

Obituary

CHARLES BERNARD SCHMITT: 1933–1986

Charles Schmitt, Renaissance intellectual historian, bibliographer and teacher, died suddenly and unexpectedly in Padua on 15 April. His death constitutes an irreparable loss to international scholarship as well as a grievous blow to his family and friends. Charles Schmitt was trained, and for a while worked, as a chemical engineer before entering the Philosophy Department at Columbia University in 1957. He completed his Ph.D. in 1963 under the supervision and formative influence of Paul Oscar Kristeller. He taught in the Philosophy Departments at Fordham University and U.C.L.A., and then, in 1967, he took up a temporary Research Fellowship in the History of Science Division of the Philosophy Department at Leeds University. In 1973, he became lecturer in History of Science and Philosophy at the Warburg Institute, enhancing its international reputation until his untimely death.

The breadth and depth of Charles's learning in Renaissance intellectual history was unsurpassed, encompassing not only the Aristotelian scholarship for which he was widely known, but also an intimate acquaintance with Platonism, Humanism, Scepticism, natural philosophy, the occult sciences, medicine and education. The authoritative nature of all Charles's writings—both exposition and commentary—on these various areas of Renaissance intellectual life owed much to his astounding command of the primary and secondary literature. Indeed, some of Charles's friends and colleagues, impatient to draw upon his considerable expository skills, regretted that he devoted so much of his time and energy to bibliographical work. However, Charles himself suggested, with his characteristically wry humour, that 'bibliography may be despised only after it has been done'. At the time of his death he was still working on the vast bibliographical survey of

Renaissance Aristotle translations which he had initiated and which, far from being despised, will be used gratefully and admiringly by scholars for generations to come. In recent years Charles had begun to publish synoptic accounts of his own and others' researches which, together with his bibliographical surveys, will establish him for posterity as a historians' historian.

In spite of his erudition, Charles was never intimidating. A genial and amusing man, he was always extremely good company and, as his former students will testify, he had a well developed knack of being critical and helpful at the same time. His vigorous encouragement of younger scholars could be fully appreciated only by those who were privileged to receive it; for those who were lucky enough to have done so, it will be remembered with affection and gratitude. Charles combined his rigorous learning with a rare generosity towards his students. In an ideal academic world there would be more teachers like him.

One of the distinguishing features of Charles Schmitt's work was an awareness of the unity and interconnectedness of intellectual interests during the Renaissance. He could never be satisfied with a study of an individual thinker or even a particular aspect of Renaissance philosophy since he was always sensitive to the influence of, and implications for, the wider context. His work in, for example, the history of Renaissance and early modern science comprised, for him, just another facet of the history of philosophy. He did not, however, regard such work as 'inter-disciplinary' but rather as dealing with Renaissance philosophy as conceived by Renaissance thinkers. In view of this, and in view of the range of his learning, it is true to say that, in a very real sense, Charles Schmitt was a Renaissance man.

JOHN HENRY

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