

IAN DU QUESNAY

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by Prof. A.J. Woodman



In the old days the Classical Association of England and Wales (as it was then called) would invite itself each year to some unfortunate local branch and oblige it to host the Association's Annual General Meeting. The cabal in Wales which ran the Association had decided that in the spring of 1973 its unfortunate victim would be the branch in Lancaster, and it was there, almost fifty years ago, that I first met Ian Du Quesnay. He was a young lecturer whose undergraduate and professional career had been spent entirely in Birmingham, and he was anxious to meet fellow Latinists from further afield; when we met, I happened to be in the company of Nicholas Horsfall, by whom I had not yet been blacklisted, and the three of us agreed that we



would sit together at the Association dinner. I wrote our names down on the seating plan, and I remember Nicholas being deeply impressed that I could spell 'Du Quesnay' on such short acquaintance. Perhaps I recalled the name from a chapter on Ovid's *Amores* which was published that year – Ian's first publication and already a classic.

In the early 1970s David West, the professor of Latin at Newcastle, established there a forum for northern Latinists called Seminar Boreas. Ian was an enthusiastic participant, and, when Boreas in mid-decade was replaced by Francis Cairns' Liverpool Latin Seminar, he naturally transferred his attendance there. He was a great admirer of Cairns' first book, *Generic composition in Greek and Roman poetry* (1972), and, since Ian was never backward in expressing his opinions at seminars and the like, the two scholars came to have the greatest respect for each other's scholarly views. Theirs was a crucial friendship. Ian could find writing difficult, being more interested in wrestling with an intellectual problem until he had solved it to his own satisfaction, rather than in publishing the results of his endeavours so that others could benefit from them. Professor Cairns, however, was a great believer in publication (and indeed had started his own publishing business), and he joked that he would sit Ian in a locked room in the house in Birkenhead and not let him out until he had drafted an article ready for publication in *PLLS, Papers of the Liverpool Latin Seminar*. Thus was published Ian's brilliant study of Virgil's Fourth Eclogue in 1977, followed in 1981 by his extraordinary discussion of Eclogue 1, explaining, seemingly for the first time, key aspects of the poem which had been persistently misunderstood. The paper is typical of Ian: it is over 150 pages long, has more than 650 footnotes, and six pages of closely printed bibliography, yet it constituted only the first part of a longer treatment; the second part was promised but, to general regret, never appeared.

By the late 1970s I was married, and in the years BC ('Before Children') my wife and I would pay happy visits to Ian and his wife in Harborne, and they would come to visit us in turn in Newcastle, where I was a lecturer. My photograph albums record our trips to the Cheviot Hills, the Roman Wall and Holy Island, where I



remember Ian relishing the crab sandwiches. I think he always looked forward to our visits to the Midlands, since it gave him an excuse to go to Oxford on a book-buying expedition. Oxford in those days had several excellent bookshops, and Ian was well known to the Classics department in Blackwells. He always bought far more than me, as he built up his magnificent library, and I remember terrifyingly fast drives back to Birmingham in the evening darkness, sitting between piles of books in the Du Quesnays' Morris Minor shooting brake. Once back in his study, which looked out onto their garden and its wonderful magnolia tree, Ian would keep me up into the small hours, dilating on whatever problem was preoccupying him at the time. He read every new book that appeared and was possessed of a formidable learning of which it was impossible not to be in awe.

His two papers in *PLLS* appeared either side of two other papers on the Eclogues, both of which came out in 1979. The first was an analysis of Eclogue 5 in *Proceedings of the Virgil Society* which, along with his study of Eclogue 4, was reprinted by Philip Hardie in the first of his volumes entitled *Virgil* (1999). The second paper was an exploration of intertextuality in Eclogue 2. David West and I had already co-edited a volume of literary-critical essays on Latin poetry in 1974, and, once each of us had got to know Ian, we agreed that he would be our first choice to be invited to contribute to our sequel, *Creative imitation and Latin literature*. Ian submitted a brilliant chapter on the relationship between Virgil's second Eclogue and the poetry of Theocritus, identifying and explaining many of the imitative techniques which would be taken up by other scholars when allusion and intertextuality became a popular topic in later decades. Ian never seemed interested in scholarly fame but I think it was with a rueful eye that he saw credit being given elsewhere for matters on which he had written in pioneering fashion years before.

It is as well to reflect at this point on the self-confidence of a young scholar who could think of embarking on the study of Virgil's Eclogues, widely regarded as some of the most difficult and controversial poems in Latin, and who could achieve such results without ever having enjoyed an extended period of research: within a mere year of graduation in 1968, Ian had accepted the offer of a temporary



lectureship in Birmingham, which soon evolved into a permanent position. David West and I took it for granted that in due course Ian would be offered a professorship of Latin in a university somewhere in the country, and I discovered years later that Michael Stokes, then professor of Greek at Durham, had thought of Ian as a successor to Gavin Townend when he retired from the Chair of Latin there. But things were to turn out differently. One day in 1983 Ian phoned me to say that he was considering applying for a lectureship in Classics which had been advertised in Cambridge, and, if he decided to apply, would I act as one of his referees. I had no hesitation in saying that he should certainly apply, but I told him that he needed a referee with more clout than me, and I suggested that he approach the Corpus Christi Professor of Latin at Oxford, R.G.M. Nisbet. I happened to know that Nisbet had been greatly impressed by Ian's extended defence of generic interpretation in his paper on Eclogue 1, and I thought it likely that he would be willing to write strongly on Ian's behalf. So it proved, and Ian left Birmingham for Cambridge. He had been ineligible to apply to Cambridge or Oxford as a sixth-former because he had no Greek, which his school in Skegness did not teach.

Over the course of the next twenty years, in addition to his service to Jesus College as successively Admissions Tutor and Senior Tutor, Ian established himself as one of the leading Latinists in Britain. An earlier Cambridge Latinist, L.P. Wilkinson, believed that scholars should spend their time on major authors rather than peripheral texts. Although Ian was certainly familiar with many peripheral texts, his arrival in Cambridge coincided with his move from Virgil to Horace. David West and I were keen that he should contribute to our third collaborative volume, *Poetry and politics in the age of Augustus*, which came out in 1984 and for which Ian chose to write on the first book of Horace's *Satires*. This famous essay overturned much of the current thinking on the *Satires*, and its continuing influence may be inferred from the frequency with which it is quoted in Professor Emily Gowers' commentary on the first Book. Such independence of thought is another of Ian's characteristics. Recently I was talking to a well-known Latinist about a poem of Catullus and he mentioned a theory which he assumed was common knowledge but of which I had never heard; since I thought I was familiar with the scholarship on the poem, I asked him where



the theory had come from, and he worked out that he must have heard it decades previously, when as an undergraduate he attended Ian's Cambridge lectures on the poet. Another former Cambridge student, now a well-known Latin professor in the United States, wrote to me recently: 'When I think of Cambridge, I think of Ian.' After Ian had been in Cambridge for some time and had reached a stage in his career which required an external assessment, I was asked by the Chair of the Faculty if I would write in his support; this time I did so, and I remember writing that as an interpreter of Latin literature Ian was without equal in Cambridge.

In 1992 Ian returned briefly to Latin elegy, contributing a characteristic paper on Propertius to a volume which marked the retirement of David West from his Chair at Newcastle. The same year saw the retirement of Robin Nisbet from the Corpus Chair in Oxford, and Ian participated in the conference which marked both that event and the bimillenary of Horace's death: his 60-page paper on *Odes* 4.5 appeared in the conference volume in 1995 and was later selected by Michèle Lowrie for reprinting in her *Oxford Readings* (2009). In 2002 he produced an in-depth analysis of Horace's first Epode for a volume which Denis Feeney and I co-edited. It cannot be said that these latter papers, any more than his others on Horace and Virgil, take a line which is popular with many Latin scholars. As was illustrated very well at the Oxford conference itself, scholars are attracted to subversive readings of Augustan literature, arguing that praise of the ruler is not to be taken at face value and that to think otherwise is to be blind to the subtlety of the poet. Ian, who was as familiar with literary theory as anyone, would have none of this. He believed that Horace and Virgil were supporters of the regime, and he deployed his deep knowledge of the political and social history of the period to demonstrating the truth of his conviction.

Ian's discussion of the first Epode was the last paper he published as a member of the Cambridge Faculty of Classics. By 2002 he was disillusioned with academic life as he found it, and he boldly resigned his position, making a new start as Bursar at Newnham College. His move into administration nevertheless brought only the briefest interruption to his classical productions. In 2012 he and I co-edited a volume on Catullus, to which his contribution was a multi-faceted discussion of Poem



66, Catullus' rendering of Callimachus. This was followed five years later by a detailed analysis of the opening lines of the poem, which appeared in a memorial volume for David West. Last year he and I co-edited *The Cambridge Companion to Catullus*, to which he contributed a magisterial discussion of the entire corpus and of the various libelli to which he thinks each poem belongs. Tragically he did not live to see Professor T.P. Wiseman's latest book on Catullus, *Catullan Questions Revisited*, which was published a mere two weeks after Ian's death and where much of the discussion is occasioned by Ian's arguments.

When David West, whom Ian so much admired, published his Inaugural Lecture at Newcastle in 1970, he entitled it *Individual Voices*. For half a century Ian's was an individual voice in Latin scholarship, instantly recognisable and always enlightening. Throughout that time I enjoyed the privilege of Ian's scholarly advice. Like Francis Cairns, who dedicated to Ian his book on Propertius (2006), I showed Ian drafts of almost everything I wrote, knowing that I could rely on him to give generously of his time to read what I had written and to give me honest and sometimes brutal comments. The future will be very bleak, now that he is no longer at the other end of a phone call or email, ready to debate with relish the questions, large or small, to which his scholarly life was devoted.

After a period of illness Ian passed away peacefully at home in Cambridge on 12 October 2022, his wife and daughters at his bedside.

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