

Princeton University

HONORS FACULTY MEMBERS
RECEIVING EMERITUS STATUS



May 2021

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

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In the Nation's Service and the Service of Humanity

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ANDREW L. FORD



Andrew L. Ford, the Ewing Professor of Greek Language and Literature, will transfer to emeritus status on July 1, 2021, after thirty-five years of distinguished service as a faculty member in the Department of Classics. Free of self-importance, yet one of the most important Hellenists of the late-twentieth and early-twenty-first century, fun-making yet kind, loud yet subtle, there are many sides to him as a person. As a scholar, one trait stands out: Andrew Ford is a man of poetry—even when he deals with prose.

Raised as one of eight children in a gregarious Catholic family, Andrew completed his undergraduate studies with distinction at Cornell University in 1974 and his doctoral studies at Yale University in 1981, with a groundbreaking dissertation on archaic Greek words for poetry. After teaching at Smith College (where he met his wife, Martine Gantrel, who still teaches there as a professor of French studies) and after a stint back at Cornell as a Mellon Postdoctoral Fellow, he joined the Princeton faculty in 1986. In 2003, he took up a visiting professorship at the École des hautes études en sciences sociales, Centre Louis Gernet, Paris. Fluent in French, Andrew continued, throughout his career, to engage closely with scholars and students working in several different intellectual traditions and languages, much to the benefit of all involved.

His first book, *Homer: Poetry of the Past* (Cornell University Press, 1992) is a landmark achievement in the field of Homeric studies: it recovers the conception of poetry that animates Homeric epic. Andrew shows that the poet's mission was to make the past vividly present to the audience. The explanation and source of the poet's ability to induce his listeners to forget the present and enter fully into a witnessing of the distant past was divine: the Muses, “perennially present and knowing all things” (as the *Iliad* put it), transmitted their power to the poet, who was thus able to recover the past in the same way as a prophet might reveal the future.

One of the most important features of Andrew's first book is that it interprets the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* by harnessing conceptions of poetry immanent in the poems themselves. This helps to explain some interesting, and unusual, aspects of the book's reception. *Homer: The Poetry of the Past* was published in a decade that was otherwise characterized by grand (and generally discordant) theories about

Homeric composition. As a result, scholarly attention was captured by the delineation of different scholarly camps. Andrew's own work did not easily line up. He was, to be sure, fully and clearly informed by ongoing debates on Homeric composition, yet his own focus was trained elsewhere: he listened closely, and patiently, to notions of poetry emerging from the poems themselves. That is surely one reason for the book's longevity and, indeed, its ever-increasing influence: much admired when it was published, it is even more so today, and will remain essential reading on Homer for many years to come.

Andrew's second monograph, *The Origins of Criticism: Literary Culture and Poetic Theory in Classical Greece* (Princeton University Press, 2002) is likewise fundamental for anyone concerned with literary criticism and its history. The monograph demonstrated, in systematic fashion, how the ancient contexts of poetic performance affected the reception and evaluation of what we now call literature (*mousik* to the ancient Greeks, i.e., the domain of the Muses). The monograph made two important contributions. The first was to pay much-needed attention to literary criticism as a "social activity," as Andrew put it; the second was to consider a vast range of ancient sources not previously considered relevant to the topic in hand—sources concerning the evaluation of statues, the consumption of wine, the setting up of athletic and artistic competitions, and the relationship between politics and poetry. In short, the book simultaneously made a lasting contribution to the history of ideas and to social history.

Andrew's third monograph, *Aristotle as Poet* (Oxford University Press, 2011) is another entirely original contribution—this time to the study of a philosopher who has certainly not suffered from scholarly neglect. Still, and despite minute attention to many different facets of Aristotle's work and legacy, nobody before Andrew thought of investigating in detail the *Song of Hermias*, the one surviving poem authored by Aristotle. It turns out that this text is crucial not only to the interpretation of Aristotle as a literary theorist, but also to our understanding of the broader literary culture to which he belonged.

There are very few scholars who manage, in the course of their academic careers, to make fundamental contributions to two of the most influential and discussed authors of all time: Homer and Aristotle. The linchpin between Andrew's major studies on those authors is his book on ancient literary criticism which, as an exploration of poetry and its social contexts, sits at the core of his interests.

Andrew has received several accolades and prizes for his research, including the Umhoefer Prize for Achievement in the Humanities and the Gildersleeve Prize (awarded by the *American Journal of Philology*).

His latest project, a commentary on Aristotle's *Poetics*, is keenly awaited by classicists, philosophers, and literary theorists alike.

The weight, range, and depth of Andrew's scholarship are in stark contrast with his personal style as a teacher, mentor, and colleague—with his light-touch versatility, fun, and attention to the interests of his many interlocutors. Despite long, weekly commutes between New Jersey and Massachusetts (from which he will soon be free), he was unfailingly present and generous with his time. This is surely one reason for his tremendous success as a teacher of undergraduate students and as a graduate advisor. His doctoral students, several of whom have gone on to distinguished careers at Yale University, King's College London, University of California-Davis, Tel-Aviv University and elsewhere, have developed a wide range of interests and approaches of their own. What they share is not a narrowly defined intellectual agenda, but a deep and creative commitment to the study of ancient literature. Andrew's lively, uplifting presence in Princeton will be sorely missed—though we look forward to many more years of productive conversation and collaboration after his retirement.