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# Ted-Larry Pebworth (1936-2021)

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ed-Larry Pebworth, Stirton Professor Emeritus at the University of Michigan-Dearborn and the fourth President of the John Donne Society, died on March 1, 2021 at Saint Anna's nursing facility at Lambeth House in New Orleans, following an extended illness. He was 84 years old.

The author or editor of numerous important studies of Renaissance literature, Professor Pebworth exercised a significant influence on seventeenth-century studies as the co-convener of the extraordinarily productive Biennial Dearborn Renaissance Conferences and as one of the four original textual editors of the ten-volume Variorum Edition of the Poetry of John Donne, the final two volumes of which are currently in press.

A fastidious scholar, he modeled a commitment to the principle that "a reliable text is the beginning of interpretive wisdom." And as a gay man partnered for fifty-eight years with his husband and principal collaborator, Claude J. Summers, he served as an example of how to live both joyously and humanely.

### An "Exuberant Embrace of All that is Good and Worthwhile"

Ted-Larry Pebworth was born on April 19, 1936, in Shreveport and reared in nearby Homer, Louisiana. He earned a B.A. from Centenary College of Louisiana in 1957, and an M.A. from Tulane University the following year, before entering the doctoral program at Louisiana State University, where in 1966 he completed a dissertation on Owen Feltham's *Resolves* under the direction of E. L. Marilla.

While studying in Baton Rouge, Ted met Claude J. Summers, an undergraduate eight years his junior, with whom he formed a personal and professional union that lasted until Ted's death. On their fiftieth anniversary in 2013, they married in Provincetown, Massachusetts. ("Ted and Claude have finally made honest men of one another," Ernie Sullivan quipped at the ceremony). As part of his wedding vow, Claude described the night in 1964 when, following the appearance of Christopher Isherwood's *A Single Man*, they stayed up reading aloud alternate chapters of the novel to one another. Several witnesses at the ceremony commented on how emblematic of their relationship this incident seemed to prove, demonstrating as it did their ability to celebrate their shared literary interests in such a highly personal and intimate way. Indeed, oftentimes their voices melded so perfectly that it is impossible to distinguish who wrote which section in their coauthored publications.

Together they created at their homes in Dearborn and, later, in the historic French Quarter of New Orleans, a warm atmosphere in which friends and colleagues gathered for music, merriment, spirited debate, and excellent food. Mary Ann Stringer fondly recalls standing over the stove, talking all the while, and making courtboullion with Ted according to Claude's mother's recipe. "And though he gave me specific instructions, my courtboullion has never come close to matching his." Similarly, recalling how much a part of Ted's sociability was his love of food, Ernie Sullivan comments that "Not much is better than being in New Orleans with Ted. No one who follows Ted around has ever starved, so imagine going to dinner with him in New Orleans. And not only dinner: Ted was a true ambassador for his beloved city and took me on many tours of gay New Orleans."

That same graciousness and delight in community infused Ted's professional relationships as well. As Ilona Bell recalls, "at Dearborn and then at Gulfport, Ted was a masterful presence, bringing people together, nourishing friendships, engineering new avenues for exploration, editing volumes of conference papers, demonstrating through his collaboration with Claude that ideas were not individual intellectual property but living matter to be cultivated and pruned along by many minds and hands." Indeed, it was difficult not to be drawn into Ted's world. Overnight guests at the house in Dearborn might be asked to help prepare breakfast by picking strawberries from Ted's patch alongside the house, and in the evening to accompany Ted vocally as he played the harpsichord that had been built by his father. Gary Stringer took pleasure from Ted's "rich singing voice" and remembers him as "a skilled pianist and organist, having regularly played for church services in his youth." Ted shared with countless friends his passion for detective novels, hundreds of which fill the bookshelves in their French Quarter home where Ted and Claude genially hosted the likes of Stephen Saylor and Anthony Bidulka when such masters of the genre appeared as part of the annual Tennessee Williams and Saints and Sinners Literary Festivals—and where Ted tried his hand at writing a novel himself, which fellow detective novel aficionado Mary Ann Stringer recalls was excellent.

Everything Ted did was characterized by a pithy elegance. Ted's onetime department chair Christopher Dahl has praised his "writer's gift: utter mastery of the plain style—lucid, economical, precise" which infused as well some of "his most characteristic sayings," such as "Don't borrow trouble," or, when commiserating with a colleague who was not a natural born typist, "I can see you're like me, you type with your tongue." Even Ted's penmanship, another colleague recalls, "was an externalization of an orderly, no-nonsense, yet supple and bold" mind. "In those days before email, receiving a letter or note from Ted was a source of immediate gratification. There on the envelope was your name and address in a script that was sharply defined yet elegant, strong yet graceful. Seeing your name fixed on the page in such a distinctive manner, you felt validated in a way that your communications with other individuals could not do."

Ted's elegance was animated by his love of fun. Gary Stringer applauds Ted's enjoyment of "puns, anagrams, spoonerisms, and Clerihews and all sorts of verbal wit," and observes that, like Falstaff, Ted was not only witty in himself, but the cause of wit in others. "He had a wonderful story about going to the Dearborn post office to pick up some snail plates that he had shipped home. When the clerk saw the label, he asked, 'Mr. Pebworth, do you own a pet store?' Ted laughed harder each time he told the story, he enjoyed it so much." Fred Wayman, Ted's colleague at Michigan-Dearborn for more than thirty years, offers an example of Ted's impromptu wit. While interviewing for a position in political science, Wayman made a formal presentation to college faculty on his research into the causes of military regimes, after which Ted handed him a sheet of paper which contained a limerick that "wittily and brilliantly picked up on my two main points":

> A state with an entrenched oligarchy Is ripe for a military autarchy. But where there's a million Institutions civilian, The threat of a coup is malarkey.

An inveterate dog lover, Ted proved an enthusiastic member of the Krewe of Barkus, which sponsors an annual Mardi Gras parade in which flamboyantly dressed pets are led by their owners through the streets of the French Quarter. Ted not only made the costumes for his and Claude's rescue beagles, but fashioned the rich purple, gold and turquoise satin ecclesiastical robes in which he and Claude dressed to march in the parade.

Ted's love of fun, however, was matched by his passion for justice. "I remember most vividly Ted's capacity for righteous indignation," Diana Trevino Benet writes. "His expressive eyebrows would shoot up even higher than usual and, with a quick intake of breath, he would draw himself up and let loose." Tom Cain recalls an incident when, walking along the New Orleans riverfront after dinner one evening, they were accosted by a group of drunken teenagers spouting homophobic slurs. "I'm afraid I was all for getting away quickly, but Ted stood firm and argued back. It's a piece of courage that sticks in my mind vividly." At a time when openly acknowledging one's sexual orientation could irreparably damage one's career, Ted's willingness to call out homophobic remarks at a conference gathering—lightly when the speaker seemed unaware of his/her bias, but more emphatically when the speaker behaved boorishly—supplied many young gay colleagues with an example of how to live and work honestly and with dignity.

Like the twin beams that make for a cohesive vision in Frost's "Two Tramps," Ted's passion for justice was inseparable from his passion for accuracy, which invested him with a quiet authority. That authority could be playfully exercised, as when—as George Klawitter recalls—at the opening of the Dearborn conference on Donne, "Ted went over to the fireplace at Fair Lane (the former home of Henry Ford) and pointed out the error in the quotation [from Herrick's "To the Virgins to Make Much of Time"] carved into the mantlepiece. He was not going to let people leave the conference without knowing about the fireplace erratum."

That authority could also extend to matters far beyond the reach of academe. Shortly after arriving at the University of Michigan-Dearborn, Ted was called as an expert witness in a lawsuit brought against the City of Detroit by the family of the late Anna Thomson Dodge over her bequest of two million dollars to build a fountain "in the park at the foot of Woodward" Avenue. As one observer recalls, Mrs. Dodge's son wanted the fountain to be literally at the foot of Woodward, possibly because it would throw water on audiences attending the auditorium next door named for a rival automobile family. The city, however, hoped to erect the fountain elsewhere in the park. "After two 'expert witnesses' were quickly disposed of by the cross examination of nine Dodge attorneys, Ted won the day by explaining how the definition of the word 'park' evolved through the ages and declaring 'The fountain can be anywhere in the park. It is the park that must be at the foot of Woodward Avenue." How many academics have been allowed to apply their knowledge of philology in the service of civic planning to such great effect? Tellingly, Ted refused payment in cash for his service as an expert witness, asking instead for a microfilm reader.

Perhaps the area in which it is most difficult to measure Ted's influence is in the classroom. Ernie Sullivan recalls his many conversations with Ted about teaching. "Ted was a very inventive teacher, and I particularly learned a lot from our discussions of Othello's self-loathing and how to use *Paradise Lost* as a textbook for Freshman composition (warning: attempt only with good students)." At the dinner celebrating Ted's life at Tujague's restaurant in New Orleans on June 26, 2021, attendees were moved as Ted's former student and mentee, Celestin Walby, likened Ted's classroom practice of seemingly casually throwing out ideas for the class to explore to a father's teaching his children to skip rocks on a lake, delighting in the class's ability to sustain some suggestions, but never regretting those that lacked staying power.

Ted retired from teaching in 1998, when, assuming that they would split their time in retirement between Michigan and Louisiana, he and Claude bought a condominium in the French Quarter. However, they soon decided that they wanted to spend all their time in New Orleans. So, following Claude's retirement in 2001, they bought an eighteenthcentury house and became full-time residents of the Vieux Carré. Ted especially enjoyed such New Orleans cultural institutions as the Louisiana Philharmonic Orchestra, Le Petit Théâtre, the New Orleans Gay Men's Chorus, and the Armeinius and Petronius Mardi Gras Krewes.

Michael Schoenfeldt comments, "When I think of Ted, I think of his exuberant embrace of all that is good and worthwhile. Ted relished life, and he particularly relished his life with Claude. Wonderfully, he could get as worked up over a misplaced comma as over a new Creole recipe. I learned so much of value from him and Claude over the years, including how to read a Donne variant and how to love another human fiercely and unselfishly."

#### A Visionary Scholar

Ted's embrace of the fullness of life and his passion for accuracy and precision infused his scholarship. Both enabled him to see fine distinctions and elucidate with a sharper focus than ever before the social interactions and attitudes informing the composition of multiple genres of Elizabethan and Stuart writing. In a series of groundbreaking articles, Ted refined our understanding of the early English essay by differentiating it from other anticipatory kinds of prose. In contrast to the meditation, vow, resolve, injunction, paradox, problem, and character, all literary kinds in which the mind moves "toward a predetermined, albeit vague or general, goal," the essay allows the mind to "wander at will" with a freedom that invites more open-ended reflection:

> It is designed to give the impression of a mind thinking on a subject with no predetermined goal or formulaic conclusion toward which it need aim. It is a record of a mind apparently roaming freely—using the devices of definition, partition, contrast, antithesis, illustration, and example, to be sure, but

calling upon them as they naturally suggest themselves in a free association of ideas.<sup>1</sup>

The essay, understood in this way, emphasized not an articulation of being in any fixed sense but a passing through of one's thoughts and perceptions about a subject at the time of composition. It is "not the picture of a result, it is the record of a passage," Ted explains. His work on the essay not only clarified how several notable English essayists were indebted to Montaigne but also highlighted their investment in writing as occasional and performative, two of the most notable attributes of coterie verse as well.

Not surprisingly, given the many friendships he enjoyed throughout his life, Ted was drawn to the study of some of the key friendships in Donne's life. Ted's work on Henry Wotton did a great deal to promote Wotton from merely a name on a list of Donne's friends to an intriguing poet in his own right. The pair of essays he co-authored with Claude on the Wotton-Donne correspondence<sup>2</sup> fleshed out the probable character of their friendship as well as the high degree to which their letters in verse and prose were performative and situational. Often enough, each wrote in response to the other or in anticipation of a response. That same responsiveness and performativity characterized coterie poetry more generally. Ted became one of our most important explainers of what this meant creatively, materially, and editorially. Ted's textual work on the Variorum (more on that in a moment) allowed him to see with great clarity the implications of the manuscript circulation of verse on the text of manuscript poets.

But his gift for noting significant distinctions also resulted in a signature contribution to the collective understanding of Donne as a manuscript poet. When we speak of Donne as a "coterie" poet, we must think of coteries (plural) not coterie (singular). For, as Ted explained, Donne wrote poems for multiple audiences at different times and in response to different occasions. A lesser scholar might have stopped

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> "'Not Being, But Passing': Defining the Early English Essay," *Studies in the Literary Imagination* 10.2 (1977): 18.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> "'Thus Friends Absent Speake': The Exchange of Verse Letters between John Donne and Henry Wotton," *Modern Philology* 81 (1984): 361-77, and "Donne's Correspondence with Wotton," *John Donne Journal* 10 (1991): 1-36.

there. But Ted, in typical Pebworth fashion, probed the implications of this insight. Donne's multiple audiences (his most immediate circle of friends, fellow poets about town, and literary patrons) did not enjoy access to all the same poems; rather, each audience knew "only a part of the canon."<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, Donne did not approach each audience in the same way. "Knowing the nature of these original audiences is important to our reading of his poetry because Donne was so constantly aware of and responsive to audience, even to the point of imaginatively assuming the stances of his audiences," Ted wrote. "The awareness of audience is essential to Donne's ethos of performance, his tailoring of perspective to particular occasion." As a result of these and other insights, we could appreciate Donne's poetic performances with greater nuance. Ted's work continues to suggest a variety of new lines of scholarly inquiry.

#### A Textual, A Man Bold and Wise

As work on the Variorum Edition of the Poetry of John Donne continued well beyond its original projected completion date of 1994, members of the Donne Society developed the practice of closing the annual conference with a communal rendition of "The Donne Variorum Blues," composed by Paul Parrish. The "Blues" narrates the travails of the various volumes' commentary teams as something akin to the Israelites wandering in the desert for forty years, and includes the stanzas:

They went to the Textuals, those men bold and wise, The heirs of Dame Helen, whose work they all prize, "Pardon our rudeness, in asking you next, But please can you tell us, will we have a text?"

The Textuals they answered, from heights so sublime, "Be patient, inferiors, we'll make it on time, The words and the commas, they must be just right,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> "The Early Audiences of Donne's Poetic Performances," *John Donne Journal* 15 (1996): 127.

Else Donne's ghost will hover and curse us each night."

As Gary Stringer records in his narrative of the early days of the Variorum Project (Appendix), Ted Pebworth was- -with Gary, Ernie Sullivan, and John Shawcross- -one of those "men bold and wise."

"Ted was an extraordinary editor," notes Chris Dahl, "not only a brilliant textual editor, but also one of the sharpest copy editors I've ever known. I remember sitting in my office and handing him an advanced draft of a research fellowship application. Ted sat on the other side of my desk, took up his fountain pen (he almost always used an italic pen by Pelikan, I believe), and edited the proposal on the spot, improving both the argument and the content by about fifty percent in a matter of minutes. That skill and generosity were some of the gifts he brought to all his scholarly collaborations and especially his work on The Donne Variorum."

It is difficult to overemphasize Ted-Larry Pebworth's contributions to Renaissance textual studies. In addition to co-editing with Claude Summers both an edition of the poems of Owen Felltham and a classroom edition of selected poems by Ben Jonson, he was at work on an edition of the poems of Sir Henry Wotton when he was invited to join the Donne Variorum project as one of the four senior textual editors. Ernie Sullivan supplies a description of Ted's critical role as the Variorum editors struggled to develop a procedure for dealing with the numerous variants that they were finding in the manuscripts and early print witnesses.

> Once the Variorum got underway, Ted and I worked together mostly at Gary Stringer's office in Hattiesburg (along with Gary and Syd Conner, Gary's assistant) correcting computer files, selecting copy-texts, and creating the Textual Apparatuses. Anyone who has read through even a single Textual Introduction and Apparatus knows what brain breaking work this is; and, indeed, anyone watching us perform it would probably compare it to sticking one's head into a log splitter. But once the logs were split and stacked, all was well—at least until one day the logs did not line up, and Ted announced that the annotation system I had invented for the variant entries in the Variorum Apparatus did not make sense. Head splitting ensued. Half of my wit

finally agreed with Ted, but my other half a wit pointed out a solution and corollary to the theoretical difficulty he raised. The result was peace among the Textuals and a co-authored article, "Rational Presentation of Multiple Textual Traditions," for *PBSA* in 1989. I should point out that I only agreed with Ted out of respect for his rare capacity for logical argument and uncanny eye for detail. Indiana University Press was not interested in our "Rational Presentation" because it made the Apparatuses quite a bit longer (it only took us another 31 years to finish with the shorter form).

Ilona Bell, herself the editor of the Penguin edition of Donne's *Complete Poems*, recalls the "revelation"—a Road to Damascus textual moment—that Ted's essay on Donne's variants was for her. "Ted saw the variants, which he and the other Variorum editors were laboriously compiling and analyzing, not only as scribal errors but also as mindful alterations designed to accommodate and please a disparate, evolving lyric audience. That idea shifted the history of lyric tradition in front of my eyes—and beneath Donne's poetic feet. It transformed the way I read Donne's poems and [. . .] the entire array of English poetry that was metamorphosing from manuscript to print."

We'll allow Chris Dahl the final word on the influence that Ted's enthusiasm for textual matters exerted on others. Dahl recalls a talk that Ted gave in the early 1980s at the University of Michigan-Dearborn's "Humanitas" symposium, which allowed faculty "a friendly venue at which to try out articles or conference papers before we published or presented them. On that occasion, Ted read a paper on some of the major insights he had gained from his work on The Donne Variorum." Chris acknowledges that "as a scholarly product of the 1960s, I held a dim view of textual and bibliographic research. It was a fusty, dull field, perhaps a throwback to the philological approaches of the nineteenth century." But Ted's talk "opened my eyes to a whole new world of scholarship, intellectually exciting and vitally related to emerging fields such as the history of the book. As I listened to Ted's paper, I felt like the young John Keats when he first read Chapman's translation of Homer. Ted-Larry Pebworth, the textual visionary, introduced me to whole new realms of scholarship that afternoon."

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