

PROFESSOR MALCOLM DAVIES Emeritus Fellow

In 1960, Donald Russell took a sabbatical. Hardly earth-shaking news this, even if it was his first ever, and therefore occupied a whole academic year. But given that he had been appointed to his tutorial Fellowship in 1948, an unusual degree of devotion to teaching is suggested, and one quite at odds with present attitudes in academia with its (over?) emphasis upon research at the expense of teaching. Further light is cast if we ponder a few more details from the earlier stages of his career, allowing glimpses of a world long vanished in many ways. We do this the more easily now, since the publication of *Rediscovering E.R. Dodds* (Oxford 2019), for the various contributors to this volume included D., whose thesis had been supervised by Dodds from 1947 onwards. This contribution must rank as the final published work by D., bringing his academic career appropriately full circle.

In his contribution, D. observes that he 'had very rashly...wanted to write a commentary on Plutarch's dialogue on the daimonion of Socrates...Dodds wisely tried to persuade me to do something less ambitious...I should have taken his advice. But I was obstinate, and so harnessed myself to a job beyond my powers'. The selfcriticism is characteristically frank, but the error, if error it was, had no seriously damaging consequences, since the next year D. was appointed to the Fellowship at St John's College, where he continued, despite allurements from Christ Church conveyed via Trevor Roper, until retirement in 1989. To modern eyes, it may seem extraordinary that someone with no doctorate or published work to his credit should have been elected in this way. But, as K. J. Dover has stated in his autobiography *Marginal Comments* (London, 1994), 'to go without a doctorate was', at the time, 'no disadvantage at Oxford. There was even a tendency to look askance at people who completed doctorates, because it meant that they had not been snapped up for tutorial Fellowships and had stayed on the shelf for three years'. That it should have been Dover who makes this observation is very relevant, since it was against competition from him that D. gained his appointment. Dover, whose British Academy obituary D. was later to write, generously observes that D. 'was certainly right for St John's,' and adds the comment that their Ancient History tutor at Balliol, Russell Meiggs 'had warned me, with characteristic bluntness, that D. 'had a better brain' than I had, although he would never be so good a historian'. That latter consideration told in Dover's favour when he soon afterwards applied with success for a Fellowship at Balliol, since this involved teaching some Greek history. There was no need for this extra complication at St John's, where Sherwin-White was already installed as Ancient History tutor. With him, D. enjoyed a harmonious relationship, finally writing his obituary for the College notes. I add to the oral tutorial testimonial just quoted, another from D.'s former literature tutor at Balliol, Roger Mynors (later professor of Latin at both Cambridge and then Oxford). He once told me in D.'s presence that he had never been quite sure whether the apparently effortless brilliance of this pupil's work was due to extensively intensive work behind the scenes, or to the fact that he simply did not perceive that the work he was expected to do was at all difficult. The way in which Mynors related this dilemma suggested that he was inclined to the latter explanation.

Dover as quoted added that St John's 'wanted someone whose teaching would be mostly on the Latin side'. This was to balance the Greek teaching of a Fellow already in post, but also implied the College's fear for the future of ancient Greek as a course. I am not the only person to whom D. confided that he had initially shared this fear, anticipating that, by the end of his tenure, Greek would be attracting the same number of candidates as a subject such as Arabic. Not a little of the credit for averting this bleak prognostication belongs to D. himself. In collaboration with his friend and colleague Robin Nisbet, he finally achieved what had eluded such great minds as Dodds and Dover, and reformed the second part of the classics course so that it could continue with the study of literature (for details see their contribution to *Oxford Classics: Teaching and Learning 1800–2000* chapter 14). The greater part of D.'s publications do indeed deal with Greek matters, but he was much more than competent in Latin. As witness his publication in his mid-seventies of five (count

'em!) volumes of Loeb text and translation of Quintilian, in which he had the help of Michael Winterbottom (Nisbet's successor as Corpus professor of Latin), who had earlier produced an Oxford Text of that author. The experience inspired the latter to publish an article in 2000 entitled 'More Problems in Quintilian,' an offprint of which, despatched to D., bore the signature 'with best wishes and thanks (what fun it was!)'.

Back to the beginning. As D. himself explains in the volume on Dodds cited above, he gradually became mildly 'depressed at' his 'inability to cope' with the over-ambitious research topic there mentioned, and was besides 'engrossed by teaching (fifteen hours or so a week was common those days)', but was also beginning to change his 'interests'. One new interest was the ancient literary critic known as 'Longinus', and a commentary on that author's treatise on 'the Sublime' was D.'s first substantial publication. 'I am so glad your book is out' wrote the famous and formidable Eduard Fraenkel, on an offprint for him dated 30.4.64. D.'s own preface was more modest: 'I shall be content if I have given the beginner some help and encouraged others to attack the innumerable problems of this text with more success than has attended me'. With this infinitely characteristic (and, most will think, grotesquely meiotic) understatement, we take leave of Donald Russell near his mid-forties, on the threshold, incredibly, of well over half a century of further publications.