



## **Carol V. Kaske**

February 5, 1933 – June 15, 2016

Carol V. Kaske, Professor Emerita of the Department of English, Cornell University, died at Cayuga Medical Center on June 15, 2016, at the age of 83. Born Carol Margaret Vonckx to J. Newell and Frances M. (Fitchie) Vonckx in Elgin, Illinois, on February 5, 1933, Carol received her B.A. from Washington University, St. Louis (1954), her M.A. from Smith College (1955), and her Ph.D. from Johns Hopkins University (1964). Carol married Robert E. Kaske (deceased in 1989), a professor of medieval literature, in 1958. Prior to moving to Ithaca, the Kaskes lived in Urbana, Illinois, and in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. An accomplished violinist and pianist, Carol considered a career as a professional musician before deciding on English literature, although her love of music remained strong. Often she would play in impromptu groups with friends.

During a teaching career that spanned from 1963 to 2008, Carol specialized in English literature of the late Middle Ages and Renaissance. She was particularly noted for her work on The Faerie Queene by Edmund Spenser on whom she published a number of important papers and a book Spenser and Biblical Poetics (Cornell University Press, 1999); her papers and book have been and continue to be widely cited and Carol was and is recognized as a major scholar in the field of English Renaissance literature. Her interests extended beyond this field, however, in that she published on Chaucer, Dante, Le Roman de la Rose, and Malory. Carol is also known for a scholarly edition and translation of Marsilio Ficino's Three Books On Life (1989, with John R. Clark) and an edition of Spenser's Faerie Queene, Book I (2006). Carol's scholarship was characterized by meticulous accuracy and wide ranging learning and in addition to being a productive and widely respected scholar herself, Carol was supremely generous in helping students and colleagues in their work. Her assistance ranged from helping to edit colleague's papers, to sharing her own wide learning and allowing and encouraging younger scholars to have access to the Kaskes' personal scholarly library, arguably one of the best private scholarly libraries in North America.

One of Carol's colleagues, who was chair at the time, recommended Carol for a teaching award in the following paragraphs:

The generosity that shines through in these [student] letters is something that will be recognized by any colleague who has ever had occasion to call on Carol as collaborator, sounding-board, or source of information. Once she knows what you are interested in she will go to tremendous lengths to track down information that might prove useful to you, and to show her a piece of one's writing is to go back to school in the best sense of that phrase. Like another wonderful teacher, Neil Hertz, she inhabits the margins of other people's writing as a sort of benevolent spirit, unfailingly resourceful, honest and conscientious, and months later she will leave you a note about some point in your argument that she has thought some more about, or on which she has discovered new information.

And unlike many learned Cornellians, Carol invites others to respond in the same way to her own thoughts and words. She is, I think, a genuinely humble person, every bit as ready to learn as she is to teach, and ready to learn from the greenest of her students. Everyone Carol meets is a potential colleague, and this makes her a colleague of a unique and wonderful kind.

Carol started her career teaching at Cornell as an instructor and then a lecturer; but she was promoted to assistant professor in 1973, to associate professor in 1985, and she was promoted to full professor in 1992. In 2002 she offered a special summer course on Malory for the Telluride Association at Cornell. Carol was a member of the Renaissance Society of America, Modern Language Association of America, and the International Association of University Professors of English. Her colleagues in Spenser studies honored her by selecting her to deliver the 2010 Kathleen Williams Lecture for the Spenser at Kalamazoo Society at the 45th International Congress on Medieval Studies, Western Michigan University. During the same conference, Carol's friends and former students held three special sessions celebrating her scholarship and teaching. In 2012 the Spenser at Kalamazoo Society funded a graduate student award in her name. After her retirement from Cornell, Carol was active in the Cornell Association of Professors Emeriti (CAPE) and the Cornell Retirees Association (CRA), fostering the continued intellectual growth of their members and performing community service in the Ithaca area.

Bob and Carol Kaske's annual parties for students and friends of Medieval Studies at Cornell were legendary, as were their dogs--first Rex and then Wolf--encounters with whom figure in many stories told by house guests. For the past thirty-odd years, Carol enjoyed weekly lunches with Ithaca and out-of-town friends at the

Statler Club, at the Corners Deli, then at JJ's Café, and finally at Friends and Pho. Carol had a life-long love of travel. In her 70's she made solo lecture trips to Japan and China, and with her cousin Anne she visited the Belgian town from which the Vonckx family originated.

Carol was a profoundly optimistic and friendly person who made friends easily. She was beloved by her many friends, colleagues, and students, and by the residents and staff of Old Hundred and of Bridges Cornell Heights, her final home. She is survived by a son, Richard, of Ithaca; a sister, Sylvia, of California; and cousins Paul "Skip" Vonckx of Washington and Anne Weaver of Massachusetts.

*Thomas D. Hill, Professor of English and Medieval Studies, chair;  
Alice M. Colby-Hall, Professor of Romance Studies, Emerita; and  
Winthrop Wetherbee, Professor of English, Emeritus*

