



David Phillip Mankin

June 16, 1957 – April 24, 2019

Classics Professor David Mankin, known to generations of Cornell students as the teacher of the inimitable "Greek Mythology" course (Classics 2604), passed away April 24 at his home after a serious but brief illness. He was 61. "Dave," as he was universally known, came to Cornell as a postdoctoral fellow in 1985, having received a B.A. at Harvard and a Ph.D. at the University of Virginia with an innovative dissertation comparing the classical Latin Epodes of Horace with the archaic Greek iambic poetry of Archilochus. In 1988, he was appointed assistant professor, and associate professor in 1994. Dave took early retirement, as associate professor emeritus.

Dave's writings on Latin literature resulted in two major commentaries in the Cambridge University Press series: a pathbreaking contribution on a little-studied text, Horace's *Epodes*, of which a reviewer more inclined to be critical (*experto credite*) wrote "the annotation is rich, well-informed, and does not hesitate to cover very different sectors (prosody, metrics, anthropology for example); this is the first time that so much information is found assembled in a commentary on the Epodes." (G. Liberman, *Revue de philologie* 1995 176). The second was on the concluding book of Cicero's *De Oratore*, where his challenge was to digest and focus a massive four-author commentary and several monographs into an accessible single-volume guide to the Latin text. *The Journal of Roman Studies* 2012 (K. Tempest. 377-8) called it "essential reading," and a rival commentator wrote, "I doubt if I could improve on his comments ... on Cicero's many new and original approaches to *ornatus* [rhetorical ornamentation], our commentator excels... Everywhere Mankin provides what is needed in both explanation and criticism" (E. Fantham, *Mnemosyne* 2012 830-1).

In the fall of 1988, he began teaching his famous Greek Mythology class, which was cross listed with Comparative Literature. It was not intended to be a large course (it had no sections or TA's): insisted on using only original sources, on varying the material and introducing

current scholarship, in hopes that some of the students would pursue it further. But his lectures, mixing Hesiod and the *Odyssey* with cartoons and popular movies, and his personal style (sunglasses, Red Sox cap, high top sneakers) quickly made it hugely popular. He won the Clark Teaching Award in 1991, and an enthusiastic following of those who could get into the course (usually seniors, it was always oversubscribed) until his retirement. He revived it one final time for the trustee – counsel annual meeting "back to the classroom" that same year.

Dave served throughout the '90s as the Classics Department's Director of Undergraduate Studies and began a career of mentoring undergraduate classics students in independent studies, senior theses, and graduate students in dissertations, and teaching a wide variety of courses on Latin poetry. They remember him with special warmth:

"Dave Mankin was my adviser, teacher, advocate, critic, sage, and friend." James Harberson '95

"Dave was my lifelong mentor since my summer college experience when I was a junior in high school" Robert Berstein '97

"Professor David Mankin was a scholar of the first rank, and an even greater human. I recall nearly my entire Cornell experience as one extended tutorial with Professor Mankin...Dave was both an authority and a resolutely encouraging teacher. Dave guided us all to our best selves, with plenty of mischief and humor along the way. His capacity for compassion exceeded his erudition, which he wore lightly and effortlessly." Michael McDonough '96

"Dave Mankin is one of the single most generous people and one of the most inspiring undergraduate teachers I have ever met. And I think he would prefer me to say those two things in that order." Lauren Ginsberg '03

"He was also the loyal champion of so many like me. Even when I left academia, he supported my decisions and we stayed in touch. What a blessing to have such a generous spirit." Elizabeth Franzino '90

"I always think of Dave when I am dealing with a struggling student. I always recall his kindness, clemency and willingness to help all of his students. I always think of *primum non nocere*, that his first duty toward his students and advisees was to do no harm and provide the support emotional and educational that was needed. I try to carry this with me every day as a teacher and I have found that it is not necessarily an easy thing to do." Molly LaPorte '99

Local friends of Dave gathered to remember him at Indian Creek Farm in Ithaca on his birthday. On September 20, 2019 Lauren Ginsberg '03, now an associate professor of Classics at the University of Cincinnati, delivered a public lecture, "Nostalgia, Ruins, Lament:

Listening to Captive Women in the Hercules on Mt. Oeta” to the Classics department, for family, friends, and former students, in Dave’s memory.

Written by Jeffrey Rusten and Michael Fontaine