

Niall Livingstone



18.10.1966 - 30.07.2019

τὼ σ' ἄμοτον κλαίω τεθνηότα μείλιχον αἰεὶ (*Iliad* 19.301)

My dear friend and colleague, Dr Niall Livingstone, died suddenly on 30 July this year. His kindness and gentleness, his deep and serious scholarship, his erudition, humour, and eloquence stay with me and with many of his friends, students, and colleagues.

Niall Livingstone was born at Ann Arbor, Michigan, the youngest of five siblings, in 1966. His father, Don Livingstone, was appointed Professor of Pure Mathematics at the University of Birmingham in 1968, so the young Niall came to spend his childhood in Birmingham, where his mother, Trudy Livingstone was a politician and campaigner, and Labour councillor for the Birmingham ward of Billesley from 1980 until 1992. Niall went to King Edward VI Camp Hill Boys Grammar School in Birmingham, where he was taught Greek and Latin by Mr Keith Prowse, acknowledged in Niall's last book as an exceptional and inspiring teacher. Niall went on to win an Edward Majoribanks

Scholarship to read *Literae Humaniores* at Christ Church, Oxford. In 1987 he was awarded the Gaisford Prize for Greek prose, an achievement he saw as a tribute to the outstanding teaching he received at Camp Hill, and from his tutor at Christ Church, Richard Rutherford. He returned to Christ Church to write his doctorate under the supervision of Doreen Innes of St Hilda's College, and was awarded his DPhil in 1995 for his commentary on Isocrates' *Busiris*. Niall lectured at various Oxford colleges and was a research and teaching fellow at St Andrews University before taking up his post in the Classics Department at the University of Birmingham in 1999. He was delighted to return to his home city and to have the opportunity to work with talented students from all over the UK and the world, but most especially with students who, like him, had been educated in Birmingham's state schools. He became a much-loved colleague and dear friend, and was an exceptionally dedicated teacher.

The *Busiris* commentary, published by Brill in 2001, laid the foundations for Niall's life-long study of Greek oratory, politics, and education. He continued to work on Isocrates, too, in journal articles and in a chapter for the volume *Pedagogy and Power: Rhetorics of Classical Learning* (1998), which Niall co-edited with Yun Lee Too. He collaborated with Birmingham colleagues too, on a volume on Epigram for the *Greece & Rome* 'New Surveys in the Classics', published in 2010, and then on the *Companion to Greek Mythology* in 2013. His final book, *Athens: The City as University* (2017) throws new light on the idea of citizenship itself, and on the ways in which citizenship and learning are intertwined in ancient Athens where, according to Livingstone, learning was 'pervasive and immersive' and also 'creative, interactive, irregular, and fluid'. It is not too far a reach to claim, based on my observation of his own practice of both teaching and learning, that at its best it was all those things. Niall was a genuine intellectual, in possession of an exceptionally wide range of learning. His knowledge and understanding of both Greek and Latin were unparalleled in our generation —+ but he was also an intensely modest person, who wore his learning lightly and could not abide intellectual bullies, or any kind of self-importance or grandiosity.

When he was not immersed in matters Greek, Niall read voraciously. He had an encyclopaedic knowledge of Agatha Christie novels and PG Wodehouse, but he also particularly liked modernist poetry and fiction: WH Auden, TS Eliot, Virginia Woolf, Ezra Pound and Louis MacNeice. He loved theatre and opera, and enjoyed music particularly together with his partner Liz. Niall was also a gifted and creative cook, and loved to cook for Liz and for his friends. Niall was a socialist and a feminist; in this he was profoundly influenced by his mother Trudy, a Labour councillor and the chair of the Birmingham City Council's Women's Committee. The support and solidarity he showed to his women colleagues will not be forgotten.

Niall leaves behind Liz Clements who was his partner and his soulmate for twenty-six years, his siblings, his nephews and nieces, and great-nephews and great-nieces.

At his funeral, I read a new translation of Sappho's fragment 16 left in Niall's papers, which I append to this obituary.

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Sappho – Fragment XVI (translated by Niall Livingstone)

Some say a force of cavalry, others of infantry,
others of warships are on this dark earth
the finest thing: but I say it is whoever someone loves.
It is quite easy to explain this
to anyone: since the woman who so far surpassed
all others in beauty, Helen, left
her most war-like husband
and set off sailing for Troy, and quite forgot
her daughter and her own dear parents
but was led astray [...]
for it was bright [...]
and with no effort [...]
which makes me think of Liz, who is not here:
her lovely way of walking, her face sparkling with light,
I would rather see than all the chariots of Lydia,
or armèd men drawn up for battle.