Memorial Resolution of the Faculty of the University of Wisconsin–Madison
On the Death of Professor Emeritus Standish Henning

Standish Henning, Professor of English, Emeritus, died on February 20, 2021, at the age of 88. He is survived by his wife, Jane, and two daughters.

Professor Henning attended Kenyon College, then earned his B.A. from the University of the South in 1953, and his M.A. and Ph.D. from Harvard University in 1957 and 1960. He spent his entire career at the University of Wisconsin, starting as Instructor of English in 1960 and retiring as Professor in 1999.

Professor Henning was a scholar of Renaissance literature with specialties in Shakespeare and Renaissance drama. He was also well-known for his expertise in composition theory and the teaching of writing.

He edited several critical editions of Renaissance plays, most notably the New Variorum edition of Shakespeare’s *The Comedy of Errors* (Modern Language Association, 2011). A variorum edition is a scholarly tool that presents an overview of the entire history of the play, beginning with its first performance, and continuing with summaries of all the intervening critical discussions of the play, its stage history, and a collation of the variant readings of editions from the first folio of 1623 to the present, along with running commentary or glosses on both the text and the action of the play. His edition ran well over 1,000 pages in manuscript and took nearly two decades to write. Professor Henning’s New Variorum edition of *A Comedy of Errors* is a monument of modern Shakespeare scholarship.

Professor Henning’s scholarship was in the field of descriptive bibliography, the activity of describing books as physical objects. For Renaissance texts especially, descriptive bibliography is the first stage in the creation of a critical edition. Much of his work studied the printing history of a single edition of a play or volume of plays. Using a machine called the Hinman Collator, he would identify and catalog significant, small differences in the printing and type setting of different copies from the same edition. The Hinman Collator that Professor Henning used for much of his career is now on display in the Memorial Library’s Special Collections as a testament to the techniques of mid-century scholarship.

Professor Henning’s contributions to the English department and to undergraduate education at the University of Wisconsin were extensive and influential. For many years, he served as the department’s Director of Graduate Studies and as Associate Chair. His service in university affairs was equally as significant, especially in the areas of undergraduate education and the development of writing on campus. He was instrumental in starting the Writing Across the Curriculum program, directing the Verbal Assessment Program, and designing the current General Education requirements in Communication.

Professor Henning was a beloved and renowned teacher. During a career that spanned 39 years, he taught classes on Shakespeare and Renaissance drama to both graduates and undergraduates, Textual Bibliography, Literary Aspects of the Bible, the survey of early British literature, and Intermediate Composition. Late in his career, he developed a groundbreaking two-semester sequence called Writing for the Marketplace, which coupled a professional writing class and an internship, both designed to help English majors transition to careers in writing and communication. In the 1970s, the Letters and Science Honors Program contacted hundreds of their alumni from many different majors to inquire which faculty members contributed most significantly to their education. All of them mentioned
Professor Henning, who taught them Honors Composition during their first semester of college. English majors would lament that they had not met him earlier in their education, so to take additional classes with him. One student wrote, “When Professor Henning ends his teaching career next semester, probably with the scene in The Tempest where Prospero breaks his want, the University will lose a magic as potent in its way as Shakespeare’s own.” In 1987 the University recognized Professor Henning with the Chancellor’s Distinguished Teaching award. The English Department honors his memory annually with a student writing award, established by his longtime colleague and friend, Professor Emeritus Andrew Weiner.

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