

Douglas Kelly

Frederick Douglas Kelly, Jr., who was born in El Monte, CA, on July 17, 1934, died in Madison, WI, on March 21, 2022. He was 87 years of age.

Douglas graduated *summa cum laude* from the University of Southern California in 1956, spending the following year studying at the Sorbonne and teaching in Versailles. While in France, he met Borghild Rombach, and the following year they married on their return to the US. They had two children, Stephen (1959) and David (1963); the marriage ended in amicable divorce. Borghild passed away in 2015. In 1981, Douglas married Sandra Ihle, a specialist in medieval English. They were introduced to each other by Eugène Vinaver, then Visiting Professor of English at Madison, who thought that Sandra, working on her dissertation on Malory, ought to meet the brilliant medievalist in the French department. Douglas obtained his MA (1959) and PhD (1962) degrees from the University of Wisconsin-Madison, where he was a student of Julian Harris. He was appointed Assistant Professor there in 1964, Associate Professor in 1966, and Professor in 1970. When appointed in 1986 to a distinguished chair in 1986, he named it after his mentor.

Douglas Kelly spent his entire academic career in Madison, teaching generations of students in French and Medieval Studies. Many of his doctoral students went on to distinguished careers in colleges and universities in North America. His formative influence was not limited to his own students as he took an interest in the graduate students of others and young medievalists just embarking on their career. Many were astonished that someone whose work they admired so much took the time and trouble to talk to them about their own interests. This was typical of a man who rarely spoke of his own work unless prompted and never considered himself anything other than a simple member of the community of medievalists. He never spoke ill of others. The numerous distinctions which came his way belied his irremediable modesty. Notable among these are his fellowships at Madison's Institute for Research in the Humanities (1967–1968 and 1990–1995). He held an American Council of Learned Societies Fellowship in 1974–1975 and a Senior Fellowship at the Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study in 1997–1998. In 1995, he was awarded the Prix Escalibur by the International Arthurian Society for contributions to Arthurian scholarship, and was elected Fellow of the Medieval Academy of America in 2017.

Douglas was a committed Arthurian for his entire career. His 1962 dissertation was published in revised form as *'Sens' and 'Conjointure' in Le chevalier de la Charrette* (1966) and was the first major work in which he argued that authors of vernacular romance were imbued with the rhetoric of the Latin arts of poetry, a field he surveyed in *The Arts of Poetry and Prose* (1991). This became the foundation of the larger part of his scholarly work, which includes some ten books, four edited volumes, and over fifty articles. *The Art of Medieval French Romance* (1992) changed the way we looked at the genre, reminding us of the Latin underpinnings of Chrétien de Troyes and others. Many scholars might have wanted to write *The Art of Medieval French Romance*, but only Douglas Kelly, with his vast knowledge of medieval Latin, could have done so. At a time when Arthurian studies had just emerged from decades of Celtic "sourcism" and still floundering in search of interpretations of the Grail, Douglas Kelly saw that the medieval schools and their curriculum were the key to understanding what authors of medieval romance

were about. And if scholars of medieval literature were still debating the nature of “courtly love” and chivalry, and the relationships between them and religion, Douglas Kelly recast the discussion in his own terms, expanding his purview to encompass courtly poetry and romance in a broader sense. *The Medieval Imagination* (1978) and *Internal Difference and Meanings in the Roman de la Rose* (1995), like the rest of his work, are now indispensable reading. Later in his career, Douglas Kelly turned to fourteenth- and early fifteenth-century literature, publishing landmark studies of Christine de Pizan (2007) and Guillaume de Machaut (2017). *The Conspiracy of Allusion* (1999) is a brilliant and learned study of description, rewriting, and authorship in the Middle Ages, which in some respects distills and expands his ideas about medieval literary imagination. Many earlier substantial articles were revised and published in *The Conspiracy of Allusion* (2011). His last major contributions to scholarship were translations, co-authored with Glyn Burgess, of the three *romans antiques*. Benoît de Sainte-Maure’s *Le roman de Troie* (2017), a long and complex work he had always thought deserved better press and greater accessibility to those without Old French, was followed by the *Roman de Thèbes* and the *Roman d’Eneas* (2021). In 1994, some thirty-nine scholars from North America and Europe joined forces to offer Douglas a *Festschrift*, aptly entitled—and alluding to his first book—*Conjunctures*. One distinguished colleague wrote in his contribution that Douglas’s achievement was equal to that of Faral, Gilson, and Curtius. Such a comparison would never have crossed his mind, but reading it might have brought him quiet pleasure and perhaps even have caused him to blush.

Douglas Kelly spoke fluent French, German, and Italian, and had some Dutch. This enabled him to move effortlessly in the international academic world and made him ideally suited to administrative positions in scholarly societies. He was International Vice-President of the International Arthurian Society (1981–1984), North American Bibliographer (1993–1991), and International Secretary and Editor of the *Bulletin* (1984–1993). The work involved in editing nine volumes of the *Bulletin* was enormous, but he shouldered the burden out of a sense of responsibility and an awareness that such scholarly societies need steering. He was also International President of the International Courtly Literature Society (1983–1989) and presided over its Dalfsen Congress in 1986. Douglas was a comforting presence at international meetings, social and affable, who provided direction and stability without even knowing it. He had many long-time friends in the international scholarly world, whose admiration for him and his work knew no bounds. He was an extraordinary scholar, inspiring teacher, and the best of men. How we will miss him.

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