

Memorial Minute for Nora Frances Crow
Read by Floyd Cheung at the February 22, 2017 Faculty Meeting

Nora Frances Crow received her AB from Stanford University, graduating in 1965 Phi Beta Kappa in English. She had been teaching at Smith for a year before receiving her PhD in English from Harvard University in 1972.

Her dissertation research on Jonathan Swift led to the publication in 1977 of the field's first comprehensive study of his poetry. She remarked that this book, *The Poet Swift*, sought "to provide a critical framework for the enthusiasm that his readers have felt all along." Throughout Nora's career, she often joined criticism with enthusiasm, the most exacting of analyses with a hearty appreciation for the pleasures of reading.

These proclivities served Nora well in her longtime and highly valued role as a reviewer for *The Yearbook of English Studies* and *The Scriblerian*. The latter, a leader in eighteenth-century studies, would sometimes feature multiple reviews by Nora in a single issue—an uncommon practice fit for an uncommonly sharp critic. Its editors undoubtedly appreciated her efficiency and judgment, though I can imagine that some of those she reviewed are still licking wounds inflicted by her pen. For instance, Nora once began a review by saying, "As the insipidness of the title suggests, this essay has very little point to it." She continued, "The argument is marred by a lack of consistency, a lack of evidence, and a lack of important ideas." But Nora also could express praise when it was deserved. Of another essay she wrote, "The more one contemplates [it] the more finely crafted and profound it proves. It is not a piece of scholarship, but a creative achievement." One could say the same of many of Nora's reviews.

Her wit as a critic also comes across in the titles of her courses at Smith including Rhyming, Railing, and Roguery Before 1800; How to Write Essays New Yorker Style!; and Satire: Execution by Words. Nora's students found her to be both demanding and hilarious, and from her, they learned how to read more closely and write more elegantly. I was Nora's office neighbor for over sixteen years, so I have overheard her students laughing with her many times.

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Over the years we had countless conversations in the hall. We talked often of literature, even though we specialize in different fields. Not so long ago we were compiling a list of works that focus on the function of imperfection in beauty. She'd offer Robert Herrick's "Delight in Disorder," and I'd respond with Nathaniel Hawthorne's "Birthmark." We also talked about her efforts in teaching herself feminist and psychoanalytic theory—evidence that the best teacher-scholars never stop being students themselves. And we talked of our common love for Apple computer products and good food. Most of all, however, she talked to me about her beloved daughter, Margaret—her education at Wellesley, her discovery of Japanese culture, and her interest in studying law. Nora retired from Smith in 2015. She died in her home on May 13, 2016.