



IN MEMORIAM

Robert L. Beloof
Professor of Rhetoric, Emeritus
UC Berkeley
1923 – 2005

Absent Love

Where are you, now I am not there?
gesturing and talking in another world,
a walking tree making the air
into fawnskin light.

It pleasures me to think that you
will keep so walking, and that nothing
will end that leafy hullabaloo
till the suns set.

The above poem was circulated at the Berkeley Friends Meeting House on July 23, 2005, as a memorial epitaph for Robert Beloof, the poem's author. The 81-year-old emeritus professor of rhetoric died in Portland, Oregon, on July 6, 2005, when he was hit by a van at a crosswalk while out for a walk. Professor Beloof taught for 41 years in the Department of Rhetoric (previously of Speech) at the University of California, Berkeley. Robert Beloof was a poet, psychotherapist, teacher — and a man of great personal and intellectual integrity. Born in a poor neighborhood in Wichita, Kansas, on December 30, 1923, Robert Lawrence Beloof was raised by his mother, Ida Beloof, an outspoken political agitator and Kansas delegate to the 1919 Socialist convention in Chicago, Illinois. Mrs. Beloof operated a boarding house for cowboys and ran for governor of Kansas on the Socialist Party ticket in 1938; along the way, she also took in laundry to pay for elocution lessons for her youngest son, who grew up proud to tell generations of students about his activist mother and her profound influence upon him.

A lifelong Quaker, Robert enrolled in Friends University in Wichita in 1940, but his education was disrupted when he was drafted for military service during World War II. As a pacifist and conscientious objector (C.O.), he opted for internment in a labor camp in North Dakota and was later assigned to work in a state mental hospital near Philadelphia. His undergraduate education became a hit-and-miss affair of attending classes at Haverford College and Swarthmore College while serving out his C.O. sentence and writing poetry. In 1946, Friends University awarded him the B.A. degree in absentia. That year his achievements as a poet also won him the Atlantic Monthly prize for best poem, a tuition fellowship to the Bread Loaf School of English at Middlebury, Vermont, and the Elinor Frost Scholarship, which Robert Frost awarded for achievement in poetry.

In 1948, Beloof was awarded two M.A. degrees, one in English literature from Middlebury College and the second in drama from Northwestern University. After writing a doctoral dissertation on the poetry of E.E. Cummings, he received the Ph.D. in speech and drama, with an emphasis in oral interpretation, from Northwestern in 1954. In 1956, Villiers Press in London published his first poetry collection, *The One-Eyed*

Gunner. His criticism, essays, and poetry also appeared in *Kenyon Review*, *Prairie Schooner*, *New World Writing*, *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, and various speech journals and anthologies.

Beloof joined the faculty of the Department of Speech at Berkeley in 1948 as a lecturer, advancing to assistant professor in 1954 and achieving tenure as an associate professor in 1958, serving as vice chair from 1961 to 1963. He was promoted to professor in 1964 and presided as department chair from 1964 to 1968 during the crucial years in the Department of Speech's transformation from an undergraduate major into the contemporary Department of Rhetoric with its full graduate program. Robert Beloof was a dramatic, forthright person; in department faculty meetings, most valuably, he often spoke openly of difficulties and problems that others were content to gloss over.

Above all, Beloof was a dedicated teacher who valued the performance-based, dramatic approach to the literary classroom, which he laid out in his classic work, *The Performing Voice in Literature* (Little, Brown, 1966). Ever a popular teacher, he was seen by his students as a consummately inventive teacher, skilled in the dynamics of group process; many praised his advanced Readers' Theatre and Symbolism courses as life-changing educational experiences. They respected him for his passionate embrace of the oft-misunderstood discipline of oral interpretation, whose future at Berkeley was, in the end, doomed, perhaps because it was not cost-effective. He continued to teach oral interpretation in the face of its disappearance before an ever more abstract definition within the department of rhetoric as predominantly theory rather than method, and his later years in the department were sometimes contentious. Outside the classroom, he spent many hours tutoring students individually and in small groups.

Beyond Berkeley, Robert Beloof was an active and creative public educator, lecturing to diverse civic, educational and professional groups. Beloof taught at the University of Naples as a Fulbright Fellow in 1959-60 and gave a very popular series of lectures on American poetry throughout Italy. He was a poetry fellow in Guadalajara, Mexico (1963-64) and worked for years with the National Council of Teachers of English as a curriculum advisor and noted symposium leader. As a member of the Society of Friends, he conceived of and helped found an innovative Quaker boarding school in the Sierra foothills.

After his retirement from the Department of Rhetoric in 1989, Beloof, who held a master of social welfare degree from San Francisco State University, practiced psychotherapy for 15 years. Until his death, he remained active both as a scholar and as a teacher, publishing clinical articles and conducting training workshops in the Pessio/ Boyden psychomotor system of psychotherapy.

He is survived by his second wife, Helen Knauth McBurney Beloof; his four sons Marshall, Laird, Douglas, and Grant Beloof; four grandchildren; and stepchildren Edith McBurney, Susan J. McBurney and William S. McBurney.

Bridget Connelly
Daniel Melia