

IN MEMORIAM: ANNE YEATS



In the Fall 1999 issue of the *South Carolina Review*, my daughter gave an account of Anne Yeats, one of the two gravitational centers of my professional life in Dublin for over fifteen years, the other one being the papers of W.B. Yeats at the National Library of Ireland. As Charis wrote, she had been impressed by “the profusion of ‘Happy Fourth of July!’ banners” that met us at the Dublin Airport and then by Anne, at Avalon, her home in Dalkey— “the garden . . . vibrantly green and fragrantly blooming,” the owner beaming with her “bright, intelligent eyes, ready smile, and . . . quick wit.” Anne Butler Yeats died on July 4, 2001. She was 82 years old and remembered in *The Irish Times* (14 July 2001) as “Popular member of painting dynasty” probably at its end. As an artist, she is “identified above all with the Irish Exhibition of Living Art” and “illustrious patrimony,” the last tributed in the recently opened Yeats Room in the National Gallery of Ireland. As the obituary notes, Anne’s work “varied from figure pieces and semi-humorous depictions of domestic cats” (she liked dogs better) “to textual works which verged on abstraction,” to “lithography and monotypes.” As I think I caught in a tour de farcical note that took off from a cheerful conversation with Anne on the subject of cat lovers “Ez” Pound and “Uncle Billyums,” her father (see *SCR* 32.1: 210, n. 2), the poet’s daughter was an arrestingly shrewd and entertaining observer as a semi-comic anecdotalist. Whence came the story of the Suicidal Cat and the Beard:

“He used to love to sleep with Father on his bed, like that [lying on *top* of the convalescing poet in the family’s summer quarters in Rapallo]. The cat [a white Persian given by Pound] had had a succession of owners who were invalids, and it preferred an indolent life, which was the normal state of affairs in its experience. So, as Father got better, the cat got suicidal and decided to jump out of windows. I don’t remember who saved the cat by finding him a new home. Perhaps Mother. But it was given away to a blind sculptor, and they were happy with one another.

“And as to the beard your father cultivated in convalescence?” I asked.

“ ‘He would trim one side of it himself and become too tired to do the other. Mother would have to even it out. She finally lost patience with the beard and had a barber brought in to remove it completely, once and for all.’ ”

When I asked about the semi-abstract cat portraits in her studio, she said: “I prefer dogs, personally. You can make friends with a dog. But a cat is independent-minded. They like to sit on the laps of people who don’t like them. People who don’t like cats will watch them, and a cat will take that as a sign of attention. Certainly, you shouldn’t look at him because that is what he wants you to do. In similar circumstances, if you were to smile at a dog, that might make him leave because baring your teeth is taken as a signal that he has invaded a space you mean to protect.

“ ‘A cat is a small wild animal when hunting in the garden; it likes its independence,’ she observed and then recited the first stanza of the 8th-century Irish poem ‘Pangur Bán,’ which a student in a seminary composed for a lark in a copy of St. Paul’s Epistles:

“ ‘I and Pangur Bán, my cat,
 ’Tis a like task we are at;
 Hunting mice is his delight,
 Hunting words I sit all night.’ ”

The verses generalize to the other media and memorialize the endeavor of artists, poets, and scholars as an uncommon lot. There is Omar Pound’s translation from the Persian, *Gorby and the Rats*, a political fable featuring a cat and some fourteenth-century Mongol invaders in the guise of rodents, to remind us that a poet’s fondness for animals may remain in a family.

As a tribute to Anne and to “living art” generally, I’ve paired two essays that return to subjects featured in recent theme-based issues: *Virginia Woolf International* (1996) and *Ireland in the Arts and Humanities, 1899-1999* (1999). The Poundian note in the memorial echoes in and concludes with an essay on Pound’s daughter, Mary de Rachewiltz. To celebrate our past, Mark Winchell gives us in this issue his retrospective on *SCR*’s first twenty-five years or so, but we also have Richard Calhoun’s return on James Dickey, poetic turns on Dickey by Virgil Suárez and Skip Eisiminger, and a spirited collection of personal essays in *The Republic of Letters* to affirm how past and present interplay in a magazine that has broadened its interests. Although the university’s Presidential Seminar did not generate the unit of essays we had hoped (and advertised on the back cover of the Fall 2000 issue), Bill Koon has given us, in one of those essays, a fine impression of that venture into multi-task collaborative teaching.

As *SCR* became larger per volume, with the founding of the Document Design Lab by Tharon Howard in 1992, we became ever more global in perspective and have become the “angel” in the year-old publishing enterprise known as the Clemson University Digital Press. We have a legacy to maintain while the future is dawning. And we will be a part of the future.

–Wayne K. Chapman