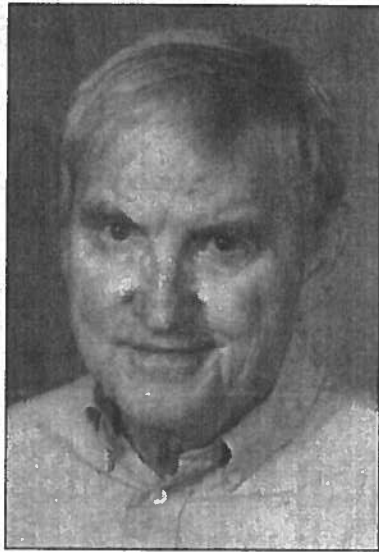


G14-R
8-28-2017

William Michael Cavanagh

Cavanagh, William Michael

William Michael Cavanagh died on Saturday, August 26, 2017, at the age of 74. Mike grew up in Mill Valley, California, near San Francisco. He later lived in New York City, in Manhattan, Kansas, and in Minneapolis, where he studied at the University of Minnesota as a Woodrow Wilson Fellow and received a PhD. He came to teach at Grinnell College in 1971.



Mike is survived by his wife, Lenore Marie "Lynn" Cavanagh, also a Californian, whom he met one lucky day in San Francisco in 1965 and married in 1966. Mike is also survived by his sister, Patty Dobbs, of Newton, Iowa; by a son, Sean, his wife, Diana, and their children Daniel and Isabel, of Silver Spring, Maryland; and by his son, Peter, his wife, Erin, and their two children, Kate and Will, of Wellman, Iowa.

Mike taught English at Grinnell College from 1971 to 2005. He taught the works of Milton, James Joyce, Elizabeth Bishop, W.B. Yeats, Philip Larkin, Seamus Heaney, W.H. Auden and many more. He loved introducing students to poetry. Thinking that Grinnell needed a poetry writing course, he invented one in the 1970s and taught it until the mid-1990s. He was also the first professor to teach Joyce's *Ulysses*, long regarded as too difficult for undergraduates. In addition, Mike taught in the now-fabled eight-credit humanities courses with Don Smith, Morris Parslow, Beryl Clotfelter, and Catherine Frazier.

On sabbatical in 1978, Mike was the Daniel Koshland Professor of Humanities at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music. In 1985 and 1991, Mike taught on the Grinnell-in-London program. In London, he taught courses about the literature of the two World Wars and courses in literature and landscape. He taught *Ulysses* twice in Dublin, making his students walk almost every inch of the Dublin that Joyce recorded and evoked in his novel. And he made sure they read every page. In the summers of 1997 and 2000, he taught American and Irish poetry at Nanjing University in China. In 2003 he was named the Orville and Mary Patterson Rountt Professor of Literature.

Mike's dissertation for his PhD was about Archibald MacLeish's poem *Conquistador* as an allegory of Roosevelt's New Deal. He later published articles on MacLeish, Seamus Heaney, Dante, Milton, John Crowe Ransom and W.B. Yeats. In 2009, he published a book at Seamus Heaney, *Professing Poetry*. The scholar Rand Brandes said it was "a book many of us have been waiting for, a book on Heaney's prose that will enable the next generation of Heaney students and scholars to discover new constellations of Heaney's universe." Mike finished a book on Milton in 2016.

In addition to scholarship, Mike devoted the last decades of his career to writing and publishing poetry. He had poems published in journals that included *The Sewanee Review*, *The South Carolina Review*, the *Free State Review*, *Aurorian*, *Rattle*, *Eclipse*, the *Heartland Review*, *The South Dakota Review*, and *Lyrical Iowa*, among others. He spent almost two decades teaching himself Dante's *Commedia* in Italian. Much of his poetry strives after Dante's simple style and manner. Mike considered his grandchildren his greatest poems.

Mike was active for the Poweshiek County Democrats. He helped teach reading to first-graders at Bailey Park elementary school and was a volunteer for Kids Against Hunger. He was a friend of the Drake Library. For many years he managed the Grinnell College Public Events Committee. He brought many renowned performers to Grinnell and he had a ball entertaining them.

A Service to Commemorate the Life of Mike Cavanagh will be held on Wednesday, August 30, at 11:00 a.m. in Herrick Chapel on the Grinnell College campus.

In lieu of flowers or gifts, the family requests that memorials be sent to the Drake Community Library in Grinnell.

GRINNELL RESIDENT

PCCR 9-6-2017

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