



Phillip L. Marcus

December 1, 1941 – January 10, 2015

Professor Emeritus of English Phillip L. Marcus taught at Cornell from 1967-1995 where, after taking his Ph.D. at Harvard, he made his mark as a brilliant teacher-scholar. After retiring from Cornell, he began a second career at Florida International where he excelled at teaching a somewhat different kind of student than those he encountered in the Cornell College of Arts and Sciences.

What greater compliment can his memorial committee pay than to say that we all learned from him? The chair of this memorial committee never missed a chance to talk about William Butler Yeats, James Joyce and Irish culture with Professor Marcus. Professor Michael Colacurcio, his Cornell colleague and closest friend here, and now Distinguished Professor at UCLA, recalls: “What I know about William Butler Yeats I learned from Professor Phillip L. Marcus—at breakfast in the basement of the Cornell Statler Club, where we went, almost every day, to complain about the weather and lament the fact that historicists like ourselves could not...[practice] theory. . . .”

He was one of the world’s leading Yeats scholars, Co-General Editor of the Cornell Yeats, and author of two of the most important critical and scholarly books in Yeats in the last fifty years: *Yeats and the Beginnings of the Irish Renaissance* (1968) and *Yeats and Artistic Power* (1992). His publications include an important study of Standish O’Grady (1970). He also co-edited a collection of essays on D. H. Lawrence (1985) as well as a variorum edition of Yeats’ stories entitled *The Secret Rose* which he co-edited (1981). He also published many essays in the field of Irish studies. With 27 completed volumes, his authoritative Cornell Yeats edition is considered by scholars one of the most important scholarly projects in the study of modern literature. Having expanded his teaching and scholarly interests into American Literature, he recently completed a major essay entitled “The American Crisis Poem.”

Professor Winthrop “Pete” Wetherbee recalls: “In 1967 and 1968 the English Department took in eighteen new assistant professors, and there was great solidarity among us. A pleasant

memory of those early years is of the open house that Phil and his office mate, the late Frank McConnell, maintained in their office in Goldwin Smith. It was a matter of course to drop in with coffee before the teaching day began, to chat, to joke, and compare notes on our teaching. We all appreciated the contagious effect of Phil's enthusiasm for teaching. He loved to talk about his classes, and the gifts and foibles of his students, often with remarkable insight into the personalities their work revealed.”

Having gone to the University of Kansas City as an undergraduate (B.A. 1963), Professor Marcus was undaunted by first generation students he encountered at Florida International. These students were often from economically deprived backgrounds and many were from families where English was not the primary language.

In 2004 he won Florida International's Excellence in Teaching Award. James Sutton, his former chair there recalls: “Phil was beloved by our students. When we had the memorial service, more than 20 of his students came up to the podium “uninvited” to talk about how Marcus had changed their lives, impacted their minds, made them see poetry and literature and life in a new way. . . .He was a wonderful colleague, especially with junior faculty and with his friends working on Yeats. He also made very good friends with our star poet here, Campbell McGrath, and worked with McGrath frequently in the classroom, teaching his poems under the rubric of the ‘American Crisis Poem.’ . . . [H[e was] ever so generous, kind, and an excellent scholar. His last article, coming out soon, is on the Crisis poem, from Whitman to McGrath—what a smart article it is.”

Professor Marcus was a bibliophile who collected first editions and an ardent big game fisherman. He had a strong interest in pottery and paintings. He was a man known for his wit, intelligence, and generosity, both of time and money. He was a dedicated teacher who loved words, reading, and the books that he knew almost by heart. He wrote an elegant prose.

He is survived by three children: Mary, the eldest, and his twin sons Leonard and Patrick, as well as by five grandchildren and three great-grandchildren.

*Daniel Schwarz, chair;
Michael J. Colacurcio, Winthrop Wetherbee III*