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Shilpa Raval, Latin scholar, dies at 34

BY JUSTIN ASH
Staff Reporter

The Classics Department was rocked this year when Shilpa Raval, a popular Latin literature professor, passed away in May after a short but devastating battle with cancer. Her death at the age of 34 came as a painful surprise to her colleagues and friends, who described her as a lively and vivacious person.

Classics department chairman John Matthews was effusive in his praise of Raval.

"Shilpa had a terrific spontaneity about her," he said. "She was tremendously quick witted, and she always seemed to know what to say."

Her husband Ted Bromund, associate director of International Security Studies and a professor of history and international relations at the University, admired her warm personality.

"I knew she was brilliant, but I liked her first because she was so easy to talk with," Bromund said. "She took an interest in her students in a very personal way. She wanted them to succeed, and to love the material."

Raval's area of expertise was gender and sexuality in the ancient world. Classics professor Corinne Pache said Raval's work was considered to be on the cutting edge of research for the representation of women in Latin poetry. Pache added that it was Raval's lively presence, as much as her research, that contributed to her reputation as a quickly rising, bright young scholar.

"She prepared like no one else I have ever met," Bromund said. "She once told me that to prepare for a one hour class, she would spend a day and a half studying in her office and the library. Shilpa tried to anticipate any question that someone could possibly ask, no matter how obscure the question may be."

Matthews said Raval's infectious personality in the classroom generated a following among her students.

"You could watch her in the classroom, and she would just tumble over herself in anticipation of the next thing to say," Matthews said. "She fought to express every thought in the most precise manner. It is that



Latin literature professor Shilpa Raval, an expert in gender and sexuality, passed away in May after a bout with cancer. (COURTESY YALE CLASSICS DEPARTMENT)

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type of enthusiasm which really inspires students."

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Ashley Elsner '05 was one of those students who thrived on Raval's energy.

"She was simply a wonderful professor and friend," Elsner said. "She had a perspective that was all her own, but at the same time, she was always willing to listen to other people's [views]. She never told someone they were wrong."

Bridging her interest in the classical and modern roles of women, in the 2002 to 2003 academic year Raval took a leave of absence from the Classics Department to serve as the research director for the Yale Women Faculty Forum. Her colleague at the Forum, Rachel Thomas '02, said Raval was instrumental in putting together a seminar series on gender and sexuality.

"Shilpa was a tremendous person, and we were all completely astounded by the energy she put into every task," Thomas said.

Raval also helped to produce a series of workshops for junior faculty on balancing scholarship, teaching and motherhood.

Chaim Bloom '04 said one of Raval's greatest strengths as a teacher was that she wanted to engage her students on the topics that really interested them.

Classics professor Victor Bers said in an e-mail that Raval's death "was a knife in the heart."

"She was kind, always fun to talk shop with," he said. "The sort of person who just made you happy to have around -- and we barely had time to say goodbye to her."

Her memorial service was held in New Haven on May 26. Family and friends, including those from her alma maters Drew University and Brown University, attended.

One of her articles is in-press at the University of Missouri at Columbia, where Raval taught before coming to Yale. Other works of hers, including a book on rape and sexuality, are being edited by a colleague at Yale. Bromund said he expects that they will eventually be published in the Yale Classical Studies journal.

Bromund said the Classics Department is also considering holding a conference in Raval's honor next year.

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