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Remembrance: Dr. Peter Schakel (1941-2024)

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Dr. Peter Schakel (1941-2024)



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Dr. Peter Schakel

Dr. Peter Schakel, professor emeritus at Hope College and *VII* Editorial Board member, died on 20 March 2024 at the age of eighty-two. He is remembered as an outstanding professor of English and internationally respected C.S. Lewis scholar.

A first-generation college student, Peter graduated from Central College in Iowa in 1963. He married his wife, Karen, the following year and went on to earn a master's at Southern Illinois University and a doctorate in English literature at the University of Wisconsin. His studies focused on British literature from 1660 to 1800, specifically concerning the works of Jonathan Swift. He also studied C.S. Lewis.

In 1969, Peter joined Hope College's English department. He taught there for forty-eight years, twenty of which he spent as the department chair. He was also the Peter C. and Emajean Cook Professor of English from 1984 to 2017. His excellent teaching earned him awards from Hope students and administration; he received the Ruth and John Reed Faculty Achievement Award in 2004, and both the Hope Outstanding Professor Educator Award and the Provost's Award for Service to the Academic Program in 2013.

Peter served as a *VII* Editorial Board member for more than three decades, beginning in 1988, and he also served on *Mythlore's* editorial board. He was winner or co-winner of the Mythopoeic Society's Award for Scholarship three times. His six books published on Lewis include *Reason and Imagination in C.S. Lewis: A Study of Till We Have Faces*, *Imagination and the Arts in C.S. Lewis: Journeying to Narnia and Other Worlds*, and *Reading with the Heart: The Way into Narnia*. Brian Murray lauded Peter's book on *Till We Have Faces* as a "slender, unpretentious, and well-written book . . . [that is] consistently insightful; it deserves the attention of all who find themselves drawn to Lewis the writer and to Lewis the man."

Friends and family remember Peter as a compassionate, gentle person, eager to discuss anything—especially sports—and help those in need. His

busy schedule never prevented him from spending time with his children, Jennifer and Jonathan, or having deep conversations with students and faculty. One of his students, Chad Busk, remembers a discussion he had with Peter about life after death: “We decided that everything good down here would be orders of magnitude better in Heaven. I will miss Peter but know that someday we’ll meet again and undoubtedly talk about how much we underestimated the joy of Heaven.”

ELISE PETERSON

Memories of Peter Schakel

Peter Schakel joined the English faculty of Hope College in 1969. A teacher of proven excellence who was also a budding Swift scholar, he was just the sort of person I was happy to greet as a colleague. Hope had traditionally viewed its function as providing an excellent education in the liberal arts and sciences on the undergraduate level, but now a transition was taking place, with Hope understanding its mission to also include a role in the advancement and spread of knowledge in the larger academic community. Peter, who alongside his assigned teaching was already at work converting his dissertation to a book, would join others in exemplifying this expanded vision for the college. When I took my turn as department chair, it became my privilege to encourage him in this work. Watching him methodically go at it was a learning experience for me. Finally, in 1978, Wisconsin University Press published *The Poetry of Jonathan Swift: Allusion and the Development of a Poetic Style*, and he continued his good work into the present century, having a hand in organizing and editing two more books on Swift as well as publishing several articles, some of them having been presented at symposia on Swift in Münster, Germany.

Earlier, however, he had launched on the publishing career for which he is best known. His repeated teaching of a popular course on Lewis’s fiction led to the publication of his first book, *The Longing for a Form* (1977)—whose title, drawn from Lewis’s account of his choice of the fairy tale genre, surely reflects Peter’s interest in the uses of allusion. His invitation to contribute to this collection of essays helped me give shape to the first of my articles on Lewis. By then he and I had become close friends, often chatting together on scholarly questions and ideas for research projects or routinely seeking feedback on our drafts. In one such conversation we talked about Peter’s idea for a new book. I thought the idea very promising and encouraged him to do it, mentioning that it reminded me of a book by Lewis’s friend J.B. Phillips, *Your God Is Too Small*—which title Peter adapted: *Is your Lord large enough? How C.S. Lewis expands our view of God* (2008). Unfortu-

nately, this little book has not received nearly the attention that it deserves—perhaps because it's in the wrong genre, a textbook for adult Sunday school class: twelve chapters, to be read week by week with discussion questions following each chapter. Peter had already published anthologies of literary genres for introductory courses, and they sold well enough that one at least went into a second edition. At All Saints Episcopal Church in Saugatuck, Michigan, he regularly taught an adult Sunday school class, and would sometimes turn down my invitation to dinner so as to prepare for it.

CHARLES HUTTAR