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Ed Chapman: In Memoriam

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Ed Chapman

1936-2019

When I met Edgar Leon Chapman during our first day of grad school at Brown University, we hit it off at once in various categories of common interest. Culturally—though I was a New England Yankee and he a quasi-Southern Missouri boy—we shared a small-town, bumpkin pedigree in the tweedy precincts of the Ivy League. As baseball buffs, we shared a hatred/envy of the New York Yankees on behalf of the (champion) St Louis Cardinals and (futile) Boston Red Sox. As Baptists, we shared a deep draft of Biblical lore—he was a lay preacher for a time—that proved invaluable for the study of literature, though we both ended up as Episcopalians. Our working class upbringing bred a strong work ethic—I as a master of concrete work and he in the rigors of farm labor, ploughing, harvesting, milking, clearing pasture-land, and tending livestock. And by way of professional vocation, we amiably divided the literary pie between his gravitation toward the Renaissance plus popular genres (such as Westerns and sci fi) and my affinity for classic American fiction and poetry. Perhaps because of his Southern heritage, he additionally made himself a first rate historian of the Civil War and of his family genealogy—to which he added two sons, Terry and Benjamin, and three grandkids.

Because of the distance between Illinois and North Carolina, we saw each other mainly during the annual Robert Penn Warren Circle meetings in Kentucky, where he impressed all who met him as an excellent good fellow—smart, witty, congenial, and well informed. Thanks to his longevity, he is probably the last/only man we will ever know who saw and heard T. S. Eliot live (at Yale). Always cheerful and friendly, his demeanor never revealed the serious medical issues of his last years, including diabetes and heart disease. It is some consolation to

think that last October 12, he passed away too quickly for fear or pain. In the aftermath, Ed Chapman will always be woven into my sense of being. Blessings on you, Ed, wherever you are. You made our lives better.

--Victor Strandberg