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NANCY EASTERLIN

DENIS'S WAY

IT IS ONE THING to feel repelled by the slag heap of postmodern discourse. But it is another to take that aversion and turn it, in the pragmatic spirit, into a source of learning and inspiration for others. This is what Denis Dutton did. His intellectual discrimination, along with a good deal of common sense and creativity, made a home for many of us in the pages of this journal and in the larger world.

I met Denis at a conference in Washington, D.C., in 1997, an event that brought together a number of scholars already working in cognitive-evolutionary approaches to literature. My memory of the sessions themselves is dim. (I recall my daughter, not quite two at the time, running incessant laps around the dining room at mealtimes as my husband gave chase.) But I do remember my first and only private conversation with Denis as we sat in a coffeehouse during one of the conference breaks. Sipping a café latte, he told me about *Philosophy and Literature*, its mission and purpose, and encouraged me to submit my work there. I was honored by his forthright generosity and democratic kindness, just as I was some time later when he asked me to serve as the journal's associate editor. In that Washington coffeehouse, I witnessed the two qualities that persisted in all our mutual engagements.

Denis was trusting and unpretentious. Though all of us hope to find these qualities in abundance among our acquaintances, they are, in fact, rare, and even more rarely found together. Like the true pragmatist he was, Denis knew that the world is full of false boundaries—between folk and high art, elegant simplicity and cant, scholarly and popular media. In *Philosophy and Literature* and *Arts & Letters Daily*, he showed that true learning also bears the common touch, reminding cultured persons that being down-to-earth is no such terrible thing. Denis benefited from his

own clear-sightedness, but perhaps not so much as the rest of us, who are enduringly grateful and who continue to reap rewards from his presence in our intellectual lives.

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