



KENNETH DOVER

Kenneth James Dover

1920–2010

I: 1920–55

KENNETH DOVER was a towering figure in twentieth-century Greek scholarship and on the British academic scene: head of an Oxford college, Chancellor of the University of St Andrews, President of the British Academy. He was knighted for services to scholarship in 1977, and had many honorary degrees conferred upon him. His scrupulous and untiring scholarship, like everything else he did, was governed by one commanding passion: the love of truth and rational argument. Something like this might of course be said of any good scholar, but with Dover it means something special. His commitment to truth and his confidence in reason were both exceptionally strong and exceptionally public. This was the foundation on which his enduring achievement rests. It also occasionally led him into misunderstandings and controversy, most notably in the reactions to his remarkable autobiography, *Marginal Comment*. This was a work of his seventies, and will be considered in its place. For the moment, it is enough to say that it is an essential source. What follows could not have been written without it.

Kenneth James Dover was born on 11 March 1920, the only child of Percy Henry James Dover and Dorothy Healey. His father was a minor civil servant, his mother (to whom Kenneth always had a very great devotion) the daughter of two schoolteachers. They lived at Putney, in south-west London, and Kenneth's education began at a private day-school in

that area. In 1932, he won a scholarship to St Paul's, where he began Greek and, as he himself says, 'was now on course'.¹

St Paul's was—and still is—one of the great classical schools of the country.² Of his teachers there, Kenneth appreciated most George Bean (d.1977) and Philip Whitting (1902–88). These were not ordinary schoolmasters; they were professional scholars with recognised expertise in specialist fields, George Bean as a traveller and archaeologist in Turkey,³ Philip Whitting as a numismatist, at one time secretary to the Academy's Sylloge of British Coins Committee. Himself to become a devoted and ingenious teacher, Dover was always ready to acknowledge such debts. In the speech he made when he was presented with the Festschrift *Owls to Athens* in 1990,⁴ he spoke not only of his schoolmasters but also of some who had taught him in the Army such technical or mathematical knowledge as an artillery officer needed, and also (above all) of his Balliol tutor, Russell Meiggs, to whose stimulating and passionate example he did indeed owe very much.

He went up to Balliol as the top classical scholar in 1938, won a Gaisford Prize in his first year, and collected his First in Mods in 1940. He then joined the Army, and served as a subaltern in an anti-aircraft battery in Egypt, Libya and Italy. He was mentioned in despatches in the Italian campaign, and incidentally acquired a good knowledge of Italian and Italian life. In October 1945 he was back in Balliol, but his long service had made a deep impression on him, and he kept up something of a military bearing, as though he did not want to put it all behind him. In later years, he would stress the experience it had given him of how 'ordinary' people think and feel, and he claimed to have found this useful in his work on the 'popular' morality of the Greeks.

The Balliol to which he returned was a lively place. The group reading Greats included several (myself among them—DAR) who went on to academic careers. Dover stood out. It was humbling to share tutorials with him, and hear his lucid, elegant and cogent essays, especially on Greek history. For it was Greek history, as purveyed by Russell Meiggs, and epigraphy, as offered in classes on the Athenian Tribute Lists by the visiting

¹ *Marginal Comment: a Memoir* (London, 1994), p. 15.

² In 1938, Cyril Bailey congratulated Dover on his Balliol scholarship as a fellow Pauline; in 1955 Dover could do the same for M. L. West.

³ See the memoir by J. M. Cook prefaced to later editions of Bean's *Aegean Turkey* (London, 1989).

⁴ E. Craik (ed.), *Owls to Athens: Essays on Classical Culture Presented to Sir Kenneth Dover* (Oxford, 1990).

professor B. D. Meritt, that most excited his enthusiasm. He was not so keen on Latin (and it may be that this indifference persisted), though a perfectly competent Latinist and Roman historian; and he was not inspired by either of his philosophy tutors, the scholarly Donald Allan and the unsystematic and highly individual Donald MacKinnon. This too *perhaps* had a sequel in Dover's materialist and rationalist critique of Plato, most clearly to be seen in his commentary on the *Symposium* (Cambridge, 1980). Anyway, he won the Ireland Prize Scholarship and got a First in Greats in 1947. He did it all despite the distractions of early married life, for he had married Audrey Latimer in March 1947; they were to be happily married for nearly sixty-three years. He then had a brief spell as a Harmsworth Senior Scholar at Merton, before being recalled to Balliol as Fellow and Tutor in Greek and Greek History in October 1948. Roman history was left to Russell Meiggs, Latin to W. S. Watt, who shortly afterwards moved to Aberdeen and was replaced by Gordon Williams, the very congenial colleague who would later follow Dover to St Andrews.

The seven years at Balliol (1948–55) were a busy time. For most of it he was also sharing (with me—DAR) the Mods teaching at Wadham. This was quite a heavy (and somewhat unpredictable) load. All the same, he made his mark in college affairs, becoming Senior Tutor at an unusually early age, and began his own scholarly work with much enthusiasm and industry. He was a great burner of midnight oil. He had, early in 1948, enrolled as a D.Phil. student, with Arnaldo Momigliano (his own choice) as his supervisor. (We were all fascinated by Momigliano's erudition and range, even if we found his English hard to follow.) Dover's idea was to fix the chronology of forensic speeches and comedies in the early fourth century BC, after the defeat of Athens in the Peloponnesian War. The thesis was soon abandoned: in those days, a thesis was not thought necessary, perhaps not even desirable, if one had other things to do. But he did produce out of it an important study of the order and authenticity of the speeches of Antiphon.⁵ The other works of these Oxford years were his revision of J. D. Denniston's *Greek Particles* (Oxford, 1954) and a (still very valuable) contribution on Greek comedy to a collective volume edited by Maurice Platnauer and called *Fifty Years of Classical Scholarship* (Oxford, 1954). Dover's piece is outstanding. At the same time, seeds were sown of enterprises to be developed later. A brave inquiry by his pupil Robin Nisbet, who asked about the rules which led Dover to suggest a

⁵'The chronology of Antiphon's speeches', *The Classical Quarterly*, 44 (1950), 44–60 (repr. in *The Greeks and their Legacy*).

rearrangement of something in his Greek prose, stimulated the research which led to *Greek Word Order* (Cambridge, 1960); and the need to give specialist lectures on Thucydides laid the foundations of some of his most important and lasting achievements. He later said that Thucydides was the author on whom he had spent most time.

All in all, the main lines of his future achievement were settled by the time he got the call to St Andrews in 1955. They were right to say that they had ‘netted the complete Grecian’. His credentials as an accomplished scholar and a sympathetic interpreter of the creative, boisterous and litigious society of classical Athens were already established. They were strengthened as time went on, but his field of interest never changed or widened.

II: 1955–76

Several considerations motivated Dover’s decision to accept the chair of Greek in St Andrews. He said himself that relations within the fellowship at Balliol in the early 1950s were not entirely congenial to him; he was also despondent about the possibility of achieving the reforms in Greats which he and a few others in Oxford favoured (see further in Section III below). He was therefore attracted to a university and a post which would allow him greater academic autonomy, including the power to shape a Greek syllabus more in his own image on both the literary and historical sides. In addition, he was sure that he and Audrey would be happy in Scotland, a country whose natural landscapes, especially in the Highlands, they both loved. And he saw St Andrews as a wholesome environment in which to bring up two young children.

These factors were all to weigh increasingly with him once he was settled in St Andrews. They contributed to the fact that by the time he received the (predicted) offer of the Regius Chair in Oxford, early in 1960, he was prepared—to the incomprehension of some—to turn it down for both academic and personal reasons. By that stage, moreover, he had already been elected, in 1959, as Dean of Arts in St Andrews (an office he would end up holding twice, during 1960–3 and 1973–5): a conspicuous sign in itself of just how quickly and substantially he became embedded in, and committed to, the larger frameworks of the institution he had joined.

Despite the distinction of previous holders of the St Andrews chair, among them the outstanding Platonist John Burnet and the eccentric

Canadian polymath H. J. Rose, Dover initially had few resources to work with in the Department of Greek. His only colleague at the outset was Ian Kidd, with whom he struck up an excellent relationship that would stand the test of time.⁶ Douglas Young became a third member of the Department early in 1956, and in the 1960s further Hellenists were appointed. In the St Andrews system Dover's workload included many more formal lectures (as many as nineteen a week, spread across all four years of the Scottish undergraduate degree) than he had been previously used to; he said that he had to abandon his painstaking standards of preparation and resort to a more 'journalistic' approach. While he found his students less proficient, on average, than the ones he had taught in Oxford, he also started to discover that it gave him great satisfaction to draw the best out of those even of modest talent, provided they were motivated to work assiduously. Throughout his two decades in St Andrews Dover was consistently recognised as an inspiring and meticulous teacher. He possessed superb gifts of communication and was keen to share his knowledge with students, even if many of them found it hard not to regard him as a somewhat Olympian figure. From the late 1950s onwards, his reputation led to a rapid expansion in the numbers of those—predominantly from Scottish schools and many of them women—studying Greek at St Andrews.

Dover's success in building up the size and standing of the Department owed much to his willingness to distribute his energies equally between teaching and research. This was a hallmark of the central phase of his career. He expanded the syllabus, making sure that Aristophanes, the tragedians, Thucydides, and the orators all had their place in it. Ian Kidd would later describe him as having been 'restlessly eager to experiment with better ways of teaching his subject and extending its scope'. Under Dover's leadership, St Andrews was one of the first universities in Britain to introduce (in 1967) an *ab initio* course in Greek. This was a cause he believed in deeply, a vital means of widening access to Classics at a time when the numbers learning the languages at school were falling. Dover insisted on teaching the beginners himself; he even went so far (it became the stuff of local legend) as to enroll as a beginner in Russian so that he could try to understand better the needs and problems of his own students. He also wrote the beginners' Greek textbook himself. Its rather taxing methods (requiring students to discover many grammatical rules for themselves from examples) led to its eventual replacement by more gentle

⁶They would later establish the remarkable fact that during the battle of Monte Cassino in January 1944 Dover was involved in the bombardment of a German position where Kidd had recently been taken prisoner of war.

introductions, but its very existence was a symptom of his pedagogic zeal. It was entirely appropriate, on more grounds than one, when in 1974 Dover was chosen to chair the Joint Association of Classical Teachers' advisory panel which oversaw production of the very successful *Reading Greek* primer, an event which had a radical effect on maintaining the teaching of Greek in many British universities.

One reason Dover was always able to keep his teaching, administrative, and research duties in harmony was his ferocious (and lifelong) capacity for hard work. Colleagues would observe how he could switch, almost as soon as a class or meeting finished, into a state of intense concentration on his own projects. Between his arrival in St Andrews in 1955 and his departure to the Presidency of Corpus in 1976, those projects gradually assumed proportions which made Dover an internationally renowned Hellenist, one of the finest of his era anywhere in the world. In the seven years of his Fellowship at Balliol, he had started to lay the foundations, as noted earlier, for what would turn into a long-term configuration of six main areas of interest: Old Comedy and therefore especially Aristophanes, who appealed to Dover by his paradoxical combination of earthy realism with intricate poetic virtuosity; fourth-century Attic oratory, which interested him for both rhetorical-cum-literary and broader cultural reasons; Athenian moral and religious values, as seen above all through the lenses of both oratory and comedy (a perspective he had first adopted in his D.Phil. proposal of 1948); Greek sexual mores (he had noticed the lack of any serious scholarship on Greek homosexuality when lecturing on elegiac poetry for Mods during 1952–4); the *Histories* of Thucydides, an author with whose fastidious rationality he undoubtedly felt a close affinity; and, last but by no means least, the Greek language itself, particularly from the point of view of historical stylistics and with sustained attention not only to literary texts but also to the documentary material of Athenian inscriptions.⁷

When Dover moved to St Andrews, he was in the early stages of planning an edition of Aristophanes' *Clouds*, having abandoned earlier plans to edit *Frogs* (to which, however, he would much later return after all, publishing his commentary on it in 1993). He had devoted quite a bit of his time in the early 1950s to work on Old Comedy; at one stage he contemplated producing a new Oxford Classical Text of Aristophanes. His

⁷For a fuller account of the configuration and development of Dover's interests, see the memorial lecture by S. Halliwell, 'Kenneth Dover and the Greeks', available online at <https://irisweb.st-andrews.ac.uk/portal/files/6870022/Dover_and_the_Greeks_web_.pdf>.

growing authority in this field was demonstrated by his contribution (already mentioned) to *Fifty Years of Classical Scholarship* in 1954 and by his survey of Aristophanic scholarship from 1938 to 1955, published in the journal *Lustrum* in 1957: both contain numerous shafts of insight, as well as a wide-ranging command of textual, theatrical, political and other issues. In the event, much of the work on *Clouds* was not carried out till the mid-1960s, though he was lecturing on the play in St Andrews earlier than that. When the edition eventually appeared in 1968, it set the standards for a new generation of Aristophanic scholarship, and not only in the English-speaking world. The text was edited incisively on the basis of a more careful examination of the manuscript tradition than any previously undertaken; the commentary was innovative in its treatment of stagecraft (Dover said he had tried to produce the play in his imagination), unprecedentedly explicit in its discussion of Aristophanic obscenity, and illuminating on almost all the intellectual and cultural questions raised by the comedy. As in all his work, Dover was supremely assured in his observations on the poet's language. He intended, in fact, to write a monograph on the language of Attic comedy: this never materialised, though he was later to write a number of important articles on the style of Aristophanes.

Another area in which Dover worked steadily throughout the 1950s, and which was to yield his first book, was the difficult and elusive topic of Greek word order. He was fascinated by the problem of how far any clear principles could be discerned behind the considerable freedom of word order which the highly inflected nature of Greek makes available to its users. This was an area where his comparative study of inscriptions bore fruit: variations even in simple documentary formulae enabled him to establish a basic analytical model which could then be adapted, and made more complicated, for the scrutiny of literary texts. *Greek Word Order*, which was published in 1960 (after the material had been presented in the Gray Lectures at Cambridge the previous year), is the most technical of his books, partly because of its employment of symbolic notation and statistical methods; but it is also masterly in its compressed, fine-grained reasoning. The work sheds light, in a way very few scholars could even have conceived of attempting, on lexical, syntactical and logical determinants of Greek word order. And it gives glimpses of what became a salient Doverian trait: a combination of philological precision with a nuanced sensitivity to the play of style in language.

By the time *Greek Word Order* appeared Dover was already embarked on a major new venture which was to prove a prime cause of delay in the completion of *Clouds*. The death in January 1959 of A. W. Gomme,

formerly Professor of Greek in Glasgow, meant that his *Historical Commentary on Thucydides* (*HCT*) was left unfinished; three volumes had so far been published. Dover was invited to undertake completion of Gomme's magnum opus in collaboration with Anthony Andrewes, Wykeham Professor of Ancient History at Oxford. For the fourth volume of the commentary, Dover assumed prime responsibility for Books VI–VII of the *Histories*, on which he had already lectured at Oxford; he pressed ahead with his work on these while he was Visiting Lecturer at Harvard from September 1960 to January 1961. When, because of Andrewes' other commitments, the volume was held up (it appeared eventually in 1970), Dover published his own abridged editions of Books VI and VII, aimed principally at undergraduates, in 1965. The happy and mutually stimulating collaboration with Andrewes was rounded off in 1981 by the fifth and final volume of the *HCT*, covering Book VIII of the *Histories*: Dover's primary contribution to this was a long, probing appendix on 'strata of composition', including subtle sifting of the evidence for Thucydidean changes of mind. Producing this appendix, he later said, gave him 'more lasting satisfaction' than anything else he had written.⁸

Dover's relationship to Thucydides is central to his cast of mind as a Hellenist. The historian's austere intelligence, tough realism, and artfully disciplined use of words appealed profoundly to comparable strands in Dover's own make-up. Pondering Thucydides, moreover, sometimes reminded Dover of things he had experienced himself during wartime service in North Africa and Italy; this explains in part why he could not read the narrative of the Athenians' retreat from Syracuse in Book 7 of the *Histories*, even when he had done so numerous times before, without, as he put it, 'feeling the hair on the back of my neck stand on end'.⁹ But he did not idolise the historian, any more than he did other Greeks: he could identify blindspots in him, firmly resisted the tendency to regard him as an 'authority', and often stressed how few of Thucydides' claims could be independently corroborated. A useful précis of Dover's views on Thucydides is provided by the 1963 pamphlet which he wrote for the *Greece & Rome* series of *New Surveys in the Classics*. But he never tired of revisiting the author later in his career: he would write a series of further articles on him in the 1980s.

Dover seems always to have been prepared to work on more than one demanding project simultaneously. Even while the continuation of

⁸ *Marginal Comment*, p. 76.

⁹ *The Greeks* (London, 1980), p. 35.

Gomme was running alongside the edition of *Clouds* in the 1960s, and amidst all his other duties (he was, among other things, co-editor of *Classical Quarterly* from 1962 to 1968), he found time from 1962 onwards to start developing some ideas about Plato's *Symposium*, as well as writing a very substantial and original paper on Archilochus in 1963 for a colloquium at the Fondation Hardt institute in Switzerland.¹⁰ The Archilochus piece is arguably one of his finest individual articles. It adduced comparative material from preliterate song cultures (drawing on a knowledge of Pacific languages Dover had precociously cultivated in his teens) to enrich its case for insisting that interpretation of the poet's work, and of archaic Greek song more generally, needs to be fully alert to the possibilities of fictionalised personae, rather than treating first-person utterances in such texts as straightforwardly autobiographical.

The turn to Plato's *Symposium* was to have far-reaching repercussions for Dover's work. Ever since finishing Greats in 1947, he had acquired something of an aversion to philosophy, both ancient and modern; with just a few exceptions (including Aristotle's zoology and Xenophanes' radical questioning of anthropomorphic religion) he thought its concerns and procedures mostly arid. Plato in particular, with his idealist metaphysics and his critique of bodily pleasures, Dover found antithetical to his own outlook on life (which he summed up by calling himself 'an English empiricist to the core').¹¹ But he was never in any doubt about Plato's greatness as a prose writer. Since the *Symposium* is the most brilliantly written of all the dialogues, it was an obvious choice when Dover was required to teach some Plato. Soon, however, it was the work's homoerotic sensibility which started to preoccupy him. Thinking about the *Symposium* reinforced his conviction of the need for a new examination of Greek homosexuality and he began to form plans for a book on the subject. Invited to give three special lectures at University College London in 1964, Dover opted to discuss aspects of the *Symposium*. The lectures produced a trio of significant articles, one of which, 'Eros and nomos' (*Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies*, 1964), laid out the groundwork for an account of Athenian attitudes to sexual behaviour which would eventually be elaborated into the arguments of *Greek Homosexuality* (Cambridge, MA, 1978).

¹⁰J. Pouilloux and nine other authors, *Archiloque (Entretiens sur l'Antiquité Classique X)* (Geneva, 1963).

¹¹*Marginal Comment*, p. 146.

By the later 1960s Dover's scholarly reputation was assuming formidable proportions. He was elected an FBA in 1966, the same year in which he declined the chair of Greek at University College London. He turned down a further offer in the following year, this one from the University of California at Berkeley. That was shortly after he had given the prestigious Sather Lectures at Berkeley in early 1967. The topic of his lectures was the corpus of speeches attributed to Lysias, who worked as a speechwriter for clients in the lawcourts at Athens in the late fifth and early fourth centuries BC. Dover set himself to investigate how far disputes over the authenticity of the speeches could be clarified, particularly by stylistic analysis. In doing so he developed the heterodox thesis that individual clients may themselves have contributed to the speeches they commissioned, thus generating a kind of 'composite authorship' and complicating the whole idea of authenticity. Although the lectures had a somewhat mixed reception, and the subsequent book, *Lysias and the Corpus Lysiacum* (Berkeley, CA, 1968), did not entirely convince some specialists, the work remains an important study of the role of speechwriters in the system of forensic oratory in classical Athens; its use of stylistics exhibits Dover's ability to put his philological finesse at the service of larger historical research. Nor should it be overlooked that the project brought to fruition an idea which, on his own testimony, Dover had conceived as early as 1948:¹² the Sathers were in effect a belated fulfilment of one component of the programme of research he had proposed at that time.

In the same year that both the Lysias monograph and the edition of *Clouds* were published, Dover started to write a general introduction to Aristophanes for readers without any knowledge of Greek. This turned into *Aristophanic Comedy* (London, 1972), notable equally for its lightness of touch and breadth of coverage: it places consistent emphasis on theatrical staging, dramatic fantasy, and the ways in which Aristophanic humour manipulates elements of popular culture. While still working on that book, as well as on an edition of selected poems of Theocritus for students (published in 1971, it was to be his only substantial foray into post-classical literature), Dover began in 1969 to plan his next major venture, a study of Greek 'popular morality' as seen principally through the lens of the two genres which he thought could give access to the mentality of ordinary Greeks: oratory, especially forensic, and (with some qualifications) comedy. Significantly, this project, like his Lysias book, had its origins in the late 1940s. From the outset of his academic career, Dover had

¹² *Marginal Comment*, p. 137.

wanted to construct a picture of Greek values which would focus on the concrete, conflicted experience of 'real people', rather than the abstract theories of the philosophers (who were not, he liked to insist, *typical* Greeks).

Greek Popular Morality in the Time of Plato and Aristotle, written mostly in the course of 1972–3 (published in Berkeley, CA, 1974), rested on a principled decision not to organise its material according to Greek vocabulary and categories (though it nonetheless reckons with these in the course of the enquiry) but on the basis of topics and questions suggested by the author's 'own moral experience'. The resulting treatment of ideas of human nature, gender, responsibility, shame, death, inequality, and more besides, is therefore designed to reduce the sense of historical distance between the Greeks and 'us', though Dover's perspective on the Greeks always in fact recognised in them a composite of the 'alien' and 'familiar'. The method adopted was also intended as an antidote to the lexical emphasis (on key Greek terms), the heavily intellectualised frame of reference, and the systematising tendency of Arthur Adkins's *Merit and Responsibility* (Oxford, 1960). Adkins wrote a long, critical review of *Greek Popular Morality* (in *Classical Philology*, 1978), questioning the sharpness of the dichotomy between 'popular' and 'philosophical' thought and maintaining that Dover's method was itself more 'lexical' than he had admitted. Part of Dover's response was an article on 'The portrayal of moral evaluation in Greek poetry' (*Journal of Hellenic Studies*, 1983), in which he stressed that understanding moral discourse always requires subtle contextualisation and must take account of much more than standard evaluative vocabulary. The deep disagreements between Adkins and Dover are paradigmatic of some of the fundamental problems thrown up in the second half of the twentieth century by historical interpretation of Greek ethics.

Once again allowing the writing of different books to overlap, Dover had started working in earnest from the early 1970s on the project on Greek homosexuality for which he had perceived a need almost two decades earlier and which he had begun to plan during his study of Plato's *Symposium* in the 1960s. At one stage he had envisaged collaboration with the anthropologist and psychoanalyst George Devereux; mercifully, given the erratic nature of some of Devereux's own thinking, this idea proved impracticable. The book which Dover went on to write, *Greek Homosexuality*, was remarkable for the acumen with which it attempted to reconstruct a complex web of social and sexual mores. Pioneering in its synthesis of evidence from literature, oratory, visual art, mythology, religion, and philosophy, it

addressed all aspects of the subject with a candour unprecedented in serious classical scholarship. Perhaps inevitably, it was to become the most widely known and controversial of all his books; it helped to usher in a new era of academic writing about ancient sexuality. If Dover's model of the asymmetrical attitudes to 'active' and 'passive' partners in homoerotic relationships is in places too schematic, his book is unquestionably a landmark in the modern study of Greek culture. It will retain a lasting value for the boldness and detail of its historical analyses.

By the mid-1970s, before *Greek Homosexuality* was finished, Dover had come to realise that he was ready for a fresh challenge in his career.¹³ He had never ceased to devote immense energy to all his duties in St Andrews. On the departmental side, he had overseen the introduction of beginners' Greek in 1967 (see above), a new joint honours degree in Classics and Ancient History in the following year, and in 1975 the creation of a Classical Culture programme (involving study of ancient texts in translation) in subhonours, i.e. the first two years of the Scottish degree system. At the Faculty level, he served a second term (an unusual event) as Dean of Arts in 1973–5. What's more, his publications and his prowess as a speaker had turned him into a leading figure on the national Classics landscape: he was President of the Hellenic Society in 1971–4 and President of the Classical Association in 1975. But he not unnaturally found himself becoming a little stale with the routines of his undergraduate teaching, and he had been increasingly aware for some time of constraints on his opportunities for postgraduate teaching in St Andrews. He therefore allowed himself in late 1975 to be considered for the Presidency of Corpus Christi College, Oxford. When offered the position, he took only a few days to decide that, despite some misgivings (see below), this was the right time to move. But the fact that he and Audrey could not contemplate parting with their St Andrews home, to which they would eventually retire for the last thirteen years of their life together, was a sure sign of how attached they had both grown to the town and its university, whose Chancellor Dover subsequently became in 1981.¹⁴ This would always remain the place where Dover felt that the central achievements of his career as a Hellenist had been accomplished, and St Andrews would in turn remain indebted

¹³ He had in fact applied unsuccessfully for the Regius Chair of Greek in Cambridge in 1972; on this episode, see Section III below.

¹⁴ Dover took great interest in observing the personalities of the diverse figures on whom, as Chancellor, he conferred honorary degrees, from the charming Dalai Lama to a conspicuously surly Bob Dylan. He was gratified to be able to continue as Chancellor, despite encroaching infirmity, up to 2005, the year in which Prince William graduated from St Andrews.

to him, more than to anyone else, for putting it on the map in the world of classical scholarship.

III: 1976–86

Dover stayed in St Andrews twenty-one years. There were two principal occasions when he might have left. One was in 1960, when, as noted above, he was offered and declined the Regius Chair of Greek at Oxford. The main academic reason he gave was that he could not work happily with a curriculum which confined the study of literature to the first part of the course ('Mods') and then forced everyone to do history and philosophy for the rest of the time ('Greats'). He did not think (he said) that this could be changed. It is difficult to say whether this was a solid reason or a pretext. He was of course very happy at St Andrews. He had the power there to shape the curriculum much as he wished, whereas Oxford professors (in the humanities at least) had, as he very well knew, no such power in virtue of their office, but only such personal authority as they might gradually accumulate. That may well have been the decisive consideration. He was in fact wrong about the possibility of change. It was achieved within a decade (quite quick, by Oxford standards), and it certainly helped secure the future of classical studies of all kinds, though at the cost of demolishing the Victorian concept of *literae humaniores* as a balanced and progressive education for public life, with a marked *rite de passage* in the middle.

Twelve years later, in 1972, Dover put himself forward for the Regius Chair of Greek at Cambridge, convinced that he was right for the job. The chair went instead to G. S. Kirk. Dover denied being disappointed at the time, but in later years the rejection certainly rankled, and he came to be resentful of what he supposed to be the manoeuvres that led to Kirk's appointment.

The opportunity presented by the invitation to become President of Corpus in 1976 could not have been predicted. Derek Hall had died suddenly, and the college had unexpectedly to seek a successor. Corpus is a smallish college, with a particularly strong classical tradition, which made Dover's election seem specially appropriate—though, as President, he was to be always scrupulously careful not to favour Classics at the expense of other subjects. He had some doubts about accepting. He was unsure about the future of colleges as independent institutions, and regarded the system as at any rate 'uneconomical'. However, he and Audrey soon settled in, a benevolent and hospitable presence in the newly refurbished lodgings.

They were both good at offering help where it was most needed, for example in looking after graduate students from abroad who could not get home for Christmas. Quietly and unobtrusively he steered the college through some important changes: the admission of women, the development of its graduate side, and the practice of allowing undergraduates representation at the Governing Body—this last being the most difficult to get through. He was by nature a reformer, liberal and egalitarian in his attitude in most things. (Characteristically, he was the only head of a college to vote against Mrs Thatcher's honorary degree.) His studied informality endeared him to many junior members; some seniors wondered whether he was going too far. In college business, it was his policy to seek consensus and then formulate it, rather than to give a lead or reveal his own view too soon. Meetings under his chairmanship were not likely to be short, for he did not care for fixing things up beforehand with college officers. His was the voice of reason, and he expected others to be reasonable too.

This benign and easy régime was greatly troubled by one sad event: the illness and suicide of a very talented, popular, and energetic history tutor, Trevor Aston. This was indeed a tragedy. The nature of Aston's illness made suicide always the likely outcome. Dover agonised over the situation. He took great pains to try to help his unhappy colleague; but Aston's wild behaviour became a source of serious alarm to the college and in the end there was nothing that could have been done to avert the catastrophe. A few years later, however, after he had left Corpus, Dover devoted a whole chapter of his autobiography to his exasperation with Aston. It was this chapter unfortunately on which the media fastened and which made him momentarily notorious. And of course the exposure itself did cause Aston's friends and the college very great distress. The relationship between Corpus and its former President could not now be warm; he seriously contemplated resigning his Honorary Fellowship, but was wisely dissuaded from doing so.

He did of course go on with his own research and writing while he was President. *Greek Homosexuality* (see the previous section) and his edition of Plato's *Symposium* (Cambridge, 1980) were published during these years, and his work on the development of Greek prose advanced. He became better known to a wider world through his series of television programmes on *The Greeks*, which resulted in a very popular and original book of the same name (London, 1980). The programmes themselves were not a great success, and Dover rather regretted them. But the book is a good testimony to his view of the Hellenic world, and its last chapter,

‘God, man and matter’, does much to explain his attitude to the philosophers: Plato’s Socrates ‘is wholly devoid of the genuine curiosity which makes a scientist or a historian’.¹⁵ In 1981, too, his international reputation was confirmed by his election to the Prize Committee of the Balzan Foundation, on which he served for ten years.

He did not while at Corpus choose to play a great part in the Classics Faculty’s affairs, apart from examining one or two theses, supervising an occasional graduate,¹⁶ and giving some stimulating lectures on Greek prose. But the university did make use of his diplomatic skills, by making him chairman of a committee on undergraduate admissions in 1982. At this time, most undergraduates were admitted to Oxford on their performance in an examination set by groups of colleges, and primarily designed to choose high-flyers as college scholars. It was therefore meant not only to test achievement but to diagnose potential. It was administered with great care and a good deal of flexibility; but it seemed, not unreasonably, to be unfair to schools which could not provide a sixth-form education going beyond the precisely defined requirements of A-levels. So there was strong political pressure to change it, no easy task given the wide range of opinion in Oxford and the ingenuity with which various positions were advocated. Dover himself saw that, in this context, ‘you can’t make an omelette without breaking eggs’. He did in the end—exhausted, as he confessed, by the enormous amount of work entailed—succeed in finding a solution which was generally accepted. It involved abolishing entrance scholarships altogether; those were the eggs that were broken. It made the examination less important, indeed optional for many. It was thus an important stage on the way to the system which has since prevailed, selection by A-level results and interviews. The arrangement does not seem to have done much to increase the intake from state schools. What it probably did do was to add some additional pressure on all schools to concentrate more and more on A-level grades, and so make the sixth-form experience narrower and less liberal. But the pressure can only have been slight: Oxford had already lost much of its influence over secondary education.

¹⁵ *The Greeks*, p. 115.

¹⁶ I was myself privileged to have him as my D.Phil. supervisor (FSH).

IV: Presidency of the Academy

Dover had been elected to the British Academy in 1966 (W. L. Lorimer his principal sponsor), and was a conscientious, indeed active, Fellow in his Section. He was a key member (and later Chairman) of a Computer Committee, created to ‘watch over the possibilities of exploiting computers to contribute to the solution of literary problems’; and in 1978 he served on a three-man review of the Academy’s Major Projects, where he was much provoked by the ‘philistinism’ of the Chairman, A. J. Ayer, in relation to the classical projects which then formed the major component of the programme. In the same year he was nominated to succeed Sir Isaiah Berlin as President of the Academy.

Overcoming initial reluctance (‘Oh *why* do people think I can do that sort of thing?’¹⁷) he brought to the office a dignified bearing and to the conduct of affairs distinguished intellectual leadership. His Presidential Addresses were a mixture of report on matters of policy and recent developments, together with reflection on a few topics of his own choosing, Olympian in tone, austere in language, in which he did not hesitate to chide, or to speak in parables drawn from Athenian history.¹⁸ For the Academy there were challenges, above all to do with the development of public funding for the humanities, at a time when it was increasingly coming to be regarded as the main channel outside the universities for the Government’s support for advanced research in these subjects. The Academy was relieved to be spared the financial cuts in public funding to which other institutions were being subjected; its research support programmes were enlarged by new funds for small grants in the humanities provided by the University Grants Committee; and its international programmes were expanding in volume and geographical range—Dover took a particular interest in the Far East, especially in the signing of an Exchange Agreement with the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, and he visited the Japan Academy on the Academy’s behalf. The most urgent organisational problem concerned accommodation. Since 1969 the Academy had occupied rent-free premises in Burlington House, shared with the Royal Society of Chemistry which was very much the senior partner. There were no facilities for Fellows, meeting rooms could only be

¹⁷ *Marginal Comment*, p. 168. There were aspects of the job, however, to which he was never fully reconciled—formal dinners among them, and after-dinner speaking was never his *forte*.

¹⁸ e.g. ‘If I seem to be speaking didactically, even reprovably, please attribute this to the spirit of the parabasis which I have imbibed from Attic Old Comedy ...’, *Proceedings of the British Academy*, LXV (1981), 66.

booked by arrangement with the chemists, and the growing staff (albeit scarcely numbering more than a dozen) worked in very cramped conditions. Dover led the search for new premises, which eventually resulted in the acquisition of a Decimus Burton house on the outer circle of Regent's Park, set back from the end of a Nash terrace. The property belonged to the Crown Estate, which agreed to a comprehensive refurbishment of the interior to meet the Academy's needs, including the erection of a lecture hall on waste ground to the rear of the building: 20–1 Cornwall Terrace, though not an ideal solution (the Academy soon outgrew it), became the Academy's home for the next fifteen years.

What came to be seen as the defining feature of Dover's Presidency, however, was 'the Blunt affair', undoubtedly the most divisive issue in the Academy's history.¹⁹ Sir Anthony Blunt, a senior Fellow (elected in 1950), a former Vice-President and a recent member of Council, from 1975 to 1978, was publicly exposed as a Soviet spy in November 1979. He subsequently resigned from certain of his academic associations but not the Academy. A move was initiated to expel him. The Academy's constitution allowed for the expulsion of a Fellow 'on the grounds that he or she is not a fit and proper person to be a Fellow', but only on the recommendation of the Council and at a General Meeting of the Fellows—the next one was not due until July 1980. The question, on which differing views of considerable subtlety could be and were advanced, was whether Blunt's scholarly distinction as an historian of art, to which he owed his election to the Academy, was cancelled out by his treasonable (or, as some would have it, treacherous) activity. Was integrity indivisible or did moral delinquency justify expulsion? Had a *scholarly* offence been committed or was treason to be treated as *sui generis*? The membership of Council, over two charged sessions, was evenly divided, and only because of the absence at the second of an opponent of expulsion was Dover as Chairman spared from having to use a casting vote on the proposal to expel (as he understood the rules of chairmanship he would have voted against, to maintain the *status quo*). The subsequent Annual General Meeting was attended by 187 Fellows, a larger number than ever before or since. After extended discussion a motion from the floor to move on to other business was carried by a large majority, and no vote was taken on the continuance of Blunt's Fellowship. The decision provoked a small number of immediate resignations and a good deal of press coverage and comment,²⁰ most of it

¹⁹The following paragraphs draw on Dover's published account in *Marginal Comment* and on material in the Academy's archives.

²⁰Some of it in the form of letters to the press by Fellows of the Academy.

adverse, over the coming weeks. There were threats of further resignations if Blunt was not induced to resign, and threats of resignation if he was. Eventually, after an exchange of letters between Dover and Blunt,²¹ Blunt did resign, expressing 'the hope that my resignation will reduce the dissension within the Academy about my membership'. He also dissuaded his supporters from following his example. The total number of resignations, including Blunt's, was six.

Throughout the controversies Dover conducted himself with scrupulous even-handedness, attracting some criticism for 'failing to give a strong lead'. The contained rigour with which he addressed the issues in public was not to all tastes; but he deprecated all concession to 'feelings', and saw his role as to ensure full consideration and proper process. Indeed, he took satisfaction from the comment at the end of Council's deliberations that it had been impossible to judge which side he was on.²² This is not to say that he did not hold strong views on the subject. As he later explained in his autobiographical memoir (p. 214), 'a decisive reason' for expelling Blunt was that 'He had transferred his allegiance to a régime which deliberately falsified history and persecuted scholars who attempted to exercise independent judgement; and nothing could have been more directly opposed than that to the purposes of the Academy.' Dover kept a meticulous record of his dealings with Fellows throughout, and though he was unfailingly courteous in correspondence, in his private annotations he could be severe in judgement, even scathing, especially when Fellows fell short of his intellectual standards.

In retrospect, Dover admitted that he had 'found the whole Affair from beginning to end, absorbingly interesting and therefore intensely enjoyable'. Nevertheless, he decided not to serve the full customary four-year term as President and did not seek re-election in 1981, confessing that his appetite for office had been somewhat jaded by the conflicts of the previous summer. He had also received invitations to lecture in Japan, North America and Australia for which his college was willing to grant him a sabbatical term, and it was clear that the Academy's new premises would not be ready for occupation until well after he would have left office. He was succeeded by Professor Owen Chadwick, whose contributions to proceedings during the Blunt affair had been notably humane and eirenic. In his own first Presidential Address Chadwick paid tribute to Dover

²¹The exchange led to the charge that improper pressure had been brought to bear on Blunt to bring about his resignation, a charge Dover vigorously refuted in a note to the Fellowship.

²²A later President reacted with incredulity at such self-restraint.

‘whose service as President happened during a period of unparalleled difficulty for the Academy and whose good humour and patience and care over detail were of high importance to our welfare’.²³

V: 1986–2010

On leaving Corpus, in 1986, he returned, probably with some relief, to St Andrews, where he continued to be Chancellor until 2005. The next few years saw several important publications. The first was the splendid two volumes of *Collected Papers*, titled *Greek and the Greeks* (Oxford, 1987) and *The Greeks and their Legacy* (Oxford, 1988). Here are to be seen all his skills: the intimate knowledge of texts and inscriptions, the lucidity and patience, the clear insistence that classical scholarship is a form of history, and that interpreters should always seek to discover the intentions of the poets and prose-writers whom they study. Here too the very special qualities of Dover’s scholarship are on view: his liberal, rationalistic temperament, his impatience with obfuscation or nonsense, whether modern or ancient, and especially with the complex of ideas which he sees as Platonic and then Christian, including the belief in the goodness of God and in life after death. Characteristic too is his choice of reference, the sorts of things with which he likes to compare the Greek phenomenon he is discussing: ‘I like modern parallels’, he writes, and that is a key remark.²⁴ He did indeed prefer to find parallels in modern culture rather than anything out of the European tradition which could be thought to be directly derived from the classical inheritance. He also liked to draw on remote cultures and languages, Vietnam for example (of which he learned something from George Devereux, who had also influenced E. R. Dodds) or the Pacific Islands. These were interests going back to his childhood, and he was genuinely learned in some of these cultures and languages. So, faced (for instance) with the need to find some parallels for the simple narrative style of early Greek prose, he turns to New Guinea or the Solomon Islands, rather than to later Greek, Latin or mediaeval story-telling. This was a settled policy. The similarities were illuminating: any suggestion of a historical link would vitiate their force. He wanted his Greeks to be seen by

²³ *Proceedings of the British Academy*, LXVIII (1983), 79.

²⁴ *Greek and the Greeks* (Oxford, 1987), p. 96; reprinted from *Journal of Hellenic Studies*, 103 (1983), 48.

themselves, not in the light of successor cultures, and he thought insistence on the 'canonical' a bad reason for advocating the study of the Classics.

The second major publication of this period was his long-planned edition of Aristophanes' *Frogs* (Oxford, 1993—see above). The third was quite a different sort of summing-up: the autobiography *Marginal Comment* (London, 1994). It is natural to compare this book with the autobiography of another great Hellenist, E. R. Dodds's *Missing Persons* (Oxford, 1977). But whereas Dodds's book was much admired and won the Duff Cooper Prize, *Marginal Comment* earned not so much acclaim as notoriety, with full-page spreads in several newspapers, and it led to Dover's being interviewed by Anthony Clare for the radio programme *In the Psychiatrist's Chair*.

All this was partly because of the book's explicitness in sexual matters (Dover was ahead of his time in this regard) and partly because of what seemed to many an insensitive and potentially offensive handling of the Aston affair. It is certainly a disquieting book. Someone who read it and did not know him was heard to exclaim that she didn't *want* to know 'that man'. Kenneth would have smiled indulgently and pitied her prudishness. But the trouble is not simply with the four-letter words and the possible personal offence, but with the whole tone of the narrative. It is of course absolutely honest and sincere; he brought to it all his historian's integrity. But it does not follow that it tells the whole truth. His friends knew him not only as a brilliant scholar but as a charismatic teacher, a supportive colleague, and a loyal and generous friend with whom it was always a pleasure to talk and exchange ideas and confidences. Yet in *Marginal Comment*, in all the exhaustive record of actions and reactions, successes and occasional failures, there is surprisingly little to be seen of these humane and benign qualities. Instead, many readers, not knowing him, have thought the author cold and egotistical. The very various views shown in the thirty or so reviews and articles which the book stimulated show how puzzling it was. Some were appreciative and reassuring ('Olympian objectivity', said Peter Jones in the *Scotsman*, and Bernard Knox in the *Times Literary Supplement* and Philip Howard in the *Times* were also complimentary), but others were critical: 'a sad book ... will puzzle and offend many who prefer the Kenneth Dover they knew and loved', wrote Ross Leckie in *Scotland on Sunday*, and others spoke of 'exhibitionism' or suspected that he just wanted notoriety. If he did, he certainly got it: few books of the kind have stirred up such a storm. Yet it does contain a good deal of very thought-provoking observations about

life and learning. Of the reviewers, Ross Leckie seems to me to have come nearest the truth: the chief character is not the Kenneth Dover we knew, and not half so agreeable.²⁵

The last book of his seventies, *The Evolution of Greek Prose Style* (Oxford, 1997), was also a summation of a life-long interest. From his earliest days, Dover's enthusiasm had been for language rather than for literature. So, in this late work, he disclaimed any wish to be a literary critic. Literary criticism, he thought, had an autobiographical element and an element of preaching. Presumably, you needed to express your own reactions (which might not be anyone else's) and also to persuade others that the stuff was worth reading and would enhance life. He preferred a more objective approach. He had great gifts for the task: a marvellously retentive memory and exhaustive study. His contribution to our understanding of Greek prose is immense. It begins with *Greek Word Order* (1960; second edition, 1968), already noted in its chronological context, where he deployed his knowledge of inscriptions to supplement the literary evidence in a way that had not been done before. His analyses are subtle and generally convincing. He had pursued the same line in the important chapter of his 1968 book *Lysias and the Corpus Lysiacum*, in which he shows that the authors of these speeches did not all have the same linguistic habits. He also wrote significant articles on the colloquial element in Attic and in the language of Aristophanes. *Evolution* is his last word on these matters. It is full of fruitful ideas, not only on word order but also on vocabulary and rhythm. He perhaps did not succeed in distancing himself as completely from aesthetic and imaginative interpretations as he professed; maybe he did not really want to. At any rate, there is a striking passage in the chapter on rhythm where he connects a (quite possibly accidental) tragic trimeter in Thucydides' narrative of the Athenian disaster in Sicily with the 'tragic' nature of the whole situation.

There were many happy times in these years, not least in travels to America and elsewhere. For five years (1987–92) he went regularly as a visiting professor to Stanford—not by any means his only experience of this kind (he also greatly enjoyed his stays at Cornell during 1984–9) but a particularly rewarding one. He took a full part in the department's affairs, helping with appointments and examining. The graduate students gave him much pleasure, and he was very helpful to them. He also gave popular

²⁵I made this point to him at the time. He replied that others thought the opposite, and that the reason was that different people saw different sides of him. This does not make my complaint invalid. (DAR)

lectures on Greek values. It was an excellent way of avoiding the British winters.

Dover's old age was saddened by Audrey's illness (she was wheelchair bound for some years) and by his own failing eyesight and other health problems. So he wrote rather little after *Evolution*; one notable article, very characteristic of him, was a piece entitled 'Are gods forgivable?' in a volume of essays on the subject of 'double standards' in the ancient and medieval world.²⁶

Reading anything he wrote fills one with admiration not only for the acuteness of his mind but for his dedication and care. He lets nothing pass as certain if there is the slightest doubt about it. He never spared himself trouble. He says somewhere that he could spend twelve hours on a version of a Greek composition for a pupil, no doubt assuring himself that he wrote nothing he could not parallel in a classical text. Writing some Greek verses in a book he was giving to a friend, he defended a minor metrical anomaly by learned references to Theognis and Callimachus. He was a perfectionist; but unlike other perfectionists, he always finished the job.

VI

Dover was tall and spare, a figure of reassuring authority, never openly angry or perturbed. Olympian, some said; but it was as a very benevolent Zeus that he would descend on the annual Greek summer school at Bryanston. He was a superb, indeed spellbinding, lecturer, often dispensing with notes (he must have spent hours preparing his lectures) and could make an audience follow a very technical argument with understanding and pleasure. He expected a lot of his hearers (as he did of his readers) but he knew how to get it.

In youth, he had looked older than his years, and already authoritative. Later, his face was deeply lined. He was physically robust (his professed anxiety about his 'funnel chest' notwithstanding) and liked challenges, humping rocks around in his garden, to which he was devoted, and walking or camping in the Highlands. He liked, and was much moved by, grand scenery of the kind the eighteenth century would have called sublime. He also kept alive his boyhood interest in natural history. He and Audrey were knowledgeable observers of birds. So it was in lonely places, and

²⁶'Are gods forgivable?', in K. Pollmann (ed.), *Double Standards in the Ancient and Medieval World* (Göttingen, 2000), pp. 22–32.

with the wonders of nature to admire, that he probably found the most profound tranquillity he knew. His other source of deep pleasure was music; some musical experiences remained in his memory as life-changing events, and both he and Audrey were keen and appreciative concert-goers.

All the same, it was Greek scholarship that sustained and dominated his life. When he said that falling in love with Greek at St Paul's 'set him on his course', he was saying the most important thing about himself. It was not only that his expertise puts him among the greatest Hellenists of the twentieth century. The intellectual and moral attitudes of classical Athens, as he pictured them—and no one has had a clearer or better-informed vision—shaped his own attitudes and behaviour in many ways. The traffic ran also in the other direction. His deeply held rationalism and dislike of obscurity or what he saw as humbug led him inevitably to fashion his Greeks in some degree in his own image. Of course, everyone does this, and we unavoidably simplify the past by doing so. That is true even of the greatest scholars, and it is true of Dover.

Perhaps one should sum up in Greek terms. He was certainly Aristotle's *alētheutikos*, the man who never either exaggerates or understates. But he had also a touch of the *megalopsuchos*, the man of dignified bearing who believes himself worthy of great things, and in fact is so. 'The complete Grecian' is a fair verdict.

Audrey died in December 2009. Kenneth survived her barely three months: he died on 7 March 2010.

D. A. RUSSELL

Fellow of the Academy

F. S. HALLIWELL

University of St Andrews

Note. Donald Russell is the author of the first, third, fifth and sixth sections of this memoir, Stephen Halliwell of the second; but we have benefited from an exchange of comments on each other's drafts. The fourth section was kindly supplied by Mr P. W. H. Brown, former Secretary of the Academy. In addition, Donald Russell would like to acknowledge advice on various points from the following: Mrs Catherine Brown (Catherine Dover), Sir Brian Harrison, Sir Keith Thomas, Professor R. G. M. Nisbet, Mr E. L. Bowie.

