

## EDWARD COURTNEY 1932-2019

Edward Courtney was born on 22 March 1932 in Belfast, Northern Ireland, to George, an administrator in the court system, and Kathleen. He had a sister and many cousins, of whom three became university lecturers. In 1943, at the age of eleven, he entered the Royal Belfast Academical Institution, which was also to produce J.C. McKeown, J.L. Moles and R.K. Gibson. When Gibson was a research student in Cambridge and met Ted (as he was universally known) for the first time, he asked him how he had retained his Belfast accent; 'I never listen to anybody else!' was the perhaps surprising (and certainly misleading) reply. At 'Inst.' Ted was taught by H.C. Fay, later to produce a school edition of Plautus' *Rudens* (1969), and John Cowser, who, by lending him Housman's editions of Juvenal and Lucan, instilled in him a preference for Latin over Greek. Three decades later, in 1980, Ted would publish the standard commentary on Juvenal, followed after four years by a critical edition of the text; and, after moving to Charlottesville in the 1990s, he would drive around town in a car whose licence-plate was 'JUVENAL', bought for him as a birthday present by his wife.

At Inst. Ted was introduced to the verse composition in Greek and Latin which was to stand him in such good stead in later years, and he was taught to play chess by a friend: in 1950 he won the Irish Junior Championship and the Irish Premier Reserves tournament, and captained the Irish schoolboy team against England and Wales. In the same year, having won an entrance scholarship in 1949, he entered Trinity College, Dublin, the last university in Britain and Ireland to require verse composition, which was deemed to be of equal weight to prose composition: in the end-of-year examinations undergraduates were expected to translate (to give an example from Ted's own years) a passage of Milton into Greek verse in 45 minutes without the aid of any reference books. It did not take long for Ted to acquire an academic reputation. Another undergraduate, on his way to the terrifying oral examinations for a Trinity College Foundation Scholarship, was alarmed to encounter Ted emerging from the examination hall in a distressed state: if this is what the examiners can do to Ted Courtney, he thought to himself, what on earth will they do to me? But Ted, exceptionally, was being examined for a Scholarship only a few weeks after entering Trinity, whereas the aghast young man had already been at the College for five terms, as was normal. Moreover, despite his evident despair, Ted had in fact been successful in the examinations and was duly elected a Scholar in his first year. As an undergraduate he found himself most influenced by the Professor of Latin, D.E.W. Wormell, whom he regarded as a fine scholar, teacher and person; the two would become friends and would collaborate on the Teubner edition of Ovid's *Fasti*, which first appeared in 1978 (41997). Sadly, however, Ted found he could no longer devote the required time to serious chess, although he played for the college team.

At Trinity Ted won the Berkeley gold medal for an examination on Apollonius of Rhodes (including verse composition in the style of Apollonius), the Vice-Chancellor's gold medal similarly for Juvenal (and likewise including verse composition in the manner of Juvenal), and the Gold Medal in Classics in 1954 on the strength of his results in the final examination. He can be seen in his graduation robes and holding his Gold Medal in the photograph which is the frontispiece of his *Festschrift*. Ted treasured these medals for the whole of his career, keeping them in a special

receptacle in his house and showing them to selected visitors with a mixture of shyness and pride, until between the years 2013 and 2016 he arranged for their return to the Department of Classics at Trinity, where the donation is held in a safe box. He was always very proud of his Alma Mater and had been looking forward to revisiting Trinity in 2013 to lecture on the transmission and text of Catullus, but unfortunately he was prevented by ill health from making the journey.

Ted's graduation in 1954 coincided with his first publication, a seven-page review in *Hermathena* (the classical journal of Trinity College) of A.Y. Campbell's radical 1953 edition of the *Odes* and *Epodes* of Horace, who would remain a favourite author throughout his life. In 1955 he was elected to a Research Lectureship at Christ Church, Oxford, where he came under the influence of R.G.M. Nisbet, who was his elder by seven years and since 1952 had been a Fellow of Corpus Christi College. Ted had the highest regard for Nisbet, not only for his scholarly abilities but also because he respected his students and would always listen to their ideas, even if he did not believe them. Nisbet's advice would be acknowledged in one of Ted's last publications, his magisterial discussion of the transmission of the text of Horace (2013). The other main influence upon Ted at Oxford was Eduard Fraenkel, whose seminars showed that problems of detail could lead to the opening up of wider perspectives. In later life Ted was reluctant to reminisce about Fraenkel, of whose inability to tolerate dissent he disapproved: in this he was at one with Nisbet, who, looking back on his own career in 1980, mentioned this failing of Fraenkel's and added that 'It was even more dangerous to produce a crumb of information that he didn't himself possess, and one now eminent scholar was consigned to outer darkness with the comment "obscura diligentia".' The exile was the young Ted Courtney, of whom Fraenkel always remained wary thereafter.

At Oxford he was a friend of G.W. Bond, the Euripidean scholar and fellow alumnus of Inst. and TCD, and a neighbour of P.J. Parsons, the eminent papyrologist, but in 1959 he took up a Lectureship in Classics at King's College, London, where he would remain for more than twenty years. During that time he published roughly forty learned articles on a wide range of Latin prose and verse texts, as well as four books. His collaboration with E.H. Alton and D.E.W. Wormell on the edition of Ovid's *Fasti* was preceded in 1970 by a Teubner text of Valerius Flaccus and in 1977 by a school edition of Juvenal, Satires I, III and X, in collaboration with Niall Rudd, a fellow alumnus of Trinity College and a lifelong friend. Niall, five years older, died in 2015 and was memorialised in a delightful volume to which friends were invited to contribute a favourite line of poetry. Ted's contribution was taken from 'A Grammarian's Funeral' by Robert Browning, a poem which he had regularly recommended to graduate students; 'I have tried in all my scholarly life', wrote Ted, 'to keep in mind the questions which it raises.'

Though Ted was outwardly strict and formal as a lecturer, famous amongst students for his legendary omniscience, he was warm to those who showed interest in the subject. 'Knock on my door with any query any time.' He would invite students to his house in Bromley, where they would be treated to magnificent hospitality by Ted and his wife, Brenda, a nurse whom he had first met in hospital when he was recovering from a minor operation. One second-year undergraduate, horrified to be asked to translate in class a passage of Juvenal's sixth satire containing an obscene term, timidly ventured 'groin' as an acceptable rendering. 'No', roared Ted, 'call a spade a spade. It's *penis*, Mr —, *penis*.' That negative was his trademark. On the eve of his leaving King's for the United

States, his students organised a farewell celebration, of which the highlight was an impersonation competition, the prizes being a framed 'NO!' and a bottle of Irish whiskey. One of the prizes was won by a student who had never even met Ted but whose repeated renderings of 'No!' were based on what he had heard his classicist coevals rehearsing.

The 1980s were a turbulent period in British universities: classicists of a certain age will remember the report produced by John Barron, Professor of Greek and Head of Department at King's College, who recommended the closure or amalgamation of various departments of Classics up and down the country. We do not know what effect, if any, the political atmosphere had on Ted, who by now was a professorial colleague of Barron's, but in 1982 he decided to leave England and move his family (he and Brenda had adopted two young boys) to America's west coast. By this time he had added to his list of publications *A Commentary on the Satires of Juvenal*, dedicated to his wife and sons. This is a masterful work of 650 pages, every one of which demonstrates his intellectual penetration and vast learning, and it was no doubt an important factor in his being appointed Ely Professor of Classics at Stanford University, where he would remain for the next decade.

At Stanford—which he always pronounced 'Stan-ford', giving the '-or-' its full value—there was the opportunity of teaching graduate students who would make their mark on the profession in future years, and those who have cause to be grateful for Ted's teaching include Cynthia Damon, Christopher Faraone, Sara Myers, Jay Reed and James Rives. He and Brenda continued from London the habit, which later they would repeat in Charlottesville, of inviting students to their home for hospitality. Capitalising on his contacts in the United Kingdom, Ted was instrumental in bringing to Stanford as an annual visitor Sir Kenneth Dover, formerly President of the British Academy and, since 1986, retired from the Presidency of Corpus Christi College, Oxford. He himself continued publishing at an extraordinary rate: in addition to thirty-five papers on the usual wide range of authors and topics, he produced critical texts of Juvenal (1984) and the poems of Petronius (1991), an Oxford Text of Statius' *Silvae* (1991), and *The Fragmentary Latin Poets* (1993). This last, the highlight of his time at Stanford, was dedicated to his colleague A.E. Raubitschek, to whom he was close: on his friend's death Ted composed a Latin epitaph, which was published in *The Classical Journal* (95 (1999) 64), while Raubitschek had entrusted Ted with a hand-written (and rather different) version of the memoirs which were published posthumously by *Histos* (Suppl. Vol. 1, 2014).

The publication of Ted's invaluable commentary on the fragmentary Latin poets coincided with his move from Stanford to the University of Virginia, where, thanks to a most generous endowment, there had been established the Basil L. Gildersleeve Professorship of Classics, of which Ted was the first holder. Brenda chose for them an attractive house in the rural area of Ivy, five miles west of Charlottesville: there was a sizeable garden and a basement where Ted could work and keep his books. He maintained the same rate of publishing as before. Besides the usual spate of articles, there was a substantial commentary (450 pages) on Latin verse inscriptions (1995) and another, inevitably shorter, on archaic Latin prose (1999), both of them invaluable, especially for readers less conversant than Ted with the more unfamiliar regions of Latin. His final book, *A Companion to Petronius*, was published in 2001, the year before his retirement, which was marked,

despite his having forbidden it, by a *Festschrift* entitled *Vertis in Vsum* and containing the contributions of twenty-three friends, colleagues and former students.

The journal *Hermathena* had unfortunately seen fit to offer a review copy of *The Fragmentary Latin Poets* to H.D. Jocelyn, who devoted to it two dozen pages of his choicest invective. Jocelyn was known for his destructive predilections and on one occasion had been publicly rebuked by R.G.M. Nisbet; but he had chosen the wrong victim in Ted Courtney, who, for the only time in his life, decided to publish a reply. 'Sometimes', he wrote of Jocelyn, 'he seems to take leave of reality', a verdict which any other victim of Jocelyn will recognise and endorse. When Michael Reeve reviewed *The Fragmentary Latin Poets* in 1999, he said, more justly, 'it is hard to think of any other scholar alive today who could have tackled with such erudition and such independence of judgement the whole range from the minor works of Ennius to Tiberianus and Symmachus'. A second edition was brought out in paperback in 2003 which included 40 pages of Addenda, testifying to Ted's habit of keeping up to date with every classical periodical he could lay his hands on. In his retirement he would visit the university's Alderman Library at least once a week and borrow every new classical monograph, especially commentaries, that came within his capacious interests. When the volumes were returned, they would have the word 'No!' diplomatically pencilled in at various points in the margins.

Retirement brought no diminution in his energies. He continued to publish articles (over thirty appeared in his post-retirement years), he taught verse composition to any graduate student who wished to learn, and he presented himself regularly at departmental talks and social events. One visiting speaker was alarmed that at the end of his talk Ted had asked no questions. Had the paper been so bad that it wasn't worth his asking a question? But he was reassured by one of Ted's former colleagues: 'Don't worry about it: you should have heard what he did to the previous visiting speaker.' At this point in their conversation Ted himself appeared, and, noticing that they were standing next to an advertisement for a forthcoming speaker, a well known papyrologist, said: 'Give that man a papyrus with gaps in it, and you can be sure he will fill them with bad Greek.' (Ted for his own amusement would sometimes write Greek prose compositions, one example being the Thucydidean *hortatio* in which the captain of the Athenian cricket team delivers encouragement to his men, who are playing a match against the Lacedaemonians.) One of my more terrifying moments at the University of Virginia came when Ted asked if he could attend the graduate seminar on the early Roman historians which he had discovered that I was offering. I could hardly turn him down, yet I was acutely conscious that on many of the fragments he had written the standard textbook. 'I shall be as quiet as a mouse', he promised. This turned out to be a downright lie. No sooner had the course got under way than Ted could not stop himself from interjecting—to the delight of the attending students, who could not restrain their astonishment at being in the company of an elderly stranger who appeared to know everything about everything. It was a great relief that, on the occasion when I made an error of Latinity, he refrained from saying 'No!' and waited until the seminarists had dispersed before issuing a tactful correction.

I spent many happy evenings at the house in Ivy. Ted and Brenda would very kindly make a point of inviting me to dinner whenever I returned to Charlottesville from visiting England; Ted, who was very sociable and enjoyed gossip, would always hope that I had some interesting news for

him about the classical scene back home. Nevertheless, as the years passed, he and Brenda decided that it would be more sensible to move into the city of Charlottesville itself, and Ted took the opportunity of divesting himself of most of his books: he donated them to William and Mary, where colleagues are now able to benefit from precious marginalia assembled over decades.

It was a great honour to be invited to succeed so great a scholar in the Gildersleeve Professorship, and a unique privilege to be on such familiar terms with him for fourteen years. I showed him everything I wrote and, as goes without saying, valued his reactions even when I ended up by disagreeing with him; what is truly remarkable is that *he* showed me everything which *he* wrote: this is one of the more humbling experiences of my professional life, but it also says something significant about Ted Courtney.

It is difficult to think that any pupil today would receive the kind of education that was offered at the Royal Belfast Academical Institution in the 1950s, and, even if such training were available, it is impossible to believe that it would produce so prodigious a scholar. What Latinist can match the totality of his command of the subject? His writings range between verse and prose texts and cover almost every major author, and, although many of them are designed to improve the text in question, it is quite misleading to think of him only as a textual critic. He wrote on the structure of poems and books, on acrostics, on the transmission of texts, on matters of grammar and syntax; he was an expert in Roman social history, and, if anyone doubts his abilities as a literary critic, they have only to read his incomparable analysis of Horace's *Satires*, particularly the satire on the Bore. Each of his contributions is founded on the learning for which he is famous, and it is very strange indeed that in a long life he received no honour from any institution dedicated to the recognition of academic eminence. What he thought about this, if anything, I have no idea. He cannot have been unaware of his scholarly superiority, although acting the great man was utterly foreign to his nature: one of his most attractive characteristics was his failure to draw attention to himself. Fortunately in his writings he has left us a legacy by which his greatness will be remembered.

Ted passed away peacefully on 24 November 2019, his wife at his bedside; they were married fifty-seven years.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For information and other help I am grateful to Anna Chahoud, Cynthia Damon, Roy Gibson, Roland Mayer, Damien Nelis, Richard Rutherford and Terry Walsh.