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In Memoriam Elizabeth M. Wilkinson (1909–2001)

Mary Wilkinson, as she preferred to be known, died in London where she spent nearly her entire life. She taught at University College from 1940 until her retirement. She held visiting professorships at Columbia and Chicago and was one of the early Professors-at-Large at Cornell University, serving from 1967 to 1973.

The *Times* of London called her one of the finest scholars of German culture England has produced. "Her work shows a rare combination of historical awareness with a sensibility alive to the subtleties that enable works of art to seem to transcend history."

"On the eve of her retirement she turned down the honour that would have meant most to her, a fellowship of her beloved University College, as a protest against what she considered to be the mistaken direction the college was taking. In her later years she was alarmed by the creeping commercialisation of the academy and the promotion of theory for theory's sake."

Her first loves were biology and history but she was lured into German by J.G. Robertson, another great British German scholar, who also persuaded her to leave high school teaching in favor of graduate work and a subsequent career at the university level. But she never lost touch with "the schools" and often remarked on the "sad" disconnect between American high schools and colleges.

Her teaching was inspired and inspiring, as was the steady flow of her published research culminating in her edition, with L.A. Willoughby, her collaborator for over three decades, in

Friedrich Schiller's *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man*, with its elegant facing-page translation, plus commentary and glossary that are breathtaking in scope and erudition. The volume, published by Oxford University Press in 1967, is a testimony to her belief that becoming truly human requires political as well as aesthetic education. "And when at the end we come to Schiller's vision of an Aesthetic State we find there no select company of aesthetes [. . .] but a community of people, scientists, scholars, artisans, citizens, going about their ordinary affairs – but with a different quality in their attitude both to the job at hand and to each other" (from the authors' "Introduction," xi). And they single out what is perhaps "the most provocative" of Schiller's contentions, "that the clue to the whole history of human freedom is to be found in the fact that we are creatures of sense before we become creatures of reason" (xiv).

[A superior intellect and stunningly beautiful, she was seen by many friends and admirers as an exquisite combination of, say, Lana Turner and Edith Sitwell, a "wondrous blend of womanhood" in her own phrase, albeit from a different context. She pretended to resent the comparison but worked on the image.]*

She drove an ambulance during the war while embarking on her career. She chaired her department for many years and presided over the English Goethe Society from 1974–85. She was a member of the British Academy, the German Akademie für Sprache und Dichtung, the Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen, and a recipient of numerous honors and awards.

Her final years were darkened by Alzheimer's. She was 91 when she died on January 2, 2001.

Have, cara anima.

Herbert Deinert

*This paragraph was cut by the editor and does not appear in GQ. I have pasted it here.