



IN MEMORIAM

Walter Edwin Rex III
Professor of French, Emeritus
UC Berkeley
1927 - 2010

Walter E. Rex III, known to his friends as Ted, died on January 22, 2010, nine days before his 83rd birthday, at Providence Pavilion in Oakland, California, where he was convalescing from an emergency operation a week earlier.

Ted Rex was the scion of a Philadelphia family, which first rose to prominence in the early nineteenth century. Rex's grandfather, also named Walter Edwin Rex, was a Philadelphia city councilman. The son of Walter Edwin Rex Jr. and Barbara Lydia Clayton Rex, Ted was educated at Harvard University (A.B., 1950; M.A., 1951; Ph.D. in Romance Languages and Literatures, 1956), and spent time studying in both France and Italy. He taught briefly at both Brown University and Harvard before coming to the University of California, Berkeley, as an assistant professor of French in 1960. He retired from the University at the end of 1992.

Ted Rex was hired at Berkeley based on the doctoral thesis on Pierre Bayle he wrote at Harvard under the direction of the renowned Diderot specialist, Herbert Dieckmann. From the outset, Rex was known for his erudition and for the particular care he took with his work. In one letter of support for Rex, Dieckmann commented that "a footnote in one of Rex's articles may take more time than the writing of a lengthy article on a well known author on whose work there exists a copious literature." Whereas Bayle was frequently studied as a precursor to eighteenth-century French thinkers, Rex's work situated Bayle's thought in the context of his own time and in relation to Bayle's precursors, revealing the importance of Bayle's orthodox Calvinism to his thought and thereby implicitly to French Enlightenment philosophy more generally. The doctoral thesis became the basis for Rex's first book, *Essays on Pierre Bayle and Religious Controversy*, published in 1965. In 1963, he collaborated with Richard N. Schwab on a translation of Jean Le Rond d'Alembert's *Preliminary Discourse to the Encyclopedia of Diderot*.

Promoted to associate professor in 1965, Rex worked in these early years of his Berkeley career on a number of projects, including, again in collaboration with Richard N. Schwab, a multi-volume *Inventory of Diderot's "Encyclopédie"*. When the first volumes appeared, in 1971 and 1972, the project was referred to by one reviewer as "an instrument de travail of incomparable importance." He also spent many years on a study of Pascal's *Lettres Provinciales*, which would be published in 1977 as *Pascal's Provincial Letters: an Introduction*.

At the time of his promotion to professor in 1972, Rex was especially commended for two articles he had written, "Recent Developments in Research on the *Encyclopédie* (Great Britain, U.S.A.)," published in *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century* in 1973, and "Figaro's Games," published in *PMLA* in 1974 and devoted to an exploration of the structuring presence of a series of childhood games in Beaumarchais's play. It was in 1975 that he would offer for the first time, together with Professor Daniel Hertz of the Department of Music, an interdisciplinary course on music and literature in the French eighteenth century (especially concerned with Rousseau and Diderot). A brilliant 'cellist, Rex was known on occasion to play musical examples on his 'cello for the students in the class. This course and its successor (a course on Mozart and Beaumarchais, again taught with Professor Hertz) would become legendary on campus.

Over the years, Rex continued to compose articles on the Encyclopédie, on Diderot, on Rousseau, along with articles on the music of the eighteenth century. In 1987, he published *The Attraction of the Contrary: Essays on the Literature of the French Enlightenment*. Reviews of this collection would comment on the “finesse of the analysis,” “the virtuoso command of materials,” and on “its urbane and sensitive treatment of eighteenth-century literature in relation to the other arts, especially music and painting.”

Throughout his career in the French department, Rex was a notably friendly presence, concerned with teaching and advising both graduates and undergraduates, always interested in finding ways to allow his teaching to evolve to meet the needs of new generations of students. He was active in many professional societies over the years, organizing an immensely successful annual meeting of the Western Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies at Berkeley in 1989. On campus he was a well-known figure, a regular participant both before and after his retirement in the monthly meetings of the Arts Club.

Ted Rex’s home of many years on Alvarado Road was destroyed in the Oakland Hills fire of 1991. Rebuilding, restoring, and replacing, in collaboration with architect Ed McEachron, a former student, was a huge effort. The new home became a wonderful place for gardening, music making, and for housing Rex’s wonderful collections – of rugs, pottery, prints, and books. It was also a stimulating environment for the pursuit of Rex’s intellectual projects. He completed a follow-up volume to *The Attraction of the Contrary* there early in his retirement: *Diderot’s Counterpoints: the Dynamics of Contrariety in his Major Works*, published in 1998. Shortly before his death, he completed another manuscript, *Molière’s Strategies: Timely Reflections on His Art of Comedy*. Rex was pleased to be writing on Molière, because doing so allowed him to renew the interests he developed early in his career for the history of ideas in the seventeenth century, for the religious controversies of that era, and for the study of the relationships between religion and ethics that characterized the era. The book covers the full range of Molière’s production, but devotes several of its chapters to *Le Malade imaginaire*, which Rex held to be the summa of Molière’s art, and the brilliance of which he wished to help readers savor in detail.

Rex was a talented and devoted ‘cello player; he played a wide repertory of solo ‘cello pieces, sonatas, trios, quartets, and quintets. The string quartet he played in for many years (a mix of professional and amateur musicians) was featured in an article in the *San Francisco Chronicle* on September 23, 1977. He could at times be needlessly self-deprecating regarding his own remarkable abilities, while quietly expecting and encouraging the best from those he played with. He made a point of sharing his knowledge of and his passion for the chamber music repertory, a subtle form of mentoring he bestowed on many of the other musicians he played with regularly.

A tireless philanthropist whose special projects included significant grants to the French and music departments of the University of California, Berkeley, Ted Rex bequeathed his library to The Bancroft Library, to which he had already given 40 eighteenth century French engravings by artists such as Boucher, Fragonard, Vernet, and Watteau.

He is survived by a sister, Barbara Picasso Rex of Philadelphia and her son Clayton Darsey.

Michael
Lucey
William Smock
2010