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A Tribute to Professor William Matthews

On the tenth of June, 1975, the Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies had the great sorrow of losing its former director, Prof. William Matthews, who founded this journal in 1970. His memory will continue to be our great inspiring guide in our studies and in our careers.

We are printing here some moving words pronounced by Professor Blake Nevius on the occasion of the Solemn Memorial Tribute dedicated to Professor Matthews which was held here in Rolfe Hall on the nineteenth of June 1975.

Others will want to speak of Will's scholarship. His field of interest and mine were centuries apart, and I don't believe he had much use for the upstart literature of this former colony that I was studying – though he once admitted that as a boy he had read through Fenimore Cooper. But whatever your field, you could learn from no one so well as from Will what it meant to be a dedicated scholar. In the summer of 1959 I visited Will and Lois in Oxford. It was one of those rare, miraculous summers of no rain



PROFESSOR
WILLIAM MATTHEWS
1905-1975

and endless bright skies. We lured Will from his study for one picnic on White Horse Hill; otherwise, for the three weeks I was in Oxford he was translating Samuel Pepys' shorthand in the present text of the Diary, working twelve hours a day, every day. It came to me then that I would never really be a scholar.

When I learned last Tuesday night of Will's death, I lay awake for a long time while a film covering twenty-eight years of friendship unrolled in my mind. But solemn as the occasion was, the soundtrack of my film was one long echo of Will's laughter. Who can ever forget that laugh? I've never seen a man so prostrated by mirth; his whole body shook, and tears would come to his eyes. Will always thought his stories were funnier than mine. Or yours. They were. But what gave them their edge was the zest with which he told them – followed by that spectacle of utter collapse.

Will was full of the most extraordinary basic wisdom. I would like to conclude with a remark that he made many years ago and that, at various

academic crises, comes to my aid. Because I thought it might be slightly indecorous for such an occasion, I cleared it with Lois, who agreed that it says a great deal about Will's humanity and reminded me that he was, after all, a student of Chaucer.

We were talking once about that central dilemma for the teacher: how to mediate between the opposing claims of justice and mercy. Or to put it another way: do you fail Student X, who has written an atrocious final, when you know that his wife had twins the day before the exam? Will as usual cut the Gordian Knot. "There's one epitaph," he said, "That I don't want them to put on my headstone: 'He was an honest sonofabitch.' "

CONTRIBUTIONS

1. Medical Studies (transl. Editor - William Matthews) 1962, 89 pp., \$8.00 UC Press
2. Galileo Reappraised (Editor - Carlo I. Galini) 1968, 110 pp., \$6.50 UC Press
3. The Transformation of the Human World - Gibson's Problem (Two Corners Editor - Lynn White, Jr.) 1966, 321 pp., \$8.95 hard cover, \$3.45 paperback UC Press
4. Scientific Methods in Medieval Archaeology (Editor - Reiner Eisler) 1970, 457 pp., \$20.00 UC Press
5. Peirce and Carl Doctor in Modern Context 1960-1960 (Editor - Lantio Mathes) 1972, 323 pp., \$12.00 UC Press
6. The Darker Faint of the Renaissance by Robert Korman (1978, 321 pp., \$14.00 UC Press)

PUBLICATIONS

1. Ours and Yours in the Body (with Editor Jeffrey Burton Russell) 1965, 313 pp., \$6.95 UC Press
2. Leonardo's Legacy: An International Symposium (Editor - C.D. O'Malley) 1969, 225 pp., \$18.50 UC Press