



## IN MEMORIAM

Vinton Adams Dearing

Professor of English and Computer Applications in Literature, Emeritus

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Vinton Dearing never spoke about himself or his accomplishments to colleagues — although he accomplished much — nor did he advertise his publications, numerous as they were, on the bulletin board outside his office. His professorial title provides some sense of the variety of his interests, although it does not clearly reflect his work on the Greek New Testament, which occupied part of his time for 50 years.

He was born in San Francisco on July 30, 1920, entered Harvard College at the age of sixteen, received his A.B. in 1940, and an A.M. from Harvard University in 1942. He served as a gunnery instructor during the Second World War, returned to Harvard in 1946, and earned a Ph.D in 1949, when he joined UCLA as an instructor in English.

He trained at Harvard in textual analysis and within a year of his arrival at UCLA had become the textual editor of an edition, projected in 20 volumes but yet to publish its first, of the complete works of the late seventeenth-century English poet, translator, dramatist, and critic, John Dryden. The association was to last for more than 50 years. By 1956 he had begun to plan an edition of the Gospels in Greek and could report "a triple nucleus" to his research: "English literature of the period 1660-1800; descriptive bibliography and textual criticism; and the Bible as literature." By 1962 he had added a fourth interest by becoming a pioneer in the use of the computer to aid the analysis of literary texts.

The common thread in most of his work was the theory and practice of textual criticism. The theory resulted in articles and two books: *A Manual of Textual Analysis* (1959), and *Principles and Practice of Textual Analysis* (1974), the latter a revised and greatly enlarged version of the former, which, among other things, incorporates the computer into textual criticism. The practice of textual criticism also resulted in articles, these addressing particular problems in the history of literary texts from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The practice further led to two major editions — that of Dryden, published by the University of California Press and commonly referred to as the California Dryden, and that of the poetry and prose of John Gay, published in two volumes by the Clarendon Press of Oxford University in 1974. He also produced, as an example of enumerative bibliography, the article on Alexander Pope for *The New Cambridge Bibliography of English Literature* (1971).

His Christian faith was very important to him and is obviously reflected in his work with the early manuscripts (up to A.D. 900) of the Greek New Testament. He wrote that *A Manual of Textual Analysis* "was developed specifically to deal with the complicated interrelations" of those manuscripts, although he was also able to apply his principles to other problematic texts. For a long time he planned an edition of the Greek New Testament reflecting his principles, and although he never completed that edition, his biblical studies resulted in *The Great Physician: A Life of Jesus Christ in the Light of Modern Spiritual Healing*, a book long-projected and eventually published in two volumes in 2004. Those studies also informed the undergraduate course in the English Bible as literature, which he taught with great success for many years.

Many scholars in the humanities still use the computer for little more than word- processing and the scanning of electronic databases. But by 1974 Vinton Dearing had written computer programs used by others for such tasks as making concordances, identifying textual variants, and making preliminary diagrams in textual criticism. He revised and extended the last program in 1981, when it was adopted by a scholar working with Chinese texts.

His work brought international recognition and was also rewarded by a Guggenheim fellowship in 1959-60 and a Fulbright senior scholarship in 1975-76, as well as a grant from International Business Machines in 1967 and a series of grants from the National Endowment for the Humanities beginning in 1976 for work both with biblical texts and with the California Dryden.

As textual editor of the California Dryden he established the principles governing the text of the whole and also provided the texts for sixteen of the edition's twenty volumes. For nearly forty years his responsibility ended with the text; other scholars prepared the literary and historical commentaries that accompanied the texts. But in 1989 the general editorship became vacant with four volumes still to be published, and Vinton Dearing volunteered to fill the vacancy because, he said, "that is what I signed on for"— to stay with the edition to the end. He provided not only the texts for the last four volumes but also the commentary to three and over half the commentary to the fourth. He saw the final volume published late in 2001.

Vinton Dearing never spoke ill of colleagues, a quality rare among academics, and in a profession by no means averse to self- promotion he served quietly. He died on April 6, 2005.

Alan Roper