

Michael Berkvam

No one can know Michael Berkvam for long without tripping over his nubbly Norwegian roots—and woe to anyone who suspects him of being Swedish! When his ancestors came to this country, they adopted as their family name that of a station on one of the world's most spectacular railway lines. From them Michael inherited a love of cold weather and northern climes, and the spirit of adventure that has marked so much of his career.

Growing up in a rural blue-collar environment in the upper Midwest also shaped his broad interests in culture and especially perhaps in sport. He knew everyone in his home town, developing the interpersonal skills that have made him such a deeply loved teacher and colleague. When Michael was a boy, the Braves moved to Milwaukee from Boston, and he became a devout fan, seeing Henry Aaron when he was a minor leaguer and glorying in the Braves teams of the 1950s. Then the unpardonable happened—the Braves moved to Atlanta. So when Michael came to Bloomington, it gave him a new lease on his baseball life to transfer allegiance to the Cincinnati Reds and to enjoy their glory years. Those in the department not born in this country have frequently looked on in amazement as serious discussion was put on hold while Michael and Emanuel Mickel, with whom he makes annual pilgrimages to Cincinnati, debated the finer points of what they persist in seeing as a game of intellect where skill and finesse and strategy are always necessary. Football is another enthusiasm of his, coming a close second to baseball in his life—though to call it close is to insult his love for baseball. His passion for the Green Bay Packers has carried him through the last half of the twentieth century, despite a few difficult moments. And, with the wild optimism characteristic of him, he still holds out hope for a resurgence of the Pack.

Michael was educated at Saint Olaf College, the University of Wisconsin, and the Sorbonne in Paris, focusing first on French literature and civilization of the Enlightenment, and then, with the spirit of pioneering adventure that is typical of him, transferring his allegiance, much as he did from Braves to Reds, to literature and cinema of the second half of the twentieth century, and particularly that of women and francophone writers, those who come not from France itself but from the diverse French-speaking countries all around the globe.

After teaching in various positions in France, Michael came to IU in 1971, serving as resident director of the Indiana-Purdue Foreign Study Program in Strasbourg in 1984–1985 and resident director of the Summer Program in Quebec in 1989–1990. He has been a core faculty member of the Honors College since 1996 and from 1998 to 2003 was director of graduate studies in French literature.

His research, which has been supported by the National Endowment for the Humanities and the Lilly Foundation, has led not just to publications, such as his exploration of the correspondence and collected papers of the eighteenth-century writer, diplomat, and politician Pierre-Michel Hennin, and his recent book exploring the literary legacy of the Vichy regime, *Writing the Story of France in World War II: Literature and Memory, 1942–1958*, but also to exhibitions and catalogues at the Lilly Library. Among the most memorable of these were *La Vie Parisienne: 1650–1900*, *Eighteenth-Century Cities: A Panorama*, and his exploration of texts associated with the French revolution, *Liberty, Equality, or Death: The French Revolution, 1789–1794*.

In addition to serving on innumerable committees, especially—and this is typical of him—those concerned with student well-being, Michael has been an energetic and imaginative creator of courses, notching up a remarkable 30 of these. He introduced courses on women writers and on cinema, and created both the department's introduction to literary analysis for majors, and the civilization-culture series on the 300 as well as the 400 level.

As a teacher he took particular interest in each student and quickly developed an excellent rapport with them. Students greatly appreciated his eagerness to make them feel welcome in his classes while at the same time shaking them out of prejudices and lazy thinking. One student recalls:

I will never forget the first time I walked into his Honors Topics Class (Women Writers in French Since 1945), which was also my first class ever taken as a college student, and he said to the class: "If you're not a feminist, then you're not a woman and you're in denial of your heritage." Wow! Thus began my profound admiration and respect for this man, who was teaching a class full of women on issues that presumably were only to be discussed amongst people of the female persuasion.

Another student praised the wit and wisdom Michael brought to class and went on:

He has a keen sense of understanding of students during these transitional college years and he knows how important it is to connect with the student on the human level and not just the intellectual level. One of my favorite courses taught by Professor Berkvam was a translation course where we translated "Casey at the Bat" into French.

Yet another wrote:

Michael Berkvam has been one of the most important people in my life. He was not only a teacher to me, but also a mentor and has become one of my dearest friends. I attribute my successes as an undergraduate to Prof. Berkvam; had it not been for him, I might have spent my undergraduate years stifled by the imagined need to write and to think for the professor instead of for myself.

For many students and colleagues, indeed, Michael has been not just a great teacher and a transforming influence but a deeply valued friend. In retirement he will continue to live in Bloomington. We wish him and his wife, Mirka, a very happy future.

Rosemary Lloyd