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'You sustain me': Anne Turvey and Her Horsewomen

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ABSTRACT
We, 'the five horsewomen' as Anne Turvey named us, are a group of teachers who trained on the PGCE English course at the IOE (2011–2012) and then undertook the MA English Education together. What follows are short reflections on what Anne meant to us in our development as teachers, mothers and friends. They are also reflections on how Anne used food and the sociability of eating as a mode of indicating care, how Anne nourished and sustained the souls of teachers she befriended.

KEYWORDS
London Association for the Teaching of English; Anne Turvey; Teacher Development; learning

Story and family (Lisa-Marie)

I am proud to be known as one of Anne's 'Five Horsewoman', one of five teachers who built a friendship and bond with Anne through our fondness for London, literature, and eating. This nickname of the Horsewomen was Anne's way of including us in her gang, a feminist joke conferring a collective identity more dynamic, more agentive than the IOE 'babes'.

Anne's Texan drawl is what many of us who have had the privilege to be the recipients of her stories will forever remember. My first impression of Anne was sitting in a room full of eager PGCE students, listening to her tales . . . of nuns in Surrey . . . of the words of her young nephew, Joe (her 'best boy'); . . . of her love of poetry; . . . of the obnoxious questions from teenagers she had taught; . . . and of her love of trashy romance novels. We would listen intently, inspired by her enthusiasm and genuine love for the subject and young people.

I would not be the teacher I am today without Anne's mantra of 'who are the learners and what do they know?' 13 years after first hearing it (in Anne's distinctive voice), it remains the basis of all of my teaching and learning. It has figured in many of my essays, job applications and CPD sessions. At the heart of this mantra is the necessity for storytelling and its importance for meaning-making. Allowing students to bring their own experiences to a text enables rich and varied interpretations. Through her stories, Anne modelled how we could also bring our own experiences to the classroom and how we could productively reflect on our own teaching practice.

Becoming a mother allowed me to witness the effects of storytelling close-up, its importance for language acquisition and enabling children to make sense of the world.

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When I was pregnant with my first child, Raphael, who Anne named her 'sociable angel', Anne bought him copies of *Peepo!* and *Alfie Gets in First*. She continued to buy him books which we still read today. The beauty of these texts lies in the almost banality of everyday life. My son was lucky enough to see himself reflected in these books: as a baby, going to the park with a teddy or being put to bed by his mummy and daddy, with the added joy on his face (and later my daughter's) at the anticipation of saying 'Peepo!' on each page. He was able to experience jeopardy and fear when Alfie locks himself in the house, and triumphant relief when he works out how to stand on a chair and open the door himself from the inside, ending with tea and biscuits all round to celebrate. He's now 6 and a half, and Etta, my daughter, is 4. We re-read *Peepo* recently to remember Anne.

My children are able to experience a world that is bigger than theirs through stories such as *The Proudest Blue* (2019), *Julian is a Mermaid* (2018) and *Sulwe* (2019). Raphael always feels tense and nervous when Julian's Nana comes out of the bathroom to find Julian wrapped in her net curtain, and relief when Julian discovers he isn't in trouble. He feels empathy for Asiya when others question her hijab at school. He knows about these feelings and emotions and can use his 'knowledge' to develop his understanding of unfamiliar contexts and situations.

Anne's mistake was telling me that she loved photos and videos of the children. So I often sent her videos of my son retelling and acting out stories such as *The Highway Rat*, or Eddie from Michael Rosen's *Quick Let's Get Out Of Here! (Chocolate Cake* is a poem he finds equally stressful and enjoyable!). I continue to have moments where I want to send her something – a photo or video that I think she'll like. I miss her. But I can hear Anne's voice in the numerous emails and messages I have re-read since her death. On re-reading them, she becomes alive again – a testament to the power of her story-telling, even through WhatsApp.

My life, my children's, and all my students' lives have been enriched by Anne. Her essence will live on as we continue to tell our stories.

Plots and plans (Myfanwy)

Every so often I am reminded of Anne and her ferocious knowledge and creativity. Every time I am reminded of her it is in these terms. What a strange world it is now, that instead of stumbling across letters in a locked cupboard (although Anne sent me post cards and I do have those) I find myself looking through a folder of PhD readings on a computer only to see my upgrade document within which are all her incredibly generous, interested and helpful notes. This was how she interacted, as far as I could tell, with all things. I was looking for an email about LATE and found one from her, a few years ago now, in which she enthusiastically sorts out who'll do what on the day and precisely how Nick Bentley will share his student work over lunch. My laptop is full of reminders, of photos, quick emails, text messages, academic articles, workshop plans all sent with exclamation and her unmistakable cadence. You can hear her Texan drawl in every one, even the shortest of them.

One of my greatest regrets is that Anne fell ill before we could embark on a planned project for her to come and teach my sixth formers about 'the Deep South'. We had a sort of vision – 'I'll teach you to make a mint Julep!' she exclaims in an email of July 2018 –

and she would talk to them about the context of *A Streetcar Named Desir,*- perhaps with her highly knowledgeable sister Sarah ('two Southern Belles in my classroom!' I exclaim in return). I'm not entirely sure how the mint juleps would have played out in terms of health and safety, but the discussion was both joyous and very earnest. Anne had a way of making literature, and the teaching of it, playful whilst also taking it incredibly seriously.

In the wake of Anne's passing, I started a new job. In among my archive, I found a workshop plan from a LATE conference that we ran together. In it we proposed the teaching of Act 1 Scene 2 of *Hamlet*, at A-level, through the creation of a marriage portrait depicting Gertrude and Claudius with the moping Hamlet. Only last week, with Anne firmly in mind, I asked a new, rather sombre Year 9 class to create a coronation portrait for the Macbeths. Of course it broke the ice, and showed me rather a lot more about what they knew of the play than some of their essays had done! It is through my lessons that I want to channel Anne, to be half as clever and thoughtful and generous would be astonishing.

I sometimes think it quite remarkable that I was thought of as one of her 'horse-women', the name given to a wonderful group of teachers with whom I was lucky enough to be in both a PGCE and MA cohort and to call my good friends. We looked forward immensely to our evenings with Anne in some Fitzrovia restaurant, full of cheer but also of great discussion, perhaps a new ballet at Sadler's Wells would be seen, or a poem she'd come across would be read. The horsewomen are now spread far and wide, from Bristol to Berlin, but we will certainly carry those early days of our teaching careers in London with us.

Sustenance (Mehrunissa)

'Miss, I don't know how to start'. Where do you start when trying to write about Anne Turvey? But really – where to begin? Where did *we* begin? This writing is an attempt to work this out. It's about how we/I knew Anne. Such writing always feels self-indulgent, but I know Anne would have told me otherwise, reframing it as the 'personal narratives of story-telling' (Turvey 1996, 150) and asserting its legitimacy as a mode of inquiry (as Brenton Doecke explores elsewhere in this issue). For any of us writing about Anne, we write about her through the prism of our own experiences. We reveal as much about ourselves as we do of Anne. But I'd like to hope that that would have made Anne happy.

I also hope that in writing this, it will hold a mirror to the countless other student teachers' experiences she shaped and the countless other teachers whom she mentored, and stand for all the children she took into her life and loved with a sense of boundless-ness. Anne made the argument that what is central to English and to education is 'all those complex social relationships' (Turvey 1992, 58). She didn't offer advice about how to better assess my students or what success criteria worked best. Hers might have seemed much more ephemeral interventions – and perhaps that's why it's so hard to define her influence, or to work out where to start with Anne. The memories of Anne are about how she made you feel in that moment with her. It was about how to listen and how to respond (whether that be with her warmth and generosity or that withering remark when you fell just a little short of those high expectations) that was never close to a top tip but an acknowledgement that what makes successful teaching is developing the

whole person. Not just the development of students, but of teachers too – for we were (and are) the learners, too.

Somewhere along the way, Anne decided to name us her Horsewomen, a play on the Biblical stories of The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse. It was a rebuttal to a rather funny remark made about the gaggle of us. I'm still not too sure why we were horse-women and it felt rude to ask. Also, which one was I? I'm a bit too brown to represent any sort of successful conqueror; a bit too passive to represent war; a bit too plump to embody any sort of famine. Death, maybe? Being some sort of harbinger for the apocalypse would certainly explain the effect that I seem to have on most people . . . I'm not sure if Anne saw the educational landscape as nearing the apocalypse, but her gender-bending of the Biblical story seemed to embody some of the paradoxes of her own identity. In defining us as her horsewomen, it revealed how she saw narratives of gender as malleable, even those Biblical narratives. 'Writing', Anne wrote, 'in school and out, is involved in the ways gender is constructed' (Turvey 1992, 59).

A long time ago, she recognised that we 'enact gender through literacy' (Turvey 1996, 150). One Friday evening, I had dinner with Anne and a former PGCE student of hers, Gabrielle Basso-Ricci, who was by then a member of my English department. We spent talked about trans narratives, agreeing on the need for true representation, of any minoritised experience, to encompass and convey joy, an emotion so often lost in the quest for representation in literary texts. Talking about *Nope*, Jordan Peele said, 'the movie had to be about Black joy as well [. . .] part of why there's sort of a spectrum of tonality of genre in here, because I wanted [. . .] wanted to give our characters agency and adventure and hope and joy and fun that they deserve' (Sharf 2022). Well, Anne was saying this about ideas of representation and story much earlier. On a picket line in 2018, she chose to read 'Bedecked', the poem by Victoria Redel, in honour of her nephew's childhood fascination for dressing up and the delights of bling in particular.

When I started my training at the IOE, in 2011, I wasn't in Anne's tutor group. And so, my admiration of Anne was at something of a distance. (Although, there was that one time, where I made some sort of totally killer comment in a lecture about the Lady of Shalott and the patriarchy that warranted approval from the double act of Anne Turvey and Morlette Lindsay. You can imagine what that meant to a 22-year-old me: 'Eek! Approval from Anne and Morlette!'). It was around the same time that Anne was attempting to get people to sign up to the London Association for Teaching of English (LATE) and British Film Institute (BFI) joint conference in December. I dutifully passed on a cheque for my ticket to Anne, and attended the conference. It would be the first of many.

I then went on to undertake a Master's at the IoE. Again, Anne didn't have much to do with the taught programme that I was engaging with. We sort of missed each other, though we were both aware of each other's presence and there was the bumping into and casual chats on the 6th floor of the IOE. There was something wonderful about someone who had never taught you, knowing you. It was her deft way of signalling a sense of interest in your life and work as a teacher, and that the development that teachers underwent at the IOE was not one that stopped at in the door of the lecture hall; it was accomplished in all the interactions that took place in corridors, or over her tin of biscuits. There was a desire to feed, and to nourish the souls of the those who came into contact with

Anne. Writing about the psychosociology of food consumption, Roland Barthes (1979, 167) ponders, 'What is food? [. . .] It is [. . .] a system of communication, a body of images, a protocol of usages, situations, and behaviour'/Anne, like Amanda in *The Glass Menagerie*, 'understood the art of conversation!' (Williams 1944, 7), but she also understood that communication wasn't just about the conversation. After experiencing a miscarriage in 2016, I underwent a D and C procedure on the final Friday of the summer holidays and returned to school the following Monday, never revealing to anyone I'd been pregnant or what my summer had really entailed. The school had suffered a set of disastrous GCSE results, the same day as it was confirmed that there was no second heart to be found in my body. When I visited the IOE a couple of weeks later, it was Anne inadvertently walking into John Yandell's office, with the offer of biscuits, that allowed me to talk about what was happening to me. The biscuits were a potent sign of affection, homeliness and sharing, an unconditional expression of love when I was at my most vulnerable.

When I became head of department later that year, ensuring that my office was well equipped with a food drawer for staff and students, kitschy paraphernalia and a box of tissues was key to establishing an Anne-like approach to mentoring and developing teachers within the faculty. Talk (and tears), both with staff and students, would often be accompanied with food, where 'food [served] as a sign not only for themes, but also for situations; and for this, all told, means for a way of life emphasised, much more than expressed, by it' (Barthes 1979, 171).

As chair of the London Association for Teachers of English (LATE), Anne knew how to corral teachers together. She used committee meetings to focus on the experiences and work of teachers in classrooms. This set the tone and the agenda for the work of LATE. Anne was fastidious in her organisation, insisting on clarity as to when things needed to be done and who was going to do them. The committee was a rotating carousel of teachers, with different things to say about their practice and what they might like to share from it. Anne was always attentive to them – and then would come the affirmation: they did have something valuable to say and they should say this at a LATE conference in a workshop or in a keynote. Anne used the LATE committee to answer back to the spaces that otherwise wouldn't have allowed for these young teachers' voices to be amplified. In a period characterised by the bleakest of education policies at national level, LATE became, under Anne's leadership, the forum in which these local successes could be demonstrated and discussed.

At the 2017, 'Incorrigibly Plural' LATE conference (held to celebrate the life and work of Morlette Lindsay), Anne derived huge joy from the performance of the spoken word club from Lisa-Marie's school. It was a moment of speaking back, in the same year as the first examination of Gove's new GCSEs took place, a refutation of the reductivity of a GCSE curriculum that valued rote learning over creativity. After the conference, Anne sent cards and a poetry anthology to us 'horsewomen'. Emblazoned across the middle of the card was Anne's message: 'You sustain me!' I pinned that card to the notice board in my office at school. Anne's words sustained me through the challenges that confronted me as a head of faculty.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Notes on contributors

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Lisa-Marie Utley is an English teacher and deputy curriculum team leader at John Cabot Academy, Bristol. She has taught the majority of her career in North London where she was responsible for teaching and learning. She was a committee member of the London Association for Teachers of English. She works with Bristol university teaching Somalian students at their community micro-campus, and also helps organise conferences for the Bristol teacher network.

Myfanwy Edwards is general secretary of the London Association for the Teaching of English. She completed her PGCE at the IOE in 2012, and has since been a teacher and a head of department at a number of London schools. She is completing her PhD at UCL IOE, researching young people's responses to Shakespeare.

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