

When Anne Lebeck first came to Amherst six years ago, few, if any, of us realized the complexity of the person who was joining us. As the years passed, some came to appreciate her for the brilliant Classicist she was; others knew her as a profoundly humane person whose interests seemed quite unpredictable and impressively wide-ranging; yet others knew her simply as a delightful and witty friend whose loyalty was never to be doubted. It is precisely this richness, this diversity of her interests, which makes it so hard to give anything like a satisfactory picture of Anne's qualities. One thing is certain: she exerted a gentle but quite immovable influence on those around her.

Even to describe her special qualities as a Hellenist is no simple task. In a field often thought of as traditional beyond most others, she constantly refused to be influenced by revered opinions of past centuries. She was concerned solely to reach the truth, the one explanation which would satisfy. If this meant treading on the toes of scholars of reputation so much the worse for them. This lack of reverence for the accepted view (which often amounted to an impish iconoclasm) could on occasion be self-defeating, but at its best could introduce a wonderful freshness in what she had to say. This originality in the face of the past is one of the many compelling features of her book on the Oresteia of Aeschylus. Early in that work she has this to say:

The philologist should not restrict himself to a single interpretation of [ambiguous] passages but should give free rein to all possibilities and associations, ultimately selecting as many as form part of a larger pattern and contribute to the meaning of the total work. The linguistic devices by which ambiguity is effected should be analyzed and the significance of the passage then interpreted in the light of its obscurity.

The views expressed in this book were bound (as indeed they were intended) to provoke many readers to hot response. Yet even so irascible a critic as Hugh Lloyd-Jones was forced to express his admiration. In a long review he writes:

The sensitivity and intelligence of the writer make the reading of the book a pleasure. . . . The book is not suitable for beginners, for it must be read with caution. But scholars seriously interested in Aeschylus will find that it well repays a careful study.

Anne's next work was to have been in Plato. A long article published weeks before her death gives some small idea of the direction her writing would have taken. She was greatly dissatisfied with the conventional approaches to Plato, whereby he was treated either as a philosopher or as a great literary artist. Her instinct was rather to see both these aspects as creating a tension which it was essential to understand in order to appreciate the writing. Her article had explored some of these possibilities in the Phaedrus, and it was her hope to extend this form of analysis to cover the whole of Plato's works.

This astonishing (and often disturbing) originality showed itself equally clearly in the classroom (and it should be said that many of her colleagues were also her pupils.. It was impossible to talk to her without learning something, if it was only the extent of one's own ignorance). She was at her best intellectually in a small group--never accepting the obvious answer to her innocent-sounding questions, never taking an opinion simply because it rested upon previous authority. But combined with this constant challenging, was a deep and absolutely unaffected interest in the work of others. Whether she was discussing his honors essay with a student, or learning of a colleague's abstruse

investigations for a new book, she was capable of the same child-like enthusiasm for new discoveries or fresh approaches to old problems. Everyone went away from such conversations, reinforced and encouraged about the value of what he was doing.

But to think of Anne solely in terms of the intellect, would be quite misleading and totally unjust. It is equally important to remember the gusto with which she attacked life in general. There was a peculiar kind of generous eccentricity about her which ranged from regularly taking an alarm clock to class with her, to completely ignoring the practical claims of her own life in order to help a good friend. Her honesty mingled with compassion to prevent her from even thinking of offending another human being. Yet there were forces within her life which contended against all her creative power--she knew them and struggled with courage. Anne is dead; but we remember that restless energy, that hard-thinking, hard-talking enjoyment of life--in this she was a true follower of ancient ways.

Peter Marshall

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John Pemberton

John Pemberton

Donald Wheelock

Donald Wheelock

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