprise. His *Saint Jerome* won plaudits from a larger audience, as is shown by its winning prizes from the American Catholic Historical Association, the American Society of Church History and the American Academy of Religion. Recently, he has shifted his interests to the intellectual and social history of homosexuality. In 1989 he instituted Columbia University's first university "Seminar on Homosexualities," and currently offers an introductory course on the history of the same subject in western Europe and North America from antiquity to the present.

Gene is a first-class public lecturer. His timing is terrific, and the flow of words Niagara-like, the whole delivered with a distinctively Harvard accent. One amazed student reported in the *Course Guide* that this "Ole' Man River" flowed irresistibly but stopped the very second the bell rang. The Society of Columbia Graduates awarded him its Great Teacher Award in 1984.