

In Memoriam: Edwige Schulte

Edwige Schulte died in Naples on June 13th 1995.

It is always difficult to commemorate someone, but it is even more difficult when you try to commemorate a person like Edwige Schulte who was, and always had been, till the very end, even well into her eighties, the epitome of life itself. Effervescent of ideas, a fervid and prolific researcher, an ebullient project maker and organiser, she, still today, talks to the scholar and the student through the pages of her books.

Our relationship lasted thirty-five years. I met her when I was a university student and she was already a well known lecturer. My own life, although quite different in many respects, has run parallel to hers: I was her student, friend, colleague. I assisted her when she was ill, I guided her, together with the doctors, towards the final separation. I really loved her, like one does a mother. She was my guide, my 'magistra', the mother of my mind, my intellectual mother, always critical, sharply so if need be, but a true guide, an example of honesty and intellectual integrity.

Born in Germany, she had followed, in the 1930s, as a young woman, together with her mother and two brothers, an uncle, a famous philologist who had been offered the Chair of German Language and Literature at the Istituto Universitario Orientale in Naples in the 30s. In this same Institute she obtained her first degree in German Literature, a second in English Literature and her 'libera docenza' (D.Phil.) in English Literature. At home among three different languages and cultures – which she, an ardent and omnivorous reader, mastered to perfection – she combined a typically German determination with an Anglo-Saxon pragmatism and a volcanic and inexhaustible spirituality, typically Neapolitan, even more than Italian.

In her long and prolific academic career she formed several generations of students, at the Istituto Universitario Orientale, at the University of Salerno, at the Federico II University of Naples, at the Istituto Universitario Suor Orsola Benincasa, initiating in the early 50s, together with other scholars, the modern strain of 'Anglistica' studies in Italy and in Naples. The consequent great interest in these studies, and in the English language in particular, was testified to by the enormous increase in the number of university students at all levels who enrolled in this field. To them, Edwige Schulte revealed the fascination of English culture, through the texts of that great literature to which she dedicated her whole life, living, with conviction as she did, the life of a confirmed single person, and dividing her time between her teaching, her research, her travels, and the sea of Ischia her beloved island.

Her students loved her even as they chaffed at her rigour, her determination, her inexhaustible vitality. It was an immense source of pleasure to attend her lessons and follow, through her words, the paths along which her own research developed. Her first book was on English Metrics, *La storia della metrica inglese* (Napoli, Liguori, 1960), her second on the poetry of John Skelton, *La poesia di John Skelton* (Napoli, Liguori, 1963) in which Skelton's rhymes, based as they were on spoken language, are reconsidered from the perspective of the influences of the contemporary Italian culture, thus granting to this little known poet full recognition as an original voice in the emergent English Renaissance. This volume was followed by another, *Thomas Brown e le origini del saggio di costume* (Napoli, Liguori, 1968), where we see Edwige

Schulte's interests turning towards the origins of English narrative prose, as again some years later these gave voice to *Origini e tendenze del romanzo inglese da Aphra Behn a Lawrence Sterne* (Napoli, Liguori, 1980), a real milestone in this field of research.

Mention must also be made of the years she dedicated to Joyce's works and which produced *L'eroe all'antipodo, per un'interpretazione di James Joyce* (Napoli, Liguori, 1973) and *Ulysses – an abridged edition* (Napoli, Liguori, 1978) two volumes which opened new perspectives in the interpretation of Joyce and made the reading of *Ulysses* accessible to even less sophisticated Italian readers. And then, in the early 80s, her last encounter: Edwige Schulte discovered William Morris, his ideas, works and his circle of friends. This brought about a real epiphany in her, a deep and total involvement. Morris became her interlocutor: she visited his houses, all the places he had spent any significant part of his life in; she joined a group of members of the Morris society on a trip to Iceland to follow his footsteps in that strong land, with its violent, vivid nature, the source of such unforgettable poetic inspiration. On her return from that trip she showed me the many photographs she had taken of landscapes, people and animals. She was an excellent photographer and tried to capture with her camera lens glimpses of what Morris himself might have seen and drawn inspiration from. She described that trip to me in vivid detail with the enthusiasm of her perpetual youth.

Only a few months before her death, I invited her to give a series of seminars on Morris, and my students were impressed by her competence and extreme patience in explaining Morris's political and literary ideas to them. In her last days, even on her death bed, she asked me 'I can't be that sick if only a few weeks ago I was able to teach for hours without feeling any the worse for it, surely?' This represented to me the proof of the mystery of human energy which can overcome all physical limitations. She was also working on the paper she had planned to give at Exeter College at the Oxford conference on the occasion of the centenary of William Morris's death.

I went to Oxford, in the end, without Edwige, without my friend, and there I had the comfort of meeting many people who had met her and who remembered her with pleasure, friends from many countries, all people who had had the rare opportunity, that I had enjoyed for years, of knowing and sharing her interests and had also appreciated her more recent volumes on Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti: vita, arte e poesia* (Napoli, Liguori, 1986), and on Morris, *William Morris: I pellegrini della speranza – prima traduzione italiana* (Napoli, Liguori, 1983) and *Saggi, saghe e utopie nell'opera di William Morris* (Napoli, Liguori, 1987).

A collection of essays, *Scritti minori di letteratura e lingua inglese*, published in 1989, attests to her other interests in the field of English Literature, concerning, for example, Milton, Swift, Keats, Kipling, Pound and Beckett.

Her books talk to their readers and bear witness, in some cases, also to her courage, in opening areas of interest new to an Italian public.

I have tried to revive the memory of her in those who knew and loved her, and to outline the figure of the true 'magistra' that she was, an unforgettable friend, severe but tender, lover of the sun and the Mediterranean Sea but capable of breathing for days on end the soft penumbra of libraries.

Adriana Corrado.