

J. William “Bill” Kemp, Professor *Emeritus* of English, died at his home on November 24, 2019 from the effects of cancer that took a toll on his body but could not dull the spirit of a man who was a consummate academic. Even a few days before his death, he was holding animated and engaging conversations with friends and colleagues who visited him.

Bill came to the University of Mary Washington (then Mary Washington College) in 1970 as an assistant professor with a freshly-minted Ph.D. from the University of South Carolina. In a career that spanned 35 years, he earned recognition as a powerful and creative teacher, a thoughtful and capable leader, and a valued colleague and friend. His standards were always high; his integrity, unshakable.

His primary academic specialties were the works of Shakespeare, analytical bibliography, the history of the book, and English Renaissance literature. His scholarship was thorough and meticulous. His critical edition of John Marston’s Renaissance satire *Sophonisba* was published by Garland Press in 1979 and remains available as an ebook from Routledge Press. Yet as a living embodiment of the term “renaissance man,” Bill’s interests spanned well beyond the limits of his main fields of study. He published work on Jane Austen, on film directors and film adaptations of literature, on electronic textual design, on experiential learning, and on animal communication. Indeed, he was an early advocate and adopter of a wide range of instructional technologies and became proficient with computers long before many of his department colleagues knew how to turn the machine on, as witnessed by a grant he was awarded for research into computer literacy—in 1983. He was a passionate lover of music of all kinds. His professional memberships included the Southwest Popular Culture Association, the Modern Language Association of America, the Jane Austen Society of North America, and of course, the Shakespeare Association of America.

Bill was twice Chair of what was then called the Department of English, Linguistics, and Speech (now English, Linguistics, and Communication). His other leadership roles at the University of Mary Washington included Assistant Vice-President for Academic Affairs, Director of the Master of Arts in Liberal Studies degree program, and Assistant Dean for Projects and Programs. He was a dramaturg for many Shakespeare productions at Mary Washington. Indeed, his role as Mary Washington’s “Shakespeare guy” became truly legendary—and as he liked to remind us, he shared a name with one of the most beloved characters in Shakespeare’s own theatre company, the clown Will Kemp.

But Bill was primarily a teacher who enjoyed each opportunity to bring the literature he loved to life for each new group of students. A writer of clarity and grace who by his own admission “lived for syntax,” he pioneered bold new approaches to teaching freshman composition. Always looking for ways to foster the love of language and the life of the mind, Bill began a departmental tradition called “Thursday Poems,” in which colleagues and students would simply read aloud their favorite poems for half an hour at the end of the workday each Thursday. In 2000, he received the Grellet C. Simpson Award for Excellence in Undergraduate

Teaching, UMW's most prestigious faculty award. An annual symposium showcasing critical, creative, and original works by students in the Department of English, Linguistics, and Communication is named in his honor.

As a colleague, Bill could be opinionated and tough-minded but never at the expense of being open to new points of view that might cause him to reconsider his positions. The words he once wrote in an essay to his department during some energized discussions about curriculum revision are the best testimony of how he viewed his role as a faculty member: "I have tried to draw a shape, an outline, hoping that through conversation the shape will grow more definite and the outline more substantial. In the end it may be transformed completely."

Bill Kemp set a powerful example and will be missed by all those who conversed with, worked with, and learned from him. Expressions in his honor and memory may be made by donations to the Mary Ivy Kemp Scholarship Fund at Millsaps College, 1701 North State Street, Jackson, MS 39210-0001.