

OBITUARY

LLOYD DAVIS

26 February 1959 – 7 August 2005



Lloyd Davis, before his untimely death, gained recognition as amongst the most internationally respected Shakespearean scholars of his generation. He was president of the Australian and New Zealand Shakespeare Association, and co-convenor of the International Shakespeare Congress to be held in 2006 at his university in Queensland. His broad intellectual interests, articulacy, and wonderful ability to engage and encourage others saw him frequently called on in planning new collaborative ventures, most recently in the ARC Network for Early European Research. I am acutely aware that to say these things in Lloyd's presence would have disconcerted such a modest man.

Lloyd's book, *Guise and Disguise: Rhetoric and Characterization in the English Renaissance* (1993) is accepted as an original reframing of an apparently settled subject, Shakespearean characterization, and as such it has caused major rethinking in the field. Disguise is taken as a trope for the whole activity of expressing identity through personae, thereby casting doubt on notions of stable or essential self. Contemporary, sophisticated theory blends with original readings and close critical engagement with texts, an all too rare combination. The book demonstrates the abiding qualities of all Lloyd's writing – an outstandingly high standard of historical scholarship, a capacity to order complexity into lucidity, to

bring light into dark corners, with subtle intelligence and astonishing clarity and economy of thought.

Lloyd published books which established him in the burgeoning field of sexuality and literature, not only in the Renaissance but in later writing: *Sexuality and Textuality in Henry James: Reading through the Virginal* (Vol. 1 of a Sexuality and Literature Series, 1988), (as editor) *Virginal Sexuality and Textuality in Victorian Literature* (1993), and *Sexuality and Gender in the English Renaissance: An Annotated Edition of Contemporary Documents* (1998). Many of his articles focused on issues of sexual morality, masculinity, ‘the figure of woman’, androgyny, and self-formation through ‘the Civilizing Process’ involved in maintaining a balance between compulsion and restraint in sexuality. One article “Death-marked love: Desire and Presence in *Romeo and Juliet*” has been recognized as a classic and reprinted in several critical anthologies. The idea for a monograph, *Shakespearean Sexuality: Critical Desires and the Invention of Modern Sexual Morality* was accepted by Routledge just before his death. The word ‘forthcoming’, usually so hopeful, in this instance carries a deep sadness. It may not come forth at all. We will not know where the footprints were leading.

Autobiography, in the period before autobiography is supposed to have existed, was his focus in two books co-edited with Ron Bedford and Philippa Kelly: *Early Modern Autobiography: Theories, Genres, Practices* (2006) and *Early Modern English Lives: Autobiography and Self-Representation 1500-1660* (2006). An essay on ‘The Love Life of Ben Jonson’ is an intriguing foray into biography. Writers forget nothing and waste nothing, and even traces of Lloyd’s early, false start in undergraduate Law re-emerged in 2004 as ‘Quiddities, Quillities, Tenures and Tricks: Shakespeare and the Law’, and he was wryly amused that this was a paper invited by judges and published in the *Australian Law Journal*.

There was a close nexus between Lloyd’s research and teaching, and the connections were ones he analyzed. The extremely useful co-written books, *Tools for Cultural Studies: An Introduction* (with Tony Thwaites and Warwick Mules, 1994), *Introducing Cultural and Media Studies: A Semiotic Approach* (with Tony Thwaites and Warwick Mules, 2002), and *Structures and Strategies: An Introduction to Academic Writing* (with Susan McKay, 1996), are clearly based on the classroom experience that earned him awards for outstanding teaching, including the high honour of the Australian Award for University Teaching – Humanities and the Arts. His own students appreciated the same courteous consideration and individually tailored attention as Lloyd’s international colleagues. He saw the educational mission as having no boundaries, and delighted in visiting schools.

Lloyd turned collaboration into a fine art. Whether as editor of a book or of the journal *AUMLA*, as co-editor, conference convenor or head of department, he was a pure delight to work with. Nothing was ever left to chance, no detail overlooked, but the diplomacy and care were invisible behind his relaxed and genial good humour. According to a school friend from his days growing up in the unpromising western suburbs of Sydney, even as a child Lloyd showed the qualities of a skilled organiser. He never did it for reasons of self-promotion or career advancement, but altruistically and for the simple pleasures it gave him of sharing ideas, conversations, and convivial meals. He brought people together and created a space for them to blossom.

A need for communication runs through all he wrote and it was an explicit subject for contemplation in several of his essays, including “Messengers in Shakespeare’s Plays” (*Parergon* 15.2 (1998): 95-113) and ‘Living in the World: Communication and Culture in Early Modern England’ (*The Touch of the Real*, ed. Philippa Kelly [2002]). In the latter he examines letter-writing, showing how ‘the development of travel and communication in the early modern period both consolidated and challenged social and personal bonds’, and what is so touching is that for Lloyd travel and communication were central to his own widespread relationships which were invariably based on the trust and affection he inspired. There is a wonderful consistency that links such attentiveness to the importance of communication with Lloyd’s frequent professional emphasis on allowing the ‘poly-vocal’ interplay in Shakespeare to reflect values of humane tolerance, equality, and acceptance of diversity. (The only contradiction I detected was when he confessed that in cricket matters he was a ‘rabid patriot’.) However adroit in using theory, Lloyd always saw his writing and teaching as morally urgent. The wide ambit of his professional interests is displayed in the inclusiveness of the title of one of his edited books: *Shakespeare Matters: History, Teaching, Performance* (2003).

Lloyd Davis personified the gracious, scholarly generosity which makes the gift-culture and camaraderie in our profession so unique. Every tribute that has been paid to him uses the word ‘gentle’. His works are flowers of the springtime. That he did not live to enjoy his full ‘summer’s green all girded up in sheaves’ is as much our loss as his.

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