



IN MEMORIAM**MARGARET (MAGGIE) ROSABEL MEZZABOTTA †***17.07.1946-20.02.2000*

The tragic death of Margaret Mezzabotta in a car accident on the morning of Sunday the 20th of February came as a terrible shock to her friends and colleagues, not only at the University of Cape Town, where she had taught for 30 years, but also at many universities in South Africa and abroad.

Born Margaret Rosabel Thompson, Maggie (which was the name she was universally known by) spent her school years in Northwood, near London. In 1967 she gained a BA (Hons) in Classics from the University of Bristol, where she was taught by such distinguished scholars as H.D.F. Kitto and G.S. Kirk. After receiving the Postgraduate Certificate in Education in 1968 from King's College, London, she taught for the next two years as Assistant Classics Mistress at Twickenham County Grammar School for Girls, in Middlesex. In 1969 she married Marco Mezzabotta, a veterinarian. Maggie was then a Presbyterian but converted later to her husband's faith, Catholicism, to which she remained committed for the rest of her life. She and Marco had a daughter and two sons, Marisa (b. 1972), Mark (b. 1974) and Martin (b. 1984).

Shortly after emigrating to South Africa, Maggie Mezzabotta began an association with the Department of Classics at the University of Cape Town which was to last for three decades. Her first, temporary, appointment was as a demonstrator for Latin I in 1970, and over the next eight years she held a variety of temporary full-time posts in the Department. In 1978 she was appointed to a permanent Lectureship, receiving *ad hominem* promotion to Senior Lecturer in 1997.

Her research interests were varied, and covered a wide field, but Greek Tragedy was Maggie Mezzabotta's particular field of specialization. She gained the PhD degree from UCT in 1987 for her thesis, 'A Comparative Examination of Sophocles' Treatment of Creon in *Antigone*, *Oedipus Tyrannus* and *Oedipus at Colonus*', supervised by her colleague of many years, John Atkinson. Her doctoral research provided the basis for a number of conference

papers and articles on tragedy in the years that followed, among them 'Greek Tragedy for Drama Students: a Practical Approach', *Akroterion* 31 (1986) 22-25, and 'Jason and Orpheus: Eur. *Med.* 543', *American Journal of Philology* 115 (1994) 47-50. In 1995 Maggie was invited to join the editorial board of the electronic journal for ancient drama, *Didaskalia*, in which she published several pieces, 'Frolicking Frogs Rap in Cape Town', 1,3 (August 1994), 'Medea, or the Myth of the Murderous (M)other', 1,5 (December 1994), 'Sophocles' *Antigone*', 2,2 (Autumn 1995), and 'Timberlake Wertenbaker's *For the Love of the Nightingale*', 2,3 (Winter 1995). Her interest in the influence of classical poetry on later European literature is evident from her articles 'Johannes Burman, Catullus 3.11-14 and Virgil *Aeneid* 1.33', *Liverpool Classical Monthly* 15.7 (1990) 109-10, and 'Virgil, Camoens and the Classical Epic Tradition', *Akroterion* 36 (1991) 36-54.

Other areas in which Maggie Mezzabotta developed considerable expertise over the last decade were ancient botany, medicine and veterinarian science. She gave several conference papers on these subjects locally and abroad, and published 'The Meaning of *spica* in Cato *Agr.* 70,1', *Glotta* 70 (1992) 100-06. At the time of her death she was fully engaged on a translation (the first into English for 250 years) and commentary on the four books of the *Mulomedicina*, a veterinary treatise by the late fourth-century writer, Vegetius.

However, although she was active in attending conferences, giving papers, and publishing scholarly articles and reviews, Maggie Mezzabotta's first and greatest love was teaching. She taught at all levels, from introductory courses through to Honours, and right across the range of Greek and Roman literature and culture. The poetry of Homer and Virgil was a strong area of interest, as were tragedy, mythology, ancient medicine, and the life of women in antiquity. Maggie was also active in the teaching of the classical languages, of Greek, and especially of Latin. In the latter field she pioneered the use of stylistic analysis of a variety of Latin texts – literary, scientific, medical, lexicographical, historical – to replace more traditional methods of language instruction at senior levels within the Department of Classics at UCT. For many years she also gave lectures on ancient theatre, outside of the Department, to students of Drama.

Generations of students can testify to Maggie Mezzabotta's enthusiasm and skill as a teacher. She never went into a lecture theatre or seminar room without having thoroughly researched and prepared her topic, and a noteworthy feature of her teaching was her extensive control of the latest bibliography. Maggie truly cared about her students. She spent many hours,

well beyond the call of duty, making herself available to them for discussion of their written work, or difficulties with their studies, and giving advice and counseling, not only on issues of teaching and learning, but also on personal matters. Her dedication as an educator was rewarded in 1997 by a Distinguished Teacher Award from UCT.

Maggie Mezzabotta was very active also in the wider community. She drew audiences of several hundreds to the courses of lectures on ancient art and theatre she delivered at UCT's Summer School; and she regularly gave talks to schools and on the radio. She was a long-standing member of the Western Province branch of the Classical Association of South Africa, serving as Chairperson and also as a committee member for many years. She was a member of the Council of St. Cyprian's School, and was active too in the Catholic Educational Aid Programme.

Maggie Mezzabotta died the day before the 2000 academic year began at UCT. We, her colleagues and friends, know how much she would have been looking forward to engaging with the new intake of students, how thoroughly she would have been prepared for her teaching. But it was not to be. It is not easy to express how much she will be missed – as a valued colleague, dear friend, and fine human being.

Richard Whitaker
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