

In Memoriam: Michael V. Fox, J. C. and Ruth Halls-Bascom Professor of Hebrew ל"ט

As the last chair of the Department of Hebrew and Semitic Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Madison before its closing, I write with sorrow to acknowledge the passing of Professor Emeritus Michael V. Fox, whom I was also privileged to call my Doktorvater. His lengthy record of accomplishments is attested in his CV, beyond which he has left an enduring mark by his influence on colleagues, his students, and academia more broadly. His service to the Society of Biblical Literature culminated in his role as its president in 2017, after a year of service as its vice president. Prior to that, he served as president for the Midwest region of the SBL (1998-2000), service on the Council of the Society, two terms on the editorial board for the *Journal of Biblical Literature*, and editorship of the SBL Dissertation Series from 1994 to 1999.

His CV is lengthy (<https://wisc.academia.edu/MichaelFox/CurriculumVitae>), with a bibliography comprising 85 journal articles, eleven published books and two books in progress, including a commentary on Job (OTL, Westminster) and a commissioned work on the "Intellectual History of Wisdom Literature," aptly titled *From the Pharaohs to the Rabbis* (Brill). From the appearance of his first book, *The Song of Songs and the Ancient Egyptian Love Songs* in 1989, each work instantiated keen and reflective reading of texts, as well as metacommentary on his views of what constitutes a text and its intersection with readers over time. His precise grasp of Biblical Hebrew, his wide reading in ancillary disciplines, and his pursuit of knowledge far beyond what might be considered germane for his expertise (such as the transmission of texts of Shakespearean plays) injected unanticipated delights into pointed commentary on a verse in Proverbs. His carefully honed prose was a model of clarity and a good corrective to the infelicitous compositions of his graduate students. As I wrote in the introduction to the Festschrift honoring him (Eisenbrauns, 2005), "all his students would agree that he taught us to believe in the dictum that clear verbal expression is the prerequisite for clear thinking." His seemingly unattainable standards for his graduate students in the study of Hebrew, gathering and evaluation of sources, forging a critical understanding of reading, the ability to compose in biblical Hebrew, accurate oral reading of Hebrew, precise prose writing, the use of comparative Semitics, and a grasp of the history of the discipline, constituted a bar not simply for completing a degree but for appropriate formation as a Bible scholar.

No depiction of Michael is complete without acknowledging his integrity and humanity. Not a few visitors who clicked on a link to his photo via his web page in the early aughts were surprised to find the surly visage of Hulk Hogan, teeth bared and holding open his vest to expose a rippling pectoral. Michael's "inner scholar" was surely well represented in that photo. But it was hardly the only instance when Michael revealed a person I would not have expected. Shopping in a Madison mall and discovering that he was performing with a Scottish dance troupe, in full kilt, is one of my more striking memories of him. My more numerous recollections of deep discussions about Hebrew grammar and lexicography cannot eclipse my glimpses into his humanity. And that is why I grieve his loss so deeply.

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