

Christy Desmet

It is with the greatest sadness that we announce the untimely death of Christy Desmet, Josiah Meigs Professor of English, Director of First-year Composition and Director of the UGA Writing Centers, co-founder and co-General Editor of *Borrowers and Lenders: The Journal of Shakespeare and Appropriation* and Associate Editor, *International Journal of ePortfolio*. Christy joined the UGA English Department in 1984, having earned her PhD at UCLA under the direction of Richard Lanham. She reached the rank of Professor in 2008 and was appointed Josiah Meigs Distinguished Teaching Professor of English in 2011, in acknowledgement of her outstanding and life-changing work with students of all levels, ages, and abilities.

Brilliant, tenacious, and always intellectually curious, Christy excelled in all three of the scholarly fields in which she read, published and taught: Renaissance Studies, Rhetoric and Composition, and Digital Humanities. Her first book, *Reading Shakespeare's Characters: Rhetoric, Ethics, and Identity* (University of Massachusetts Press, 1992) elegantly integrated rhetorical theory and its applications by classical, Renaissance, and twentieth-century critics with Shakespeare's characters as they are "read" in performance and criticism. She is perhaps best known among Shakespeareans, however, for the germinal collection she edited with Robert Sawyer, *Shakespeare and Appropriation* (Routledge, 1999) and its companion, also edited with Robert, *Harold Bloom's Shakespeare* (2001). "Shax and App," as she liked to call it, defined and legitimized a new field in Shakespeare studies – the study of adaptations, appropriations, off-shoots, riffs, remixes, mash-ups, remediations – readers', writers', performers' and other creators' ongoing *what you will* with Shakespeare's plays, poems, characters, words, and biography. Shax and App argued that such adaptations could be worthy objects of scholarly study and that these objects could themselves transform the ways in which we read and performed Shakespeare, notably by drawing attention to historically under-appreciated aspects of Shakespearean performance, rhetoric, characterization, and plot. Christy's own scholarship and teaching on Shakespeare and appropriation branched out into everything from science fiction, YouTube, music (with her beloved husband, musicologist David Schiller), Gothic (with her friend and former Department Head, Romanticist Anne Williams), and Victorian literature (with her friend, Victorianist Tricia Lootens).

So rich was this new field of Shax and App that in 2005 Christy and her UGA colleague Sujata Iyengar co-founded a new scholarly periodical devoted solely to the study of Shakespearean adaptations: *Borrowers and Lenders: The Journal of Shakespeare and Appropriation*. The journal, which went on to win the "Best New Journal" award from the Council of Editors of Learned Journals in 2007, innovated not only in its content but also in its form and platform. It was the first online scholarly humanities periodical to integrate rich multimedia including image, video, and sound, printable dynamic pdfs, and deep electronic "markup" to allow future indexing and classification.

The journal's platform was built from another ground-breaking project in which Christy (along with UGA academic professional Ron Balthazor) was instrumental: the English Department's electronic markup and management application, known as "emma," an immersive online writing environment that allows students and instructors to create, mark up, review, and archive streamlined and elegant online writing portfolios. Christy and her colleagues in UGA's Writing

programs published widely on student writing, in part using the invaluable data about student learning that Emma allowed them to gather. In later years Christy's work on electronic portfolios, innovation in adaptive learning, and teaching Science Writing through UGA's Writing Centers garnered her plaudits from the National and International Cohorts of Electronic Portfolio research and the Council on Basic Writing Award for Innovation, while her dedicated, ethical, and high-minded direction of UGA's first-year writing program won her the University System of Georgia's Regents' Teaching Excellence Award for Departments and Programs (2012) and the unswerving loyalty of the graduate students and contingent or non-tenure-track faculty who predominantly staff the program and for whose rights she fought stubbornly -- and usually successfully.

A beloved instructor and longtime member of the UGA Teaching Academy, Christy was more than once invited to educate schoolteachers at the Folger Shakespeare Library's summer Teaching Shakespeare Institute. At UGA, she served as resident expert on the collaborative development of adaptive learning technologies and was a member of UGA's first cohort of Online Learning Fellows. She also received a Fulbright Distinguished Fellowship in Humanities in 2015 to teach Shakespeare at Yonsei University in South Korea, multiple Improving Teacher Quality Grants, an NEH/Folger micro-grant on Teaching Shakespeare to Undergraduates, and won 2018's Outstanding Professor Award from UGA's Student Government Association. Students enjoyed the humor and kindness with which "Dr. D." always tempered her rigor and dedication.

Many of Christy's friends knew, and teased her about, the "I'm busier than you" game -- the joke being that Christy was *always, always*, "busier than you" -- busy writing articles, editing articles and collections, commissioning new work for the journal, mentoring graduate students, training writing program administrators, developing new grant proposals, learning yet another image- or video-capture program or adaptive learning system, reading and responding to yet another emerging or established scholar. Similarly, we also appreciated her habit of meticulously keeping her cv up to date and telling us proudly how many items she had published that year. Since she's not here to do it herself, then, let me tell you that in academic year 2017-2018 Christy Desmet published 1 co-edited essay collection, 9 essays in scholarly collections, and 5 anonymously-reviewed journal articles; gave ten talks at academic symposia or conferences; and edited two-and-a-half journal issues. At the time of her passing, she was involved in co-editing at least two scholarly essay collections and journal issues, co-authoring two books, co-investigating several grants, and completing several articles. She often told us that she felt she was "writing for her life" -- that her scholarly work had pulled her through two life-shattering bouts with cancer and that as long as she was writing, grading, and editing, she knew she was still alive and could fend off Death once more. She also loved, and made time for: watching college sports, especially football; walking the dog around Lake Herrick; trips to her adored beach, especially the Barrier Islands; and the friends she cherished and supported loyally.

I imagine her as one of the series of terriers she owned -- determinedly, doggedly holding on to life and shaking off the cancer as a terrier plays tug-of-war, worrying a toy in its teeth and gripping hard. Or, in a more literary vein, as Menelaus holds on to the shape-shifting Proteus even as the latter turns into fearsome or ungraspable forms -- snakes, lions, dragons, water, fire --

to demand a safe return home. But cancer shifted shape once too often for her, manifesting as sudden heart failure caused by scarring from previous bouts of chemo- and radiotherapy.

Christy Desmet suffered a major heart attack in late May, the side-effect of cancer treatment she underwent some eighteen years ago. She rallied miraculously over the summer, continuing to write, travel locally, edit, and plan her graduate seminar for the Fall semester as usual. Early this week, however, Christy suffered a second, and fatal, heart attack. She passed away quietly on Wednesday, July 25th, with her loving husband David Schiller, devoted brother Clark Desmet, and faithful terrier Ascot Rosemary Plum Desmet at her side.

She will be tremendously missed by faculty, students, staff and administrators from UGA, and by Shakespeareans and Writing faculty worldwide. Her husband is not able to answer all the phone calls this note might elicit, but he would welcome email or letters from Christy's colleagues. The UGA Department of English would also like to gather memories from students and colleagues in our annual newsletter. Please send your thoughts to Dr. Roxanne Eberle (eberle at uga dot edu). And please adhere to Christy's own request during her illness this summer: "No food, no plants." Plans for a memorial are not yet finalized, but it seems likely that there will be some sort of secular service at UGA, probably towards the end of September, and perhaps a Shakespearean gathering in Washington, DC, in the Spring.

Sujata Iyengar