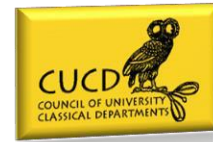


Robert Maltby (1949–2026)

by A. J. Woodman

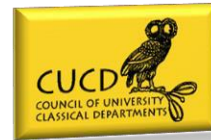


It is not given to many scholars to produce singlehandedly a book that is on the desk of every colleague, easily at hand for constant use, but that was the destiny of Robert Maltby when in 1991 he published *A Lexicon of Ancient Latin Etymologies*. Simple in conception, profound in effect, it is one of those rare works which leave scholars wondering how on earth they managed without it. Robert was tempted to ask himself whether lexicography ran in his genes, since Edward Maltby (1770–1859), a distant relative from the Norfolk branch of the family, read Classics at Pembroke College, Cambridge, revised T. Morell's *Lexicon Graeco-prosodiacum* in 1824, and then



produced *A New and Complete Greek Gradus, or Poetical Lexicon of the Greek Language* in 1830, before going on to become Bishop of Durham. Robert himself, born in Hornsea in the East Riding of Yorkshire on 21 January 1949, proceeded in 1968 to Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, where the senior Latinists at the time were C.O. Brink, R.G.G. Coleman, E.J. Kenney, A.G. Lee, and L.P. Wilkinson. (The younger Fellows, such as J.C. Bramble and R.O.A.M. Lyne, had yet to make their mark and would soon leave for Oxford, although in 1970 J.N. Adams travelled in the opposite direction and, when teaching a class on Vulgar Latin, found that Robert, in a foretaste of things to come, was one of the attenders.) Of the three scholars who specialised in the works of Ovid, it was the urbane Guy Lee whom Robert found most sympathetic, as became clear when he developed an interest in Latin elegy in later years. Robert rowed in the college Eight and remained at Corpus for his PhD, a comparative study of the language of Plautus and Terence, supervised by the genial New Zealander Bob Coleman. Along with John Bintliff, his contemporary, Robert shared ownership of ‘a rather run-down car’, which, when sold to a mutual friend, promptly gave up the ghost.

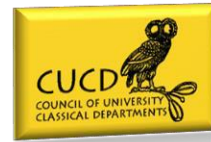
After a postdoctoral spell at the *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae* institute in Munich, to where he would return in the 1980s as a Von Humboldt Fellow, Robert was appointed to a lectureship at Sheffield, where the Firth Professor of Latin was E. Laughton, known principally for *The Participle in Cicero* (1964); other colleagues were A. Drummond, J.H. Molyneux, and R.I. Winton. Robert taught Latin at various levels and alternated between elegy and drama (comedy and Seneca) as his literature topics. The 1980s were an unsettled decade for higher education in Britain generally and for Classics in particular: the Barron Report in 1987 recommended the amalgamation or closure of various Departments of Classics across the country, and in that same year Robert moved north to join the School of Classics at the University of Leeds. Until the very late 1970s Leeds had maintained separate Departments of Greek and Latin, and the Chair of Latin Language and Literature had been occupied successively by E.J. Wood, who during a career of over forty years published neither book nor even article, and O.A.W. Dilke, who seems to have believed that, because the eleventh ode of the first book comprises 56 words, Horace knew at what age he would die. Dilke was succeeded in 1980 by the present writer, who soon came to appreciate having the radically minded Greek historian J.D. Smart as colleague. John Smart was an ardent



Hellenophile, who offered Modern Greek as a special subject and oversaw, and greatly encouraged, an exchange programme with the University of Thessaloniki. Tragically John died shortly after taking early retirement, but Robert inherited his legacy, developing and extending the many Greek links with which his name has long been associated. It is a remarkable tribute to Robert's international influence that *Secretis bene uiuere siluis*, the aptly titled *Festschrift* which was published as recently as 2024 and co-edited by two of his Greek friends, the late Stratis Kyriakidis and Charilaos Michalopoulos (a former PhD student at Leeds), contains so many contributions from scholars based in Greece. Robert also developed, along with Guido Milanese, exchange links with the Catholic University of Milan and then subsequently with the University of Verona, links which Leeds students enjoy to this day.

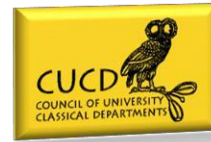
Both Sheffield and Leeds are within easy reach of Liverpool, where in 1975 Professor Francis Cairns established the Liverpool International Latin Seminar, of which Robert became a keen attender. Professor Cairns also founded his own publishing company, which acted as a vehicle for *Papers of the Liverpool Latin Seminar*; two of Robert's earliest papers, on Propertius (1981) and Terence (1983) respectively, were published in *PLLS*, beginning an association which would last for almost thirty years. The paper on Propertius was not Robert's first sortie into elegy. In 1980 Bristol Classical Press published the unassuming *Latin Love Elegy*, an annotated edition of selections from the three major elegists in which Robert acknowledged the help he received from Guy Lee; conversely, when Lee produced the third edition of *Tibullus: Elegies* for Francis Cairns (Publications) Ltd. (1990; ¹1975, ²1982), Robert collaborated on the revision. By this time Professor Cairns himself had transferred to Leeds, filling the vacancy left by my departure in 1984 and bringing with him both his Seminar, which for fifteen years came to be organised by Robert, and his publishing house.

So it was that Robert's incomparable etymological lexicon was published by his colleague in 1991, followed in 2002 by *Tibullus: Elegies*, a magisterial commentary of over 500 pages on Books 1–2 of the Tibullan corpus and dedicated to Guy Lee and to the enterprising textual critic, Barrie Hall. Everyone who knew Robert remarks on his modesty and humility, two of his most striking characteristics, yet this commentary is testimony to his scholarly determination and self-confidence, since P. Murgatroyd had



recently published commentaries on the same two books (1980–94). Murgatroyd’s work comprises two substantial volumes, but Robert knew that he had things to say. The sequel came two decades later with the publication of *Book Three of the Corpus Tibullianum* (2021), an even longer commentary (701 pages) in which it is argued that not only were none of the poems written by Tibullus but neither were any of them written by the authors to whom they are conventionally ascribed; rather they are from the pen of a much later ‘unitary author’, whether male or female, who adopts a series of ‘masks’. Thus Sulpicia disappears from the record. Such an exhilarating thesis no doubt invites considerable scepticism, but it will also draw admiration from those readers who like radical proposals.

This commentary, like the Aris & Phillips edition of Terence’s *Phormio* which he published in 2012, was a product of Robert’s retirement. In the summer of 2010 he left Leeds, where he had been Professor of Latin Philology since 2000 (the original Chair of Latin having been abolished), and in due course he and his wife, the audiologist Maryanne Maltby, settled on the south coast of England in Kent. The bibliography in his *Festschrift* (pp. xxvi–xliv) shows that the torrent of papers which picked up speed in the very early 1990s continued uninterrupted until his death: for three decades he published an average of two papers a year on an extraordinarily wide range of topics, both linguistic and literary, extending from early Latin to late, some of them written in the modern European languages in which he was fluent. Nor was this output at the expense of service to the wider classical community: at the start of the millennium he assumed the editorship of *Classical Quarterly* for five years (2000–2005). Nor, as we have seen, did he cease to publish books. In 2022, in collaboration with Niall W. Slater, there appeared Volume VI of the Loeb series *Fragmentary Republican Latin* (667 pages), comprising Livius Andronicus, Naevius, and Caecilius; Robert was responsible for the first two. Volume VII (a mere 600 pages) was scheduled to be published (as Fate would have it) exactly a week after his death, although he had made sure that my copy, like that of Volume VI, reached me in time for Christmas. He was contracted to produce a new Loeb of Catullus and Tibullus, the desperate need for which makes its loss all the more tragic.



Robert's distinction was not restricted to the printed word. He was a first-rate lecturer, clear and witty, his under-stated humour accompanied by a delightful twinkle behind his glasses. He never attempted to lose his Yorkshire accent and enjoyed telling the story of a sabbatical period he spent at Balliol, when an elderly don admonished him, 'I hope you are going to get rid of that awful regional accent before you leave here!'. Roman cookery was one of his more unexpected specialities, and a lecture on the topic might be accompanied by a practical demonstration, often involving audience participation and a running commentary on some of the more unusual features of Roman recipes.

Robert's fabled kindness is remarked on by all who knew him, and especially by his doctoral students, one of whom has written that Robert 'was a brilliant academic, full of knowledge and genuine scientific curiosity. He combined this with remarkable sweetness, generosity, and patience. He gave his time freely, shared his wisdom without ego, and supported others with kindness that asked for nothing in return. His guidance helped me grow, his encouragement sustained me, and his quiet confidence made difficult moments lighter.' I can testify to these qualities myself. When I was venturing into the field (unfamiliar to me) of Latin elegy, he agreed to read everything I wrote. I would send him my work in chunks, as I produced them, and within a day or two would receive back the most helpful and encouraging comments. After this exchange had finished, we would continue to email each other with snippets of gossip or scholarly questions; indeed I was consulting him on a passage of Velleius only a month before his death, and he came up with a key item of evidence which I could have kicked myself for having missed. We had been hoping to meet up in London last autumn, but he was obliged to cancel at the last minute. It is inexpressibly sad to think that we shall now never be able to rearrange that meeting.

Robert died suddenly and unexpectedly on 6 January, the feast of the Epiphany. His was a rare combination of intellectual accomplishments and he will be very greatly missed by classicists across the globe.¹

¹ For information and other help I am grateful to J. Bintliff, A. Chahoud, S.J. Heyworth, M. Maltby, A. Michalopoulos, S.P. Oakley and E.J. Stafford.