

September 29, 1942 – April 3, 2011

Waldemar John Rempel received his BA from the University of British Columbia in 1964 and earned his PhD from The University of Texas at Austin in 1973. He joined the Department of English at the University of Manitoba in 1970 to begin a distinguished career in teaching and scholarship that would last for thirty-seven years. Upon his retirement in December 2007, he was named Senior Scholar, a position he relished.

A specialist in the literature and culture of the eighteenth century and the Restoration, Dr. Rempel's interests also included Shakespeare, Elizabethan and Jacobean drama, the history of the book, bibliography, university teaching, and, in recent years, literature of humour. He served his Department and discipline with exuberance and aplomb, very often as chair of committees. While he served in a wide capacity, including tenures as chair of our graduate programme, Associate Head, and Acting Head, he was especially dedicated to the promotion of excellence in teaching, in the Department, Faculty, and University. He became a member of the Senate Committee on Instruction and Evaluation soon after its founding; he was a long-time member of the Teaching Excellence Committee in the Faculty of Arts; and he worked closely with UTS in its Peer Evaluation programme. It is no surprise that Dr. Rempel won awards and accolades for his own teaching, including the prestigious Dr. and Mrs. H. H. Saunderson Award for Excellence in Teaching.

These facts do not begin to measure the many ways in which John touched the lives of his students, friends and colleagues—especially, perhaps, his junior colleagues.

Teaching was a calling and a passion for John. More than that, teaching for John was an art. He practiced his craft with exceptional energy, and with careful attention to the myriad facets that could make a course sparkle for students. He understood that physical space influences classroom dynamics. Prior to the start of classes, he would visit the rooms in which he would be teaching that year so that he could think ahead of time about how best to use the space. He understood how important are the first impressions of a course and so designed his syllabi to welcome rather than intimidate students. He welcomed students also by making it a point to get to know each of them by name within the first few days of class—a feat of memory supported (when it was still possible to do this) by Polaroid snaps or a video camera. He understood how terrifying it is for some students to go see a professor during office hours, so he endeavoured to make this occasion altogether pleasant, keeping a dish of candy in his office along with a little fridge, well stocked with juice boxes, and populating his desk and bookshelves with stuffed animals. The latter invariably drew comment and so eased the way into discussion of matters to do with course work. John's knack for putting students at ease—so that they could live up to their potential—influenced several cohorts of graduate students as well; he was an exceptional mentor to them, especially as they began their own teaching careers.

John's fine sense of decorum, his understanding of how best to fit means to occasion, shaped his academic life outside the classroom as well, in ways ranging from whimsical to weighty. Many of us remember his assortment of shirts emblazoned with images, of Shakespeare or dogs—two of the passions of his life—and with wit. Fewer of us knew that he always wore white to mark with appropriate *gravitas* an event such as a thesis defence. Those of us who attended any of John's wine-tasting events savoured his sense of occasion as much as we did the wines or sherries or ports that we sampled. What most of us did not know was that John usually supplied these often rare and exotic samples as a gift from his own stock. It was entirely typical of John that his generosity remained unannounced.

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Many of you will recall that John wrote a wine column, punningly entitled "Grape Expectations," for many years and that he regularly circulated updated lists of best buys. It was characteristic of John to want to share with friends and colleagues his own discoveries about what delighted

him. And his interests were wide and varied. He was enthusiastic and informed about wine, about Georgian sterling, about music, about rare books, about theatre, about dogs-especially his beloved Huskies, about humour, from its crudest to its most refined.

As this litany suggests, John had a deep appreciation of culture, high, middling, and low. Long before it became fashionable to ground literary studies in the material culture of an age, John was doing so in his courses. Generations of students benefitted from his knowledge and collections. He would routinely bring into class objects that connected students to the literature they were studying or introduce students to the Renaissance or the eighteenth century through the music or, with the help of his wife, Ursula, the dance of the period.

John was just as much a student as a teacher. Although his command of the literature that he taught was such that he could recall *verbatim* an astonishing number of lines of poetry or passages of prose, he never lost the joy of discovering something new in what he knew well already. He loved teaching Shakespeare because of the inexhaustibility of the plays; he used to remark that you could enter a Shakespeare play anywhere and find new avenues to explore. He was an avid theatre-goer; over the years he attended more Black Hole Theatre productions than probably anyone else. He took something away from every single performance of a play. Just as he delighted in his own findings of new meanings, so also did he share in the excitement of younger scholars who discovered for themselves something that was already a part of his capacious understanding. John found enormous pleasure in collegial life, and, as one of his junior colleagues put it, he had a gift for making others "feel good about themselves."

The eighteenth-century English literature in which John was deeply immersed is known especially for its wit and decorum. It is entirely fitting that John's own academic life was distinguished by these very traits. He will be sorely missed by his friends and colleagues.