

In Memoriam: Nicholas Howe

Feb. 17, 1953 – September 27, 2006

With great sadness we report the loss of Nicholas Howe, professor of English at the University of California, Berkeley, and one of the leading scholars in the field of Anglo-Saxon studies. Howe died in Oakland, CA on September 27, 2006 of complications arising from leukemia. He is survived by his widow, Georgina Kleege, and a sister, Nina Howe.

Howe was born in Princeton, NJ, son of the writer and critic Irving Howe and the classicist Thalia Phyllis; he grew up in Belmont, MA, and Buffalo, NY. He earned a BA in English from York University in Toronto in 1974 and a PhD from Yale in 1978. He taught as an assistant professor at Rutgers (1978-1985) and associate professor at the University of Oklahoma (1985-1991). During his years as Professor of English at Ohio State University (1991-2002) and as director of their Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies (1995-2002) he was instrumental in building a program nationally recognized for its excellence. He became professor of English at the University of California, Berkeley in 2002. He held administrative positions at all these universities, received numerous awards, including a Guggenheim Fellowship, and served on the Executive Committee of the OE Division of the MLA, the Executive Committee of the Medieval Academy of America's Centers and Regional Associations (CARA), the Advisory Board of ISAS, and the Editorial Board of *Anglo-Saxon England*. In 2005, he was named a fellow of the Medieval Academy of America.

These numerous professional accomplishments pay tribute to a remarkable and copious body of work spanning three decades, beginning with *The Old English Catalogue Poems* (Copenhagen, 1985). His many books and articles on Anglo-Saxon topics, his studies of modern literature and personal essays on travel and place, are all marked by a characteristically lucid style, depth of insight and meticulous intellectual integrity. He is perhaps best known for his groundbreaking book *Migration and Mythmaking in Anglo-Saxon England* (New Haven, 1989; rpt. Notre Dame, 2001), which explored the Anglo-Saxon identification with the biblical Hebrews as a people who had traveled across the sea from pagan darkness to a Christian promised land. The book's powerful appeal to so many readers came, perhaps, not only from the depth of its historical imagination and the clarity of its interpretations, but also from its implicit resonance with the contemporary world. Georgina Kleege has said that "I think in a way what Nick recognized was that the story of the migration that was so important to Anglo-Saxon culture was not dissimilar to North American history—to our own sense of America as a country of immigrants"; in some respects *Migration and Mythmaking* traverses the same terrain and addresses the same issues of immigration, identity, anxiety, faith and cultural survival as Irving Howe's *World of Our Fathers*.

Throughout Howe's work one finds a broad but seamless interest in the interlace of people and place, not so much in the human impact on the landscape as in the landscape's imprint on the human imagination. His most recently published book, *Across an Inland Sea: Writing in Place from Buffalo to Berlin* (Princeton, 2003), combined personal memoir with travel writing, and was illustrated by his own photographs. His last book, *Writing the Map of Anglo-Saxon England: Essays in Cultural Geography*, which brings his longstanding and deeply-felt interest in place back to the reading of a number of Old English texts, will be published by Yale University Press.

Howe's many gifts included an apparently effortless confidence, an ability to articulate academic concerns to a broader audience, a talent for building bridges between the specialized world of the scholar

and the world of the educated general reader, and a sense of the fundamental humanity that grounds, motivates, and enlivens the best historical scholarship. He was a brilliant teacher whose rigor was matched by his enthusiasm and understanding; he inspired numerous students to share his love of Anglo-Saxon literature. As a colleague his generous encouragement and support were always accompanied by high expectations and a passion for excellence. He was a demanding but constructive critical reader whose opinions one could always trust to be honest, exact, fearless, and thoroughly informed; his advice on any topic was always worth heeding. Nick Howe was a tireless and thoroughly professional scholar, a humane and imaginative thinker, a graceful and fluent writer, and a loyal and supportive friend. His energy, intelligence, wit and wisdom will be deeply missed by all who knew him.

Georgina Kleege requests that donations in his memory be made to the Leukemia Research Foundation (<http://www.leukemia-research.org>), Recordings for the Blind and Dyslexic in Princeton, NJ (<http://www.rfbd.org/>), or The Dictionary of Old English at the University of Toronto (<http://www.doe.utoronto.ca/>).

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Quotations and some factual information have been taken from published sources including the *San Francisco Chronicle* for Sunday, October 15, 2006, and a UC Berkeley press release (http://www.berkeley.edu/news/media/releases/2006/10/12_howe.shtml).