

*At a meeting of the FACULTY OF ARTS AND SCIENCES on April 8, 2008, the following
tribute to the life and service of the late Wendell Vernon Clausen
was spread upon the permanent records of the Faculty.*

WENDELL VERNON CLAUSEN

BORN: April 2, 1923
DIED: October 12, 2006

Wendell Vernon Clausen, Pope Professor of the Latin Language and Literature, and Professor of Comparative Literature, *Emeritus*, died on October 12, 2006, in Belmont, Massachusetts. He was 83 years of age, and had been in declining health after suffering a stroke in August 2005.

Wendell Clausen was born in Coquille, Oregon, on April 2, 1923. He received his B.A. from the University of Washington in 1945, majoring in both Classics and English. In his senior year he was uncertain which field to pursue, and so he sought guidance from a professor of English whom he admired, Allen Rogers Benham. Benham's advice was unambiguous: "Be a classicist! Anyone can teach English." Wendell duly enrolled for graduate study in Classics at the University of Chicago, obtaining his Ph.D. in just three years. His first appointment was at Amherst College, where he taught from 1948 to 1959. At Harvard he was Professor of Greek and Latin from 1959 to 1982, then Victor S. Thomas Professor of Greek and Latin from 1982 to 1988 and Pope Professor from 1988 to 1993; he also held an appointment as Professor of Comparative Literature from 1984 to 1993. He served as chairman of the Department of the Classics from 1966 to 1971 and as Editor of *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* in 1973–4, 1982, and 1992–3.

Wendell initially made his name as a distinguished editor of classical Latin poetry. His first major publication, in 1956, was an edition of the satirist Persius, a notoriously difficult writer. Wendell's was the first satisfactory critical edition, and its combination of deep erudition and refined taste—traits that would mark all his scholarship—brought him to international attention. It was quickly followed in 1959 by an edition of Persius and his fellow-satirist Juvenal for the Oxford Classical Texts series, in which Wendell was the first American scholar to publish a volume. In another OCT volume, he joined with three eminent British Latinists to edit a group of poems attributed to Virgil and known collectively as the *Appendix Vergiliana* (1966).

Alongside this editorial work, Wendell also produced a series of articles that attested to his interest in the poetry of the late Republic and the Augustan period—the poetry of Catullus and Horace, of Propertius and Ovid, and, above all, of Virgil. In later years literary-critical work came to occupy the center of his scholarly efforts, and it is arguably as an interpreter of Latin poetry that he made his most distinctive contribution to classical studies. He was one of the first English-speaking classicists to explore the relationship between Latin poets and Hellenistic Greek poetry, with which he had a rare familiarity, and his subtle analyses revealed a new dimension of artistry in poems that had been studied for centuries. Among the products of his research in this area are his contributions to the *Cambridge History of Latin Literature* (1982), which he co-edited with E. J. Kenney; his Sather Lectures at the University of California at Berkeley, published in 1987 under the title *Virgil's Aeneid and the Tradition of Hellenistic Poetry* and reissued in a revised and expanded form in 2002 under the title *Virgil's Aeneid: Decorum, Allusion, and Ideology*; and his magisterial commentary on Virgil's *Eclogues*, the distillation of decades of thought, published in 1994, the year following his retirement. His last published work, completed in collaboration with a former student, James E. G. Zetzel of Columbia University, was an edition of a ninth-century commentary on Persius, the so-called *Commentum Cornuti*; it appeared in 2004, bringing to fruition a project announced almost fifty years previously.

One of Wendell's great strengths as an interpreter was his ability to integrate the most exacting philological scholarship with a finely tuned literary sensibility. The two skills did not merely coexist, but were mutually reinforcing, the *lungo studio* informing and illuminating the *grande amore*. To speak of love in this context is no exaggeration, since for Wendell poetry was far more than the object of his professional study; it was a lifelong passion and a source of delight and sustenance. To hear him recite from one of his favorite Latin or English poets, with great feeling and often from memory, was a deeply moving experience. The qualities he admired in the poets he interpreted—learning, concision, exquisite craft—were also to be found in his own writing. He took to heart Callimachus' dictum "a big book is a big nuisance," and strove to convey much in a small compass. Two of his most influential articles run to only ten pages each.

As a teacher, Wendell had a profound impact on two generations of Harvard Classics students, both undergraduate and graduate. Many of the graduate students he trained have gone on to distinguished careers as classicists. But his relationship with his students went beyond that of a typical teacher and mentor. He nurtured them with care and supported them staunchly, and they reciprocated with a deep and steadfast devotion. The words of one express the sentiments of many: "Wendell was to me everything I ever admired or ever hoped to be in my life as a classicist."

Only a few of the many awards and honors he received can be mentioned here. In 1952–3 he was a Fellow of the American Academy in Rome, and in 1963 he was elected a Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences (in a cohort that also included James Ackerman,

Morton Bloomfield, and Noam Chomsky). In 1982 he held the Sather Lectureship at Berkeley, and in 1994 his contribution to Virgilian studies was recognized with the award of the Premio Internazionale Virgilio by the Accademia Nazionale Virgiliana di Mantova and the Provincia di Mantova. This last distinction gave him particular pleasure, since his affection for Italy was almost as great as his love of Virgil. In 1998, to commemorate his seventy-fifth birthday, he was presented with a volume of essays by friends and former students. Appropriately, this *Festschrift* is, by the gargantuan standards too often typical of the genre, a conspicuously lean volume, twenty papers making up a mere 300 pages.

Wendell's death on October 12, 2006, was followed less than a month later by that of his beloved wife, Margaret, on November 6. Wendell Clausen is survived by his sister Ilene Hull; by three sons from his first marriage, John, Raymond, and Thomas; by a stepson, Edward Woodman; a stepdaughter, Jane Woodman; and by five grandchildren.

In his first year at Harvard, Wendell and Steele Commager taught a half course in Catullus and Horace. A student taking the course was asked by a friend what Professor Clausen was teaching, and he replied: "Elegance." Elegance was indeed at the heart of everything Wendell taught, and it is a lesson that his work continues to teach, to all those who care about the poetry of Rome.

Respectfully submitted,

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