



2019

In Memoriam: Richard L. Harp

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Recommended Citation

(2019) "In Memoriam: Richard L. Harp," *Quidditas*: Vol. 40 , Article 2.
Available at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/rmmra/vol40/iss1/2>

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In Memoriam

Richard L. Harp

This volume is dedicated to Professor Richard L. Harp who died at the age of 73 on 7 March 2019. Richard and his spouse Margaret Harp, Professor of French at UNLV have been active members of the Rocky Mountain Medieval and Renaissance Association. Richard served on the Association's Executive Board, presented papers and chaired sessions at several conferences, and Margaret served as Treasurer, and organized RMMRA's 2018 Las Vegas conference.

Richard was a prolific scholar, author and editor of seven books, and numerous articles. His special focus was Ben Jonson. Not only was he founder and co-editor of the *Ben Jonson Journal*, published by Edinburgh University Press, but also the editor of the Norton Critical Edition of *Ben Jonson's Plays and Masques*. But Richard's interests were diverse. His publications also include studies dealing with Shakespeare, Samuel Johnson, John Milton, John Donne, the modern Irish playwrights and authors Brian Friel and Frank O'Connor, and pedagogy. Below is a partial list of his publications.

BOOKS

- A Companion to Brian Friel* (co-editor, Robert Evans), ed. West Cornwall, Ct.: Locust Hill Press, 2002.)
- Ben Jonson's Plays and Masques*, Norton Critical Edition (2nd edition), ed., New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2001.
- Cambridge Companion to Ben Jonson* (co-editor, Stanley Stewart), ed., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.
- Frank O'Connor: New Perspectives* (co-editor, Robert Evans), ed., Locust Hill Literary Studies Series No. 23, West Cornwall, Ct.: 1998.
- Dr. Johnson's Critical Vocabulary: A Selection from His Dictionary*, ed. University Press of America, 1986.
- Jerry Tarkanian: Countdown of a Rebel*, Leisure Press, 1984 (co-author, Joseph McCullough)
- Thomas Percy's Life of Dr. Oliver Goldsmith*, ed. Salzburg Studies in English Literature, Salzburg, Austria: University of Salzburg, 1976.

ARTICLES

- “The Critical Reception of *Romeo and Juliet*,” ed Robert C. Evans. *Critical Insights: Romeo and Juliet*. Ipswich, MA: Salem Press, 2017. 47-62.
- “Madness and Community in Jonson,” eds. Roger Sale, Anthony Johnson and Helen Wilcox. *Community Making in Early Stuart Theatres: Stage and Audience*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2017. 239-54.
- “Virtue is not Boring: Shakespeare and the Moral Life.” *Modern Age*. (Spring, 2016), 19-29.
- “*Othello*: The Critical Backstory,” *Othello: A Critical Reader*, ed. Robert C. Evans. London: Bloomsbury [Arden Early Modern Drama Guides] (2015), 15-49. [co-author Stephen Hrdlicka].
- “Jonson and Genre,” in *Oxford Handbook of Jonson Studies: Scholarly Research Reviews*, ed. Eugene Giddens (Oxford University Press; online publication January 2015; hardbound publication forthcoming).
- “John Donne’s Crisis of Faith: *The Holy Sonnets*,” in *Crisis of Faith*. Salem Press, 2013, ed. Robert C. Evans, 88-105.
- “Why Juliet Makes the Torches Burn Bright: The Luminous Quality of Beauty,” in *William Shakespeare, Romeo and Juliet* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2011, ed. Joseph Pearce, 183-94.
- “Love and Money in *The Merchant of Venice*,” *Modern Age* (Winter, 2010), 37-44.
- “Historical Contexts,” *The Seventeenth-Century Literature Handbook*. London: Continuum Press, 2010, 43-56.
- “Commentary,” *Times Literary Supplement* (December 11, 2009), 13-15 [cover story; Unpublished correspondence of Evelyn Waugh, et al. and manuscript autobiography of Fr. Martin D’Arcy, S.J.].
- “Proverbs and Philosophy in *The Merchant of Venice* and *King Lear*,” *Ben Jonson Journal*, 16 (2009), 197-215.
- “The Nobility of Hamlet,” in *William Shakespeare, Hamlet*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2008, ed. Joseph Pearce, 231-44.
- “Fables, Myths, and Fairy Tales in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*.” San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2008, ed. Joseph Pearce, 253-64.

- “The Comic and the Dramatic in *Pride and Prejudice*.” San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2008, ed, Joseph Pearce, 395-404.
- “Jonson’s *Volpone* and Dante,” *Comparative Drama*, 39:1 (2005 Spring), 55-74. [Co-author, Christopher Baker].
- “Ben Jonson,” in *The Age of Milton: An Encyclopedia of Major 17th-Century British and American Authors*, ed. Alan Hager. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2004, 181-86.
- “Catholicism, Religion, and Ben Jonson,” *Cithara* 42 (May 2003), 25-34.
- “Introduction.” *A Companion to Brian Friel*. West Cornwall, Ct.: Locust Hill Press, 2002), ix-xvii.
- “Manus and Oedipus the King.” *A Companion to Brian Friel* (West Cornwall, CT: Locust Hill Press, 2002), 23-30.
- “Alice Milligan’s Letters and Diary,” *New Hibernia*, 4 (2000), 79-87.
- “Jonson’s Late Plays,” in *Cambridge Companion*, 90-102 [above].
- “Milton and the Medieval Mixed Life,” *Cithara* 38 (May 1999), 32-39.
- “Count Florimond de Basterot and the Founding of the Irish National Theatre,” *Notes on Modern Irish Literature*, 11 (1999), 26-30.
- “Frank O’Connor’s Stories: Epiphanies of the Heart,” in *Frank O’Connor: New Perspectives* [see above], pp. 65-81.
- “Jonson’s Comic Apocalypse,” *Cithara*, 34, (November 1994), 34-43; rpt. in *Ben Jonson’s Plays and Masques*, 468-77 [above].
- “Jonson’s House of Wisdom,” *Ben Jonson Journal*, 1(1994), 1-13.
- “Orthodox Wonder,” *The Chesterton Review*, XVII (February 1991), 33-45.
- “A Body in the House: The Catholic Origins of the Modern Murder Mystery,” *Crisis*, 8 (July-August 1990), 27-31.
- “*The Shan Van Vocht* (Belfast, 1896-1899) and Irish Nationalism,” *Eire-Ireland*, XXIV (Fall 1989), 42-52.
- “Nicotine Diseases in Post World War I Fiction,” *Moderna Sprak*, LXXXIII (1989), 16-19.
- “Jonson’s ‘To Penshurst’: The Country House as Church,” *John Donne Journal*, 7 (1988), 73-89.

- “The Poisonous Weed,” *Journal of American Culture*, 11 (Winter 1988), 59-64.
- “Tobacco and Raymond Chandler,” *Clues: A Journal of Detection* 9 (Fall/Winter 1988), 95-104.
- “Goldsmith’s College Tutor: The Malicious Monk in Leland’s *Longsword, Earl of Salisbury*,” *Moderna Sprak* (1982), 241-42.
- “Where are the Great Sinners?” *The American Benedictine Review*, 33 (September 1982), 292-301.
- “The Myth of the College Basketball Coach,” (co-author, Joe McCullough) *Journal of American Culture*, 4 (Fall 1981), 49-57.
- “New Perspectives for Goldsmith’s Biography,” *The Eighteenth Century: Theory and Interpretation*, 21 (Spring 1980), 162-75.
- “Mind of the Maker: The Theological Aesthetic of Dorothy L. Sayers and its Application to Poetry,” in *As Her Whimsey Took Her: Critical Essays on the Work of Dorothy L. Sayers*, ed. Margaret P. Hannay. Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1979, 176-99.
- “The Winter’s Tale: An ‘Old Tale’ Begetting Wonder,” *Dalhousie Review*, 58 (Summer 1978), 295-307.
- “Using Elemental Literary Forms in the Composition Class,” *College Composition and Communication*, 29 (May 1978), 158-61.
- “The Christian Reader and the Christian Life,” *Christianity and Literature*, 25 (Spring 1976), 9-17.
- “Practicing What We Preach: Using the Classics to Teach the Classics,” *College English*, 37 (January 1976), 488-99.
- “The Christian Poetic of the Search for the Holy Grail,” *Christian Scholar’s Review*, 4 (1975), 300-10.
- “A Note on the Harmony of Style and Theme in Poe’s *Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*,” *CEA Critic*, 36 (March 1974), 8-11.

Richard received his Bachelor of Arts from the University of Kansas, his Master of Arts from Boston College, and his Doctorate of Philosophy from the University of Kansas. He taught in the Department of English at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas for 44 years, from 1975 until his death in 2019. At various times during those years he served his department in the capacities of Chair, Director of Graduate Studies, and Director of Composition.

Remembrances by colleagues and former students

It is with great sadness that I share the news that our colleague, Dr. Richard Harp, Professor of English, passed away on Thursday, March 7, 2019. Richard was a valued colleague and a great friend to many in the College of Liberal Arts and across campus. He began his service to UNLV in 1975 and contributed in numerous ways over the past 44 years, including serving as Director of Composition since 2015, Chair of the Department of English for six years, and Director of Graduate Studies for nine years. He was an outstanding professor and prolific researcher, publishing seven books and more than 45 articles. Also, he was founding co-editor of *The Ben Johnson Journal*, housed at UNLV since its inception in 1992. His academic specialties included English Renaissance literature, ancient and modern Irish literature, and the Bible as literature. Richard received the Barrick Distinguished Scholar Award in 2003 and taught abroad as a Fulbright-Hays Lecturer at the University of Gothenburg in Sweden and Visiting Fellow in the Humanities at University College in Galway, Ireland. He served the UNLV community on many committees, including several years as a member and, later, chair of the Graduate Council. Richard will be truly missed by all who knew him.

Jennifer Keene
Dean, College of Liberal Arts
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Our friendship happened at a lectern. Both Richard and I were deeply concerned about the ways in which canonical poetry was being shunted—by theory, by fashion, by old mortality—to the margins of academic discourse. We had begun to feel like characters at the end of Truffaut's *Fahrenheit 451*, wandering in a woodland, reciting poems into the falling snow. (Richard was a great memorizer of poems, from Herbert to Heaney, Herrick to Hopkins.) And so we decided to team up, to teach our department's English Literature surveys together in one big lecture hall. All told, we did it four

times: twice Chaucer to Johnson; twice William Blake to Seamus Heaney. It went fast. The students would file noisily in and then, after a few words about the weather or the weekend's sporting events, Richard would begin with a wonderfully revelatory etymology—on such words as “kindness” or “virtue” or “humility”—and off we'd go. I'd parry with a sweeping historical assertion or a bit of theological provocation (Richard was Cavalier and I was Roundhead), and Richard would then answer with a passage from the poem proving us both correct and yet entirely open to question. The students took it joyfully from there. It seemed that everything Richard managed to say took, for them, the form of a radiant permission. But it was a rigorous permission too. One could never speak of a poem in the absence of the poem. Actual words, in their profoundly humane entity, mattered first and last. For seventy-five minutes, twice weekly, and now for the rest of my life, Richard brought poetry back to its luminous centers: to kindness, to virtue, and to humility.

Donald Revell

Professor of English

University of Nevada, Las Vegas

When I first met Richard Harp, at the 2014 RMMRA Conference in Denver, Colorado, I was struck at how he seemed to me intensely interested not only in what I happened to be presenting at the conference, or in my research goals more broadly, but in who I was as a person. We happened, fortunately for me, to be placed on the same panel, early Saturday morning, and I will never forget the impression he made on me. The word that comes to mind is “attention.” Harp had a way, not merely of listening to others, as we so often do with minds focused elsewhere, but of attending to them as persons, displaying true curiosity, even wonder, in both what they are saying and who they are as individuals. He did not, in other words, see others as mere ideas but as people who transcended their academic or professional lives.

As it turned out, I was fortunate to study under Harp these last four years at UNLV, his final PhD student. Harp also invited me to work

with him as Managing Editor for the *Ben Jonson Journal*, the journal he co-founded with Stanley Stewart in 1993. Getting to know Harp these last four years only confirmed my early impressions: a brief, often unplanned, meeting sometimes became a forty-five minute conversation – the best having nothing to do with work. Unlike so many in academia, Harp never seemed to separate, arbitrarily as we do, the intellectual and the personal. A conversation with him might begin with the mundane details regarding journal page numbers – or, as he would put it, “what we have in the hopper” – but would end with how my parents were doing, or the current state of Rebel, or Kansas, basketball. Indeed, for me, those short moments with him, the best those discussing sports, were, what C. S. Lewis coins, the “golden sessions.” I think, for Harp, all of life was more or less interrelated. Working with him demonstrated how an intellectual should both love his material but also show a kindness and appreciation towards students, colleagues, or anyone who happened to enter into his life. I learned as much about life from him, and how to be a well-rounded scholar, as I did about literature.

Unfortunately, I only knew Professor Harp for less than five years, but they were nonetheless memorable for that. Perhaps it is fitting that the final memory I do have of him impresses on my mind many of the above qualities. I happened to be reading his book *Dr. Johnson's Critical Vocabulary* in the UNLV English department one afternoon. When I finished, I left to discard my coffee, as I do every afternoon, thinking nothing of it. But seeing me down the hall, he hailed me into his office, as he so often had done before. It was during a break in his metaphysical poetry class, so he had anything but leisure time. Nevertheless, he took the time to see me. He handed me a book he wanted me to have, and told me that he had been meaning to give it to me for some time now. Little did he know, he chose a fitting time. For it was the same book I had just been reading.

Brandon Schneeberger
Visiting Assistant Professor
Oklahoma State University

One time when I was in Dr. Harp's office he told me about *his* first dissertation attempt. It was a failure, he said, on the *ars moriendi*, or "the art of dying well." He bent down to pull from a bottom shelf one of his numerous oversized dark tanned folders and started flipping through it. "Never could finish it," he said, smiling and making eye contact, "after eight months I had to pick a new topic." The irony of this strikes me now as I sit down to reflect on a great teacher who was in all senses of the word a "true gentleman," down to the very last email he sent to me three days or so before he went into the hospital. It contained numerous suggestions and encouraging thoughts. If I learned one thing from Professor Harp it is that failures and mistakes are a blessing and the true purpose behind things is more mysterious than our plans and our dreams.

When I entered his classroom for the first time back in 2003 at the age of 23, I had no real hopes or expectations. I was just about finished with my degree and wandering along to whatever might come next when I enrolled in Dr. Harp's Milton class. What I encountered was poetry—unpredictable and alive. I had no idea who Milton was, thank God, and I had no inkling of the cruxes critics (still) debate in his poetry. What I received was not criticism, but instead a story I had never heard before. Dr. Harp would say things like: "Milton is a philosophical poet—If he's trying to say something he's gonna come right out and tell you. He wants you to understand him so that you can wrestle with what he is saying," and also, "Milton was a hard studier." There was a long tradition here: Pagan, Christian, erudite, common, beautiful. There was the idea of "justifying the ways of God to men." But one phrase that particularly struck me was something he said about a "student of Milton" that he knew. He could have been talking about an old school buddy; he could have been talking about one of his own teachers, or one of his students, or he could have even talking about himself, and this is what interested me. In all of my three-and-a-half years of college up to that point I had yet to hear a professor say that one might be a "student" of a work of literature like *Paradise Lost*, or of an author like John Milton

(though of course that always seems natural when reading alone). It sounds strange to me now, and possibly strange to some who are reading this, but back then I believed that literature was a vehicle designed solely for transporting me to expressing myself. I had been taught this idea from day one as a literature major. It seemed clear to me then that a story was meant to provide the *means* for me to reach my own ideas, my own “readings,” and thus provided a place for me to exercise my own applications of “critical theory.” (To reach, seek, and destroy my own “U-(Dis)-topia(s).”)

I could write so much about this one class. A particularly vivid memory I have is of what happened one day during the usual mid-way break. The Milton class met only a once a week (Monday evenings it was) for three hours, so we were given a lengthy 20-minute break. The reprobates like myself would, of course, head outside for a smoke and some coffee during this precious time (and who knows what else). As I straggled in to return I was shocked to see him standing there alone kind of pacing around down the hallway by the classroom door. I had stayed outside for an extra smoke so naturally I figured that I would be walking into class late. No worries, of course, just float in. Harp took an interest and plainly asked me how things were going. He made eye contact but wasn't intimidating. I said “fine.” We kept chatting for a while (by now I began to wonder if class had been cancelled or something). During that encounter he said some things like: “Education is a journey. The word literally means ‘to be led out.’ It's not a boxed thing, you know. Education isn't just taking a set number of classes and you are done—it doesn't have to end with getting a degree.” This really did not strike me as the usual “knowledge is power” or “the sky is the limit” kind of thing. It was more mysterious. “Where to?” I remember thinking. “A journey...where are we going?” All the same I knew what he meant. It sunk in while the whole time I felt excited, thinking, “I can't believe that he is talking to me like this.” Professors don't just do this kind of thing, you know. During class he had often brought up his own past as a student, like the time when he told us about what his teacher had said about the Fall of Adam and Eve. “I had

a teacher,” he said, “who used to say, ‘we aren’t in Kansas anymore.’ Kind of funny because we actually were in Kansas at the time. But we all knew what he meant.” Mystery and wonder seeped into Harp’s classes, though he spoke so plain.

I wish to quote a few words that Harp wrote at the passing of one of his own teachers, Frank Nelick. He gave me some of Frank’s papers one day (among other things) when he was clearing out his office and I found this piece amongst his things. Please humor me, and where it says “Frank” go ahead and read “Frank” but also go ahead and read in “Richard” too:

Frank was in the tradition of truly original scholarship which was validated by truth in speech rather than in the often curious and merely pedantic refinement of specialized publication. One had the sense that he was hearing a wisdom from Frank that was both ancient and alive and that was certainly never gotten up from old lecture notes or the latest scholarly treatise. Books were at best a means (and the scope of his reading was legendary), not the end of serious inquiry. . . . Like Shakespeare, Frank did not need the spectacles of books to read nature, and he exhibited a great deal of courage in insisting in the university that wisdom is found in speech, in teaching, rather than in writing. His students were the beneficiaries of this. During his thirty years at the University (of Kansas), though, he probably directed as many or more scholarly theses and dissertation of graduate students than anyone else in the English Department. That is, he was as generous with his specialized scholarly knowledge as he was with his teaching. Original ideas for scholarly investigation he had in abundance and they were validated by the successful completion of a graduate student’s research. A scholar protects an original research idea like almost nothing else he possesses. Frank had such ideas in abundance and he scattered them among his students like a farmer sowing a field. In so doing he contributed sustainably to his graduate students’ subsequent academic appointments and promotions For me, Frank was a never-ending help and source of ideas and scholarly wisdom. (“A Great Teacher Dies”)

Perhaps the most accurate way to describe the way in which Dr. Harp influenced my scholarly career would be to compare him to a great basketball coach. He was a good recruiter—I came back to UNLV for my PhD because of his deep familiarity with the program (he

helped design it and actually gave out *the very first PhD* granted by UNLV back in the 1990s). He had drills and skills, countless ideas and big dreams, yet was ever grounded, humble, and willing to give his time in abundance to anyone who was serious. All of my scholarly ideas and publications in one way or another originated from one of Dr. Harp's classes, his conversations with me, or just like Frank—he simply “gave” me ideas to research which I was free to use as I pleased. In fact, just one semester before I earned my PhD, I sat in on yet another of Dr. Harp's classes. Previously I had sat in many of his classes whenever I could during my PhD studies, even after I was “out of coursework” as they say. Many of these courses were *undergraduate* ones (including a whole year's worth of the British Literature survey he co-taught with Donald Revell). Coming full circle, the last class I sat in on (spring 2017) was another undergraduate Milton class. On the syllabus Dr. Harp had listed a number of possible report topics and everyone had to give a presentation (just thinking about it still gives me the butterflies!). I chose to do my report on one of the topics from the list, “Milton and the Middle Ages.” Researching this topic soon after led to the conference paper I gave at the RMMRA at Grand Junction, CO entitled, “Milton and the Middle Ages” which won the Allen D. Breck Award (Volume 38 of *Quidditas*). The idea is original and rooted deep in history and tradition (I barely scratched the surface and hope others will continue looking at these issues). I hope to inspire students as Dr. Harp inspired me in so many ways, especially in these treacherous waters in which our profession is under vicious attack—both from without and within our departments. Many, many students will tell you that contact with great teachers like Richard Harp, Frank Nelick, John Senior, Dennis Quinn, and Donald Revell, makes your heart burn because it instantly becomes true that there exists an actual connection between literature and the real world in which we live.

Steven Hrdlicka
Instructor in English and Art
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Obituary: *Las Vegas Review-Journal*

Richard L. Harp, of Las Vegas, passed away March 7. Richard was born October 9 1945. He earned his B.A. in English from the University of Kansas, his M.A. in English from Boston College and his Ph.D in English from the University of Kansas. A Professor of English at UNLV, Richard taught and published on writers of the English Renaissance including Shakespeare, Jonson, Milton, Donne, and Herbert. He was co-founding editor of the Ben Jonson Journal and served two terms as Chair of the UNLV Department of English. Richard loved teaching literature and was an inspiration to his students.

A native of Lawrence KS, Richard was a lifelong fan of the University of Kansas Jayhawks and showed the same enthusiasm for the UNLV Runnin' Rebels. He played multiple sports and most excelled at tennis.

He was preceded in death by his father, Richard F. Harp, his mother, Martha Sue Layne Harp, his infant daughter Sarah, and his infant grandson Jacob. He is survived by his wife, Margaret, his children Rebecca, Matthew (Stacy), Adam, Mary, and Andrew and his grandchildren Lucas, Ella, Lainey, and Colton. He will be profoundly missed by his wife, children, friends, colleagues and students.