

Princeton University

Honors Faculty Members
Receiving Emeritus Status



May 2012

The biographical sketches were written by
colleagues in the departments of those honored.

Copyright © 2012 by The Trustees of Princeton University

Contents



Faculty Members Receiving Emeritus Status

Larry Martin Bartels	3
James Riley Broach	5
William Browder	8
Lawrence Neil Danson	11
John McConnon Darley	16
Philip Nicholas Johnson-Laird	19
Seiichi Makino	22
Hugo Meyer	25
Jeremiah P. Ostriker	27
Elias M. Stein	30
Cornel R. West	32

Lawrence Neil Danson



Lawrence Neil Danson was born to be an English professor in New York City in 1942. He graduated magna cum laude and Phi Beta Kappa from Dartmouth College. At Dartmouth, Larry won a Reynolds Fellowship for Graduate Study Abroad, which enabled him to attend Merton College, Oxford, and after two years there, he earned a First Class degree from the Honours School of English Language and Literature. From Oxford, Larry went on to pursue his Ph.D. at Yale University, impressing some of the finest literary critics and scholars of the 20th century with his quicksilver brilliance. His dissertation on Shakespeare's tragedies, written under the supervision of Alvin Kernan, was the first step in a 45-year career of outstanding scholarship in Shakespeare studies.

Larry is a career Princetonian. He arrived as an instructor in the momentous year 1968, a few months before the trustees voted to admit women. Appointed as assistant professor in 1970, he earned his tenure six years later — within a department (in)famous for its exacting standards — on the basis of his book “Tragic Alphabet: Shakespeare’s Drama of Language” (Yale, 1974), his (then) manuscript on “The Harmonies of the ‘Merchant of Venice’” (Yale, 1978), and his exceptional strength as a teacher.

As a Shakespearean scholar, Larry combines rare talents. He is the consummate close reader who teases rich subtleties out of the textures of Shakespeare’s poetic language. At the same time, he is a subtle questioner of traditional pieties about the plays, but even while he disturbs our preconceptions, he also locates larger organic wholeness within the plays. In “Tragic Alphabet,” written well before post-structuralism had become fashionable in the reading of literature, he focused on the limits of language as a locus of struggle for Shakespeare’s heroes. In “The Harmonies of ‘The Merchant of

Venice,” which one reviewer called “the best book-length study of a Shakespeare play I have ever read,” Larry delivers a play that is both riven with its own internal controversy and also ultimately serene. And in “Shakespeare’s Dramatic Genres” (Oxford, 2000), which Jonathan Bate in the *Times Literary Supplement* described as “the best book on the subject of Shakespeare and dramatic genre...[since] 1954,” he gives new life to an abiding set of critical questions by asking whether there is such a thing as a genre.

With all of Larry’s distinction as a Shakespearean, however, he commands interests farther afield in the 19th century as well, publishing three books on fin-de-siècle British literature that were equally as searching, important and well received: “Max Beerbohm and ‘The Mirror of the Past’” (Princeton, 1982); “Max Beerbohm and the Act of Writing” (Oxford, 1989), which the *Review of English Studies* considers “one of the weightiest contributions yet made in this field”; and “Wilde’s Intentions: The Artist in His Criticism” (Oxford, 1997), called “brilliant” by Regenia Gagnier in *Nineteenth-Century Literature*. Wilde’s witty, epigrammatic prose in particular has left its mark on Larry’s own elegant and lauded prose style.

Larry has received numerous honors, prizes and fellowships, among them, a National Endowment for the Humanities Fellowship, the Hoffman Prize and several awards for stellar and innovative teaching, including the 250th Anniversary Fund for Innovation in Undergraduate Teaching, which he won twice, and the coveted Cotsen Faculty Fellowship. All three of these awards enabled Larry to develop and teach new undergraduate courses, several of which continue to grace our undergraduate curriculum.

The University as a whole has benefited from his clear-thinking and energetic citizenship: he is a former director of the Princeton Writing Program; he has served on the Executive Committee of the Council of the Humanities, on the Committee for Renaissance Studies, in the Program in Theater and Dance, on the Priorities Committee, and on the Committee on Conference and Faculty Appeal.

But it is within the English department itself that we feel our debt to be the strongest and longest lasting. Larry is hands down the

wittiest person in our department. No one has a keener ear for the ridiculous and no one more impatient with jargon and fustian of all kinds. And though this makes Larry a lot of fun, something more than fun is often at stake as well. In meeting after meeting, whenever we ourselves became false or pompous, Larry's quips would bring us to tears of laughter and, more importantly, bring us back to good sense. And more. Larry probably holds the record for the number of appointment/recruitment committees on which he served with vision, generosity and good judgment. In this capacity he has exerted an enormous — and enduringly positive — influence on the shaping of the English department across several generations.

Not only as scholar and citizen, but also as a teacher, Larry has been deeply committed to clarity and at the same time also deeply restless, always venturing into new territories, always trying out new ideas. It is not surprising then that Larry has been one of the department's best and most ceaselessly inventive teachers, most recently offering a course called "London Rich and Poor," which informed and delighted a gaggle of demanding English majors during a terrific junior seminar in London. In three major senses, Larry is an innovator. First, as his teaching awards suggest, he keeps developing new courses, taking his students in new directions: for example, in recent years, he has taught courses on the relation between early modern England and the Ottoman Empire, on Shakespeare and film, and on representations of innocence in literary, anthropological and philosophical texts. Second, Larry has long been ahead of the curve when it comes to technology in the classroom. During the late '90s, while the rest of us were visiting our first websites, Larry compiled a website called *The Electric Shakespeare*. Giving students access to video clips, references, essay topics and writing tips, Larry had effectively created his own Blackboard site "avant la lettre." Third, despite his decades of experience teaching Shakespeare, he is always thinking afresh, gathering the fruits of many years of experimental pedagogy.

Larry's classes are not merely the fruit of experiment, therefore, but essentially experimental by nature. His lectures, even on plays he has talked about for 40 years, seem to be in a state of constant,

productive flux. He is always tinkering, often overhauling, never satisfied. Larry seems to understand that the best, most daring teaching always happens outside of one's comfort zone. When he lectures, the room is alive, there is a crackle of energy, and the students know that something important is happening. His wit and erudition, joined to his blessed ability to transform himself into Iago, Rosalind or Polonius in short order, grab the students' attention and do not let go.

Over the course of his career here, Larry has made the study of Shakespeare important to thousands. As one alumnus commented, "Whenever I attend a production of Shakespeare or open one of his plays or sonnets, I think of Professor Danson." The culture changes, Princeton changes, and year after year, Larry has managed to find aspects of Shakespeare that strike sparks for each new generation of students. Colleagues, preceptors and undergrads alike concur that Larry can reach any student, from those with extensive experience reading, viewing and acting in Shakespeare's plays, to sheer beginners who know Shakespeare only as a great name. He opens up for majors Shakespeare's art in the context of English literary history and convinces nonmajors that reading these plays is a rich and complicated pleasure that makes them smarter, more thoughtful and more human.

Larry's former students are eloquent on his virtues as a teacher. One alum, now an engineer, writes, "He really enjoys working with students — *all* students — not just Princeton's best and brightest 10 percent. When I struggled with my workload, Professor Danson was quick to observe ... that things were not working well for me. He took time to meet with me ... and drew me out of my resignation.... I regard this as a small miracle of teaching beyond the call of duty." No wonder Larry's impact lasts long after graduation. As another alum, now an attorney, put it, "He never told me what to write, but always helped me to find my own words." And a writer of novels and screenplays remarks: "My love of language and whatever skill I demonstrate in its use ... derives from my time with Professor Danson. As a teacher, he changed my life."

One of Larry's former graduate students puts it well: "Year after year, Larry Danson has lectured without once suppressing

his inspirational belief that he is teaching the most exciting and important literature in English.” Witty, immensely learned, at home with the canon of English and American literature, and always up on contemporary fiction and critical debate, Larry invariably asks the question you were struggling to find, or hadn’t even known you needed. Just when Larry talks as if he were modestly reworking old material, or mildly adapting the work of others, he is (as we always discover) doing something totally original. In cheering him on to his next chapter in life, we’ll rely on Celia’s words to Rosalind: “Now go you in content/To liberty, and not to banishment.”