

In Memoriam

Douglas Wurtele 1922–2007 Founding Editor of *Florilegium*

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Unfailingly courteous, gentle, kind, tough-minded, filled with integrity, generous, scholarly: these are the adjectives that come to mind when I think of Douglas Wurtele, who died on Easter Saturday, 7 April 2007. Several clear images also emerge: seeing him sitting with David Williams in the beer tent at Learned's Congresses all over the country, watching him set up current issues of *Florilegium* against the chalkboards in the early meetings of the Canadian Society of Medievalists / Société canadienne des médiévistes, listening to his wisdom and superb advice in the Carleton University Faculty Club when I first took over as editor, receiving small boxes (about one a week) over the course of an entire year as he gradually shipped the stock of past issues and management information to me, and talking with him about a Chaucer thesis he came to Western to examine a couple of years ago. Douglas somehow never stopped working.

He was, with Roger Blockley, the founding editor of *Florilegium* in 1977, and when his co-editor became an administrator a few years later, Douglas carried on running the journal on a shoestring. Editors of small independent journals with no funding have to be dedicated, but Douglas went far beyond, working tirelessly to keep producing the journal.

Although it started as a journal for classical, medieval, and Renaissance studies, Douglas's own research interests in Chaucer and matters medieval gradually dictated a shift in the direction of medieval studies. He maintained the journal as a bilingual one, and steadfastly kept it interdisciplinary. When he achieved the adoption of the journal by the Canadian Society of Medievalists, a dear wish of his, Douglas took the opportunity to retire as editor — but unlike many retiring editors, he undertook to produce

a last issue which would clear all the papers currently under submission and accepted, so that the new editor inherited a very solid circulation list, a functioning editorial board of senior scholars, and good editorial practices with which to carry the journal forward.

I knew Douglas best as a fellow medievalist, the author of more than a dozen thoughtful and learned pieces on Chaucer, and especially on the Christian background of Chaucer's thought. He had, however, many other concerns. He spent many years caring for his beloved wife Anna, herself also a scholar and teacher earlier in her life. He was a staunch supporter of the faculty union at Carleton, serving it in many capacities including a sequence of terms as president elect, president, and past president from 1989 to 1992, and also serving four years as the representative of retired members on the Executive. His was, I am sure, a voice of indignant and firm resolution during the four rounds of collective bargaining that took place during those years. He served a term as chair of Carleton's Department of English, and also served as president of the Faculty Club. He was heavily involved in the study of Christianity in literature, attending the meetings of that group at the Learned's and delivering many thoughtful papers. He was a founding member of the Medieval-Renaissance Society, a joint society between Carleton and Ottawa that sponsored a conference and individual papers for some decades. Most remarkably, after his retirement as a faculty member at Carleton twenty years ago he remained the sole teacher of medieval literature courses in his department for nearly two decades. He was a superb teacher, dedicated, kind, rousing, and rigorous. Even after Carleton hired first a Middle English specialist and then an Old English scholar, Douglas continued teaching — although he returned to teaching first-year or general courses, including one that concluded in December 2006, a few months before his death.

Douglas spent most of his life in Ottawa and Montreal; born in Montreal and having spent his childhood there, he then attended Ashbury School in Ottawa, graduating in 1936. His arm and shoulder were injured severely enough during the war that for the rest of his life he could not lift his arm above shoulder height. After the war he completed his baccalaureate at the University of London and then worked for the National Archives in Ottawa, before moving to McGill University for graduate study. He returned to Ottawa to Carleton University as a member of the English department. Given his excellence as scholar, teacher, and editor, it is appropriate that he received two *festschriften* in recent years, the first of which was volume 16 of *Florilegium*, published in 1999 and including articles by eleven scholars. More recently, Robert Myles and David Williams co-edited a collection in Douglas's honour entitled *Chaucer and Language* and published in 2001 by McGill-Queen's University Press.

When the Canadian Society of Medievalists was founded as the result of a meeting of like-minded souls disappointed by the offerings in medieval studies at the Learned's in Prince Edward Island (Douglas attended, in enthusiastic support), the next Learned's Congress was very fortuitously at Carleton in 1993. Douglas served as our local coordinator, and he somehow bagged for us the very best site for the first conference of the new society — a new building right on the main quad with good classrooms steps from each other and a superb plenary room with lots of light and comfortable chairs. He handled desperate alterations to time, organizing tea and coffee breaks, putting together arrangements for a meal at a local restaurant, and last-minute audio-visual requests from importunate participants with completely unflappable calm. He even laid on a lovely reception at St Paul's, where the attendees at the nascent Society could admire a medieval-inspired library and its books while drinking wine.

Douglas Wurtele, in short, had the gift of always doing both the right thing and the good thing. He made those around him better, because he simply couldn't comprehend how anyone would not do the right and good thing that needed doing. Hence *Florilegium*, his work for CUASA (Carleton University Academic Staff Association), his teaching courses that needed to be offered at Carleton for two decades after retirement, his care of his wife, and his many kindnesses for friends and fellow scholars. We all miss him.

