

Princeton University

Honors Faculty Members
Receiving Emeritus Status



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

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Faculty Members Receiving Emeritus Status

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Froma I. Zeitlin



In 1996, Froma Zeitlin published a 500-page volume of collected papers, *Playing the Other: Gender and Society in Classical Greek Literature*. In 2007, a Festschrift was devoted to her, *Visualizing the Tragic. Drama, Myth, and Ritual in Greek Art and Literature. Essays in Honor of Froma Zeitlin*: that volume contained 17 papers by a galaxy of scholars and, according to the editors, they could have included three times as many contributors. In May 2010, an international conference was held in Princeton titled “Mythmaking: Celebrating the Work of Froma I. Zeitlin.” On the poster for that conference the organizers summed up her career: “Over five decades she has transformed the field of classics, opening it up to fertile interactions with post-War French thought and feminist theory and imprinting it with her own extraordinary vision. During these years, and since 1992 as the Ewing Professor of Greek Language and Literature, she has helped make Princeton one of the leading centers for the innovative scholarship that she pioneered.”

Froma was born in New York City and received her B.A. (magna cum laude) from Radcliffe College in 1954, an M.A. from Catholic University in 1965, and a Ph.D. (with distinction) from Columbia University in 1970. From 1970–76 she was an assistant professor at Rutgers University, and an associate professor with tenure from 1976–77. Then, brilliantly, the classics department lured her to Princeton as a visiting associate professor in 1976–1977, and the rest is history: associate professor of classics, 1977–1983; professor of classics, 1983; professor of comparative literature, 1989; and the Ewing Professor of Greek Language and Literature, 1992. From 1996–2005 she also was devoted to another subject close to her heart, in serving as director of the Program in Judaic Studies. Indeed, her deep engagement with the humanities throughout the University and her service on numerous boards and committees, is reflected in the astonishing number of 18

departments, programs, and other entities that subscribed to the Mythmaking conference.

Her honors and awards have been legion, including three National Endowment for the Humanities fellowships and fellowships from the Guggenheim Foundation and the American Council of Learned Societies. To note but a few jewels in her crown, she has been Directeur d'Études Associé at both the Collège de France and the École Pratique des Hautes Études; she is an honorary fellow of Newnham College, the University of Cambridge, and a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences; and in 1995–1996 she served as the Sather Professor at the University of California–Berkeley, delivering the Sather Classical Lectures, the most distinguished series in the classical world. In 1995, her distinction was duly acknowledged by Princeton with the Howard T. Behrman Award for Distinguished Achievement in the Humanities.

Froma is one of the world's leading interpreters of Greek drama. In an important book on Aeschylus (*Under the Sign of the Shield*, 1982, second edition, 2009), in two edited collections which were nothing less than epoch-making (*Nothing to Do with Dionysos?* and *Before Sexuality*, both 1990), and in her own many articles and chapters (the long, careful, pioneering essay is her preferred form), she has redrawn the intellectual map of Greek Tragedy and Old Comedy. Her writing is distinguished by its force and its subtlety, by its high level of theoretical sophistication, and by its notably fierce attachment to the philological details of the texts themselves. Several major themes can be picked out from her broad interests: gender and sexuality, problems of self-identity, the role of society and locality, and the dramatic function of spectacle and performance. Her early articles helped to define the feminist approach to drama with a richness worthy of the texts. Her work bears a strong stamp of the French structuralism associated with Jean-Pierre Vernant (whose translated essays she edited in 1991), yet her scholarly voice is very much her own and she has resisted the term “structuralist” for her approach to literature. Some of her most compelling readings focus on painful issues of identity in drama, both for the individual self and the self as a social and political construct. She has shown that it is the perpetual struggle of tragic characters to understand and establish themselves and their places

in society—in the context of seemingly fixed but in reality frighteningly unstable social and political constraints, roles, and protocols—that makes Greek drama enduringly important to generations of readers.

In the last two decades, Froma has moved out from her core area of Athenian drama of the fifth century BCE to consider other genres and periods of Greek literature, again further developing her approach to gender, self-identity, locality, and society, in Hesiod, in Homer, and in the Greek novel. She has turned her attention to basic questions of vision and spectacle in both drama and the novel, and the title of the book version of her Sather Lectures, currently in preparation, is, appropriately, *Vision, Figuration, and Image from Theater to Romance*. At the same time, she has also made a reputation with several papers in the last decade on the literature of the Holocaust. Here it is important to note how closely intertwined her scholarship has been with her teaching. Just as she was renowned for her two core courses on classical literature in translation (appropriately CLA/COM 323, “Self and Society in Classical Greek Drama,” and CLA 329, “Sex and Gender in the Ancient World”), so she has won the highest praise from students, both Jewish and gentile, for her regularly taught COM 349, the rigorous and passionate, scholarly and emotionally demanding, “Texts and Images of the Holocaust.”

Space forbids further reflection on Froma’s scholarly achievement, particularly her mediation and bridge-building between European and American academic cultures. But one of her many personal virtues is relevant. As the editors of the volume of papers dedicated to her (“with all our love”) note, “she loves to say ‘Have you met...?’, ‘I must get you to see...’” These and similar words must have been heard by hundreds of friends and admirers over the last few decades. If there is one virtue that sums her up, that marks her career at every turn, that doubles the impact of her formidable scholarship, and that lingers in the memory of all who have profited by her acquaintance, it is her extraordinary generosity.