

E.J. (Ted) Kenney 1924-2019



by Roland Mayer

Edward John Kenney, Ted to everyone, was born in Hornsey, London, on 29 February 1924, a birth date he relished. His high intelligence was early recognized, and he was sent to school at Christ's Hospital, where linguistic training was traditional and rigorous. Mastery of verbal technique attracted Ted strongly, and so he particularly enjoyed verse composition, at which he was very deft. He left the school as Senior Grecian, and his devotion to it was life-long. He frequently referred to CH in the inaugural lecture he delivered after he became the Kennedy Professor of Latin at Cambridge ('New frameworks for old: the place of literature in the Cambridge classical

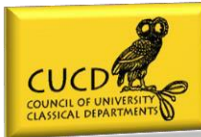


course', 1975, pp. 4-5, 21). The school commissioned John Ward to paint a portrait of Ted, who was a benefactor and almoner:

<https://artuk.org/discover/artworks/professor-edward-kenney-69868>

Ted secured a scholarship at Trinity College, Cambridge, but before going up he served in the Royal Corps of Signals. To both these institutions as well he was strongly attached (his favoured neckwear was either his 'First and Third Trinity' boat club tie or that of the Signals). After securing his BA in 1949, he began research, but accepted a lectureship at Leeds University from 1951-2. He returned to Trinity as a research fellow in 1952-3, a fellowship that meant a great deal to him. But in 1953 he became a fellow of Peterhouse, where he remained until 1991. Of the college offices he held the most personally satisfying must have been that of Perne Librarian. From 1959-65 he was an editor of the *Classical Quarterly*. In 1967-8 he was the Sather Professor at the University of California, Berkeley; the lectures he delivered there were published in 1974, *The classical text: aspects of editing in the age of the printed book* (an Italian translation of it was published in 1995). This work is a history of textual criticism from the Renaissance to the present, something never attempted before, as his friend Sebastiano Timpanaro had to point out. In 1968 he was elected to a fellowship of the British Academy and in 1974 he became Kennedy Professor, a post he held until 1982, when he retired early, so as to spare the Classics Faculty his salary during a particularly severe recession.

During his retirement the number of Ted's publications rocketed, so it is high time that an account of his contribution to classical scholarship be provided. It may surprise some readers of this memorial to be told that Ovid was once a rather neglected writer. In his inaugural lecture Ted had commented, pp. 13-14, that 'it was something of a struggle to convince those who had to be convinced that Ovid's *Metamorphoses* was a suitable subject for special study in Part II of the Classical Tripos'. Despite scholarly neglect he was drawn to Ovid by his masterly control of the Latin language in verse, his humour, and his undeviating commitment to the profession of poetry. More will be said of this in due course. For his part Ted was committed to the traditions of classical scholarship, so a critical edition of Ovid's text was an obvious starting place for an appreciation of the poet's achievement. His edition of the *amatoria* appeared in 1961, and a revised edition was published in 1994. A paper on 'The poetry



of Ovid's exile', published in *PCPS* n.s. 11 (1965) 37-49, initiated a re-assessment of the poet's final works. He published a commentary on the 'double' epistles, XVI-XXI, in 1996. In 2011 appeared his commentary on *Metamorphoses* VII-IX in Italian. Of particular value are the introductory essays and notes which he provided for the translations by A. D. Melville of the *Metamorphoses* (1986), amatory poems (1990), and *Tristia* ('Sorrows of an Exile', 1992).

In 1966 a new Oxford Classical Text of the so-called 'Appendix Vergiliana' appeared, the product of the collaboration of a quartet of editors. Ted edited the *Dirae* (*Lydia*), the *Copa*, the *Elegiae in Maecenatem*, and most significantly the *Moretum*. In 1984 he returned to this poem with an edition of the text with translation, introduction and commentary. The part of the introduction which sets this project apart is entitled 'Treatment, Tone, Intention'. Ted divined that this mock-heroic poem, a description of a poor farmer's lunch, was far from a literary skit on a contemporary poetical fad for the supposedly simple life of the countryside. He found the depiction of rural life as a perpetual struggle sharp and precise; it created in the reader a sense of participation, a feeling of what it might be like to exist at that low level of subsistence. For Ted the impression of the Roman countryside left by the unknown poet was more authentic than that of the *Georgics*, and oddly moving.

Ted's thinking about the proper approach to the study of classical literature is to be found in his inaugural lecture of 1975, a highly personal document, testimony to his attachment to his old school, to his sense of taking his place in the long tradition of classical scholarship, and to his love of English literature. One comment stands out: he ventured the observation that 'it seems to me to be a weakness ... that our approach to Greek and Latin literature does not generate ... moral fervour' (p. 7). Moral fervour had conspicuously animated Ted's commentary on the third book of Lucretius' *De Rerum Natura* (1971), perhaps his most personal piece of scholarship. The Ovid of the exilic poetry also kindled in him a moral fervour. In the introduction to Melville's translation of the *Tristia* (1992, especially pp. xvii-xviii) Ted drew attention to the link between Lucretius and Ovid, and he credited Ovid with 'courage and principle' and a 'controlled but unsleeping indignation' in his literary campaign of 'psychological warfare against Augustus'. He asserted that '*Tristia* II ... deserves to rank high in the annals of protest against the tyranny of censorship'. Of course by the time Ted wrote



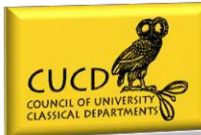
that the notion that Ovid should be taken seriously and that classical literature should be treated 'as such' was firmly established within the scholarly community. But in the mid-1970s his personal credo was something of a challenge.

To disseminate his favoured approach to the study of classical literature Ted along with Pat Easterling founded and edited the Cambridge Greek and Latin Classics series of commentaries, now known world-wide as the 'Green & Yellow' series. In the introduction of his own commentary on Lucretius, p. vii, Ted defined his aim as being 'to provide the student with the guidance that he needs for the interpretation and understanding of the book as a work of literature'. That was and remains the headline aim of every contribution to the Cambridge commentaries.

The inaugural lecture was also a public avowal of Ted's love of English literature. Dickens's Mr Micawber puts in an early appearance on p. 2, and P. G. Wodehouse is quoted on p. 10, Kipling on p. 20. The element common to all these writers is that they are high stylists, unmistakable in their own individual ways. Ted regarded all sound literature as one. For instance in an essay on the style of Juvenal in Braund & Osgood's *A companion to Persius and Juvenal* (2012), p. 128, he ranked the satirist's vivid description of a tenement flat in 3.203-7 with Dickens's descriptions of Sarah Gamp's apartment or Todgers's in *Martin Chuzzlewit*, or the Veneerings' dinner-party in *Our Mutual Friend*. Ted's own command of English, and his insistence that it be stylishly and correctly used, proved something of a hazard during undergraduate supervisions. The mispronunciation of words, 'deity', say, or 'sonor'ous' or 'consumm'ate', would be briskly corrected, with confirmation of the 'correct' accent by apt quotation of some verse from Pope or W. S. Gilbert. It need hardly be said that Ted's own English prose style was impeccable.

To return to Ted's scholarship in 1990 his commentary on Apuleius' tale of 'Cupid & Psyche' was published, and in 1998 his translation of the whole of *The Golden Ass* for Penguin Classics. This was his only excursion into Latin prose, but there was no break in the consistency of what he most admired in a writer: Apuleius' 'almost insolent assurance' of his control of diverse literary materials and of language. And of course the novel is funny too.

In the second edition of his commentary on Lucretius III, dated May 2014, Ted concluded the Preface thus: 'My wife has never spared herself in the labour of



retrieving books from shelves now inaccessible to me, and this edition is dedicated to her in love and gratitude.' It is time to say something of Anne. Gwyneth Anne Harris was born in Highgate, London. Her father, Henry Albert Harris, held the Chair of Anatomy in Cambridge from 1934. The family home was in west Cambridge, at 5 Selwyn Gardens, a house built by the classical scholar and professor of English, A. W. Verrall. Anne was an artist and studied painting at the Cambridge School of Art. She was a beauty. On her marriage to Ted in 1955 her ironical father felt that his youngest child had come down in the world, married as she was to a fellow of Peterhouse (Harris was a fellow of St John's College) and living in a house with only one staircase on the 'wrong' side of the Cam. They lived at 4 Belvoir Terrace, on the Trumpington Road opposite the Botanic Garden. This suited Anne very well, since she was an inspired gardener. She wrote a charming account of being taken regularly to the Garden as a child, which was published in a newsletter of the Garden's Friends. Their tall house was usually populated by numerous cats, though one of them refused to move from Peterhouse to Belvoir Terrace, so Fuff-Fuff, as he was chiefly known, took up residence in Ted's set on L staircase for the remainder of his life (there is an account of this puss with photograph in the Peterhouse Annual Record 2003/2004, pp. 102-3). They shared a love of music, especially the operas of Handel, Mozart, Verdi and Strauss. They were also both great collectors of books. Anne put together an impressive library of illustrated books on plants and gardens, whilst Ted's collection of classical works was little short of amazing for a private scholar's library. Their marriage was happy, and Anne's support of an increasingly frail Ted in their final years was valorous. It was no great surprise that she had no wish to survive him for long, and indeed a few months after his death on 23 December 2019 she followed him on 25 April 2020, as she wished to do.

Ted's academic manner could be somewhat forbidding, since he had little sympathy with the idle or mediocre. The affection he secured from friends and students however is testimony of the geniality of his nature. Tom Gould for instance dedicated his book, *Platonic Love* (1963), to Ted. He took special pleasure in his enduring friendship with Sebastiano Timpanaro. A group of his former undergraduates at Peterhouse clubbed together to pay for a bookcase in his honour in the new college library. A dozen of his postgraduate students produced a Festschrift, entitled *Amor:*



Roma, Love and Latin literature, to celebrate his sixty-fifth birthday in 1999. What stands out is the persistent expression of gratitude from contributors to the 'Green & Yellow' commentaries. As Rhiannon Ash put it in the Preface to her commentary on Tacitus *Histories* II (2007), p. viii: 'It is something of a convention for those working on Latin texts in this series to offer him warm thanks, but I now know at first hand what an extraordinary privilege and pleasure it is to work with someone whose erudition, humour and patience has such a beneficial impact on every word of the commentary.' Ted's former student, the justly lamented Neil Hopkinson, dedicated the revised edition of *A Hellenistic Anthology* (2020) to the memory of Ted and Anne Kenney.