



## IN MEMORIAM: Donald J. Kummings, 1940-2017

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## IN MEMORIAM: DONALD J. KUMMINGS, 1940-2017

Donald J. Kummings was, in the Whitman community, a scholar's scholar. He was responsible for four books that are in a handy place on nearly every Whitman scholar's bookshelf because they are still consulted (in my case) nearly daily. With J. R. McMaster, Don edited *Walt Whitman: An Encyclopedia* (1998), the greatest single reference book on Whitman ever compiled. Don coordinated and edited the work of over 200 scholars who authored the encyclopedia's more than 750 articles. He also did the hard work of narrowing 5,000 possible topics down to the 750 that finally appeared in the book. Earlier, along with Scott Giantvalley, Don pioneered vital bibliographical work on Whitman as well. Following Giantvalley's *Walt Whitman, 1838-1939: A Reference Guide* (1981), Don's massive *Walt Whitman, 1940-1975: A Reference Guide* appeared in 1982, cataloging well over 3,000 books and articles. Together, these two volumes provided the first comprehensive annotated list of all work about Whitman over nearly a century and a half. They became the basis of the continually updated and expanded searchable online bibliography now available on the *Walt Whitman Archive*, just as the articles in the *Encyclopedia* also have found an online life on the *Whitman Archive*, where users can now consult most entries.

Don also edited two important collections of essays on Whitman. The first, *Approaches to Teaching Walt Whitman*, was one of the earliest and most distinguished of the ongoing MLA "Approaches to Teaching" series. It's safe to say that Don's volume revolutionized the teaching of Whitman, offering a broad range of approaches to specific works, from introductory to graduate courses. More recently, Don's *A Companion to Walt Whitman*, part of the Blackwell Companion series, appeared in 2006 and remains a superb gathering of essays on the wide array of topics about and critical approaches to Whitman and his work. Exploring cultural contexts, literary contexts, and particular poetic and prose texts, the thirty-five essays by some of the most distinguished Whitman scholars of our time form a kind of monument to the continuing importance of studying Whitman.

Don received his B.A. in creative writing and an M.A. in English, both at Purdue University. He then taught at Adrian College for a couple of years before earning a Ph.D. in English and American Studies at Indiana University in 1971. He soon became a professor at the University of Wisconsin-Parkside, where he stayed for thirty-six years, retiring in 2006. During his tenure at Parkside, Don earned every teaching award possible (some twice), culminating in the Carnegie Foundation Wisconsin Professor of the Year Award in 1997. A poet as well as a scholar, Don published a chapbook of his Whitman-inflected poems, called *The Open Road Trip*, in 1989. In 1991, he was the recipient of the University of Wisconsin-Parkside Excellence in Research and Creative Activity Award.

Don loved to travel, and he did it often, visiting over fifty countries on five continents. He was a man of broad vistas with an admirable eye for detail. His work in Whitman studies—energized by that same Whitmanian mix of vista and detail—endures, and it has nurtured countless books and articles that continue to define the field.