VIVIEN LAW *Dona Haycraft*

Vivien Anne Law
1954–2002

VIVIEN LAW was born in Canada, in Halifax, Nova Scotia, on 22 March 1954, the daughter of John Ernest and Anne Elizabeth Law. Both her parents were of English origin, her father being from London, her mother from Clavering (Essex). Her father worked in management for an international telecommunications company (her mother was happy to be described simply as a housewife), and it was a posting to Cable and Wireless in Halifax which had caused her parents to emigrate from London to Canada shortly before Vivien was born. A subsequent position in the Canadian equivalent of that company, Teleglobe (properly the Canadian Overseas Telecommunications Corporation, as it then was) caused the family, now comprising two children, Vivien and her younger brother Adam, to move to Longueuil, Québec (a suburb of Montreal on the south bank of the St Lawrence River), in 1959. In Longueuil Vivien completed junior high school at Lemoyne d'Iberville High School (to 1966), and then from 1967 onwards was able to attend high school at the Trafalgar School for Girls in Montreal, a private school of high academic distinction, where her natural gift for languages was carefully nurtured (she had mastered Greek and Latin, Spanish, French and German by the time she completed high school there in 1971). Throughout her life Vivien remained grateful for the excellent linguistic training which she had received at (what was affectionately called) 'Traf', and her first book is dedicated to Barbara Armbruster, the woman who taught her Latin and Greek (it was Barbara Armbruster who taught Vivien the quaint habit,

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which she maintained throughout her life, of writing Greek without accents and breathing marks).

From the Trafalgar School Vivien went on to McGill University in Montreal (1971–4), where she took Double Honours in Classics and German, and where her inclination to medieval studies first became apparent (she took courses in Old English, Old Norse, Old High German, Church Slavonic, as well as Greek, Latin and Hebrew). The brilliance of her academic promise is already visible in her undergraduate essays (she was by nature a hoarder, and all the essays she ever wrote are carefully preserved among her papers), on such subjects as 'Ein kurzes Vergleich der angelsächsischen und althochdeutschen Sprachen' (she had spent the summer of 1973 at Freiburg as part of her honours degree, and spoke and wrote German fluently throughout her life), or 'The Impact of Byzantine Political Thought on Russia' or 'Henry I of Saxony', the latter accompanied by a dense apparatus of footnote references to texts printed in the MGH and to works in German by such scholars as Max Manitius and Carl Erdmann. But the bulk of her papers from these early years consist of vocabulary lists and tables illustrating (for example) the changes undergone by Latin vowels in the Romance languages, or the differences between Spanish and Portuguese. It was at McGill, too, that she compiled a substantial supplement (pp. 170–237) to *The McGill University Collection of Greek and Roman Coins.* I. *Roman Coins*, ed. D. H. E. Whitehead, which constitutes her earliest publication (1975). From her work at McGill, it was clear that her major intellectual orientation was linguistic, and that she had an extraordinary capacity for disciplined and concentrated research.

Upon graduating from McGill in 1974 (with a GPA of 4.0, the highest possible mark), having apparently won every prize that the University had to offer, including the Chapman Gold Medal in Latin, she won a Commonwealth Scholarship to Girton College, Cambridge. Her family recalls that she had conceived the desire to study in England, at Oxford or Cambridge, while she was still in high school; the award of the Commonwealth Scholarship enabled her to pursue this dream, and she crossed the Atlantic in September 1974 on the Polish liner *Stefan Batory*, in a high state of excitement, accompanied by few possessions except her flute, for which she had acquired an expensive carrying-case shortly before leaving Canada. (Her notebooks do not record that she pestered the crew members to be taught Polish; but the scenario is not improbable, given that she had good reading knowledge of Polish later in life.) She arrived at Girton in October 1974, intending to read for a second under-

graduate degree as an affiliated student in the Department of Anglo-Saxon, Norse, and Celtic. Her Director of Studies at Girton was Jill Mann, who had treated the claims of Vivien's McGill transcripts with mild scepticism, on the grounds that it seemed improbable that a twenty-year old could have mastered so many languages to any serious level of competence. But it was immediately clear to those who taught her in Cambridge during her first term that such scepticism was misplaced, and that she did indeed possess an astonishing mastery of the languages registered on her McGill transcript, including a number of those taught in the department, such as (Insular) Latin, Old English, Old Norse and other Germanic languages. It was difficult to see what aim would be served by requiring her to spend two additional undergraduate years studying languages in which she already had formidable expertise. Accordingly, after a term's work, she was enrolled in January 1975 as a research student, and set to work preparing as her doctoral dissertation an edition and study of the *Ars grammatica* of Boniface (d. 754), under the supervision of Michael Lapidge. The topic was devised so as to draw on her expertise in Latin and her developing curiosity about the structure of languages; furthermore, at the time she started her research, there was no adequate edition of Boniface in print. The dissertation was completed in 1978, and examined by R. G. G. Coleman and Richard Hunt. Unfortunately her edition of Boniface was never published, possibly because an edition of the same work, done as a war-time doctoral dissertation at the University of Chicago by one G. J. Gebauer, was completed by B. Löfstedt and published in the Series Latina of Corpus Christianorum in 1980. The defects of the Gebauer–Löfstedt edition are clear from a masterly review which Vivien published (*Studi medievali*, 22 (1981), 752–64), but she never got around to preparing her own edition for publication. In any case, on the strength and promise of her dissertation, she was elected to a Research Fellowship at Jesus College, Cambridge, a post which she held from 1977–80.

The Research Fellowship gave her a stable base from which to pursue her study of late antique and early Medieval Latin grammar. From the outset her intention had been to situate Boniface's *Ars grammatica* within the wider context of late antique and early Medieval Latin grammar, not only in the British Isles but on the Continent as well. It should be remembered that, in 1975, although many of the most important late antique grammatical texts were available in collections such as Heinrich Keil's *Grammatici Latini* (1857–80), very few of the important Medieval Latin grammars—for example, those of Murethach, Smaragdus, Sedulius

Scottus, to say nothing of the large corpus of anonymous treatises—were then accessible in printed editions; and those grammatical works which had been edited, for example the writings of (the so-called) Virgilius Maro Grammaticus, were often represented by editions of an abysmally low scholarly standard. Accordingly, if Vivien was to acquire mastery of the field of late antique and early Medieval Latin grammar, her first task was to familiarise herself with the early medieval manuscripts in which grammatical texts were transmitted. This task necessitated constant travel to British and continental libraries (she was an indefatigable traveller) in order to provide herself with transcriptions of grammatical texts; it also necessitated the acquisition of a huge collection of microfilms of grammatical manuscripts. Her work on these manuscripts soon revealed a vast and uncharted sea of unedited and unstudied grammatical texts, for the most part anonymous. A major component of her life's work was the attempt to chart this sea.

Her earliest publications in the field already reveal a profound experience of grammatical manuscripts and a refusal simply to reiterate the opinions of earlier scholars. All these publications report new discoveries, such as previously unknown Old English glosses to the *Ars grammatica* of Tatwine, an early eighth-century Anglo-Saxon grammarian (*Anglo-Saxon England*, 6 (1977), 77–89), or unsuspected aspects of the relationship between Anglo-Saxon and continental learning as revealed in the transmission of the grammars of Boniface and Tatwine (*Revue d'histoire des textes*, 9 (1979), 281–8), or the true nature of the jumbled and misunderstood grammar attributed to the early Irish grammarian Malsachanus (*Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies*, 1 (1981), 83–93). As she continued to investigate grammatical manuscripts, she inevitably uncovered more and more previously unknown texts, and it is a tragedy that her early death prevented her from publishing editions of many of them, such as the *Ars Sergilii*, an unconventional grammatical treatise arguably from the circle of the unconventional Virgilius Maro Grammaticus, or the (more conventional) late antique grammar of Scaurus, the discovery of which she announced in *Rheinisches Museum*, 130 (1987), 67–89, the publication of which was anticipated in the series Cambridge Classical Texts and Commentaries. Her unpublished notebooks contain hundreds and hundreds of pages of transcriptions of grammatical texts examined (not all of them previously unknown, of course) during her travels. In many ways the trajectory of her early career resembles that of the nineteenth-century German scholars who spent their summers touring libraries and their winters publishing their *Reisefrüchte*.

After delivering a set of lectures (by invitation) on early Insular grammarians to the Department of Anglo-Saxon, Norse, and Celtic in Lent Term, 1979, and at the urging of her colleagues, she felt confident enough to offer the preliminary survey of the terrain which is contained in her *Insular Latin Grammarians* (1982). This compact book of 131 pages provides the first systematic attempt to classify Late Latin grammars according to type, to identify the principal early medieval commentaries (nearly all of them anonymous) on standard texts such as Donatus and Priscian, and above all to establish the date and place of origin of such commentaries. How many such commentaries were produced in either Ireland or Anglo-Saxon England is a thorny question, as is that of distinguishing anonymous Irish from anonymous English authorship. Her incisive treatment of questions of attribution inevitably brought her into contact (and sometimes conflict) with a number of medievalists, especially in Ireland, and in particular with Louis Holtz of the Institut de recherche et d'histoire des textes in Paris, who had then recently published his monumental edition of Donatus (1981). Although Vivien and Louis Holtz frequently disagreed about attributions and origins of commentaries, the warmth and generosity with which they treated each other's work and shared their learning could well serve as a model for all medievalists.

Above all, *The Insular Latin Grammarians* illustrated the cultural context in which the achievements of scholars such as Boniface and Tatwine were to be understood. She showed, emphatically, that these Anglo-Saxons were the first grammarians who were faced with the problem of explaining the structure of Latin to students who were not themselves native speakers of the language. By contrast, the grammars of (say) Donatus and Priscian had been composed as reference works for Latin speakers, and therefore contain much material, especially etymologies and analogues in Greek, which were simply irrelevant to an audience of beginners. Anglo-Saxon grammarians were thus forced to devise more elementary texts of a nature radically different from those which were transmitted to the Middle Ages from late antiquity (as she showed, the layout of verbal paradigms which today is found in virtually every elementary grammar, no matter what language, was first devised by Boniface). Vivien (of necessity) began to elaborate a terminology to describe the various types of grammar which survive from late antiquity and the Middle Ages, and her terminology and the classificatory scheme which it entails—*regulae*-type grammars, *Schulgrammatik* grammars, elementary grammars, parsing grammars, and so on—is one of the most useful contributions that she made to medieval studies.

The huge amount of research underpinning *The Insular Latin Grammarians*, in combination with the ever-increasing flow of scholarly articles, all of them written with inimitable concision but displaying formidable erudition, led to her election as the David Thomson Senior Research Fellow of Sidney Sussex College, Cambridge, in 1980, a post which she held until 1984. By then, however, her work had naturally caught the attention of the Department of Linguistics, which, by the happiest of chances, not only needed someone who could teach the history of the subject but had a heaven-sent opportunity, under the 'New Blood' scheme devised by the then University Grants Committee, to establish a lectureship designed for her. When he saw advertisements for the post, the doyen of the history of linguistics, the late R. H. Robins, remarked that they might just as well have added: 'Only Vivien Law need apply'. The 'New Blood' scheme ran for only a few years in the 1980s, but many first-rate scholars were helped by it, in highly specialised fields; since then, regrettably, existing lectureships have increasingly been suppressed by faculties, and the thought of establishing a new one, even when there is a candidate so obviously brilliant as Vivien was, has now passed beyond a head of department's dreams.

A paper on 'The History of Linguistic Thought' was already an option in the Modern and Medieval Languages Tripos. Vivien therefore landed in the department running and, from the beginning, her course never lacked at least a handful of devoted students. Most papers, in most branches of the history of ideas, deal with a period of at best some centuries, in one perhaps quite small part of the world. Hers was very different. It was designed to cover two and a half millennia, from Ancient India and fifth-century Greece to American linguistics in the 1960s and beyond. Though centred in western Europe, it potentially included every other major civilisation, especially those from which ideas have fed into the European tradition. Nor could the history of linguistic thought be separated from the general intellectual and political history of successive periods, of which most undergraduates have been taught increasingly little. Only a scholar whose enthusiasm for learning knew no artificial bounds could have taken it on. In later years she was to remain, above all, a historian of grammar; the philosophy of language, and especially many of the theoretical preoccupations of the twentieth century, she was apt to regard with less sympathy. But the period on which her work was centred soon expanded, in line with her teaching, far beyond the early Middle Ages, to an extent that is hard to appreciate from the projects she was able to complete before she died. The most coherent group of publications are

still in the field where she first gained her reputation. The rest are scattered glimpses of what should have been.

One never dared to speak to her of the 'Dark Ages'. Out of this period, however, in which we are nevertheless comparatively in the dark, the enigmatic figure of Virgilius Maro Grammaticus was one that continued to intrigue her. Of (arguably) Insular origin and seventh-century date, his grammatical treatises are so bizarre and unconventional that they have been regarded variously as nonsense or parody. For example, Virgilius refers throughout to grammatical authorities who are unknown outside the pages of his writings and whose very names invite derision: Balapsidus, Fassica, Galbirius, Galbungus, Glengus, Gurgilius, Sarbon, Terrentius, and others (including three authors named 'Vergil', none of them identical with the author of the *Aeneid*). He tells us that Galbungus and Terrentius debated for fourteen days and nights over whether the pronoun *ego* had a vocative case. He expounds twelve types of Latinity, of which the first, *usitata*, has the familiar word *ignis* to represent fire; but the eleven others, *inusitatae*, have words which are otherwise unrecorded (*quoquihabin*, which Virgilius declines in full, *ardon*, *calax*, *rusin*, and so on through all the remaining types). Because the structure of Virgilius's grammatical writings is evidently modelled on that of classical grammars such as the *Ars maior* of Donatus, earlier scholars have inclined to the notion that Virgilius was simply attempting to compose a parody grammar. But, as Vivien Law rightly pointed out, the excessive length of Virgilius's writings casts doubt on the parody hypothesis (a joke of this sort could have been made in a few pages, whereas Virgilius's grammatical writings occupy some 160 pages in the standard edition). While not denying the amusing nature of these writings, she sought a deeper, more satisfying explanation. Her *Wisdom, Authority and Grammar in the Seventh Century: Decoding Virgilius Maro Grammaticus* (1995), though characteristically brief (170 pp.), is a masterpiece of sustained and inspired analysis. By the meticulous elucidation of linguistic ambiguities embedded (one might say encoded) in his Latin, she was able to show how Virgilius enticed his readers towards a more profound and sophisticated understanding of the processes of perception and the acquisition, not merely of Latin grammar, but of knowledge divine and human. The study and analysis of Virgilius's treatises undertaken by any reader, reading with the *oculi mentis*, thus becomes the paradigm of human learning.

From her base, as it were, in the early Middle Ages one natural way to move was backwards, to the tradition of the Roman '*Ars grammatica*' and, behind it, its Greek sources. For many authorities the earliest Greek

grammar is still the one ascribed to Dionysius Thrax, who died around 90 BC. Since antiquity, however, the authenticity of most of this text has been questioned: the doctrine of the parts of speech does not agree entirely with the views ascribed to Dionysius by ancient commentators, and suggests a date of composition, or at least reworking, some four centuries later. The controversy was revived at the end of the 1950s by Vincenzo di Benedetto, and Vivien's interest in it led, in particular, to a conference held in Sidney Sussex, whose proceedings she edited with Ineke Sluiter (*Dionysius Thrax and the* Technē Grammatikē (1995)). Her own approach was, characteristically, to look for detailed changes in the analysis of Latin in the late Imperial period, which the wording of Dionysius, or pseudo-Dionysius, might or might not parallel. In print, however, she made no more than, in her own words, 'a small beginning' (*History and Historiography of Linguistics*, eds. H. J. Niderehe and K. Koerner (1990), I. 89–96). Her projected edition of Scaurus, a grammarian earlier than Donatus and the others whose work has survived, would have shown her deep familiarity with the ancient tradition to which they belonged.

It was also natural that Vivien's interests should expand into the later Middle Ages, to include (for example) late medieval speculative grammar. The essay which resulted from her J. R. O'Donnell lecture (delivered in Toronto in 1998 and printed in *The Journal of Medieval Latin*, 9 (1999), 46–76), on late Medieval Latin verse grammars such as the *Doctrinale* of Alexander of Ville-Dieu, is a brilliant illustration of her intellectual range: in demonstrating why such poems were composed and how they were structured, she provides a fascinating glimpse of an otherwise neglected aspect of late medieval education. Few historians of linguistics have indeed been so consistently alert to the practical contexts in which grammars were written. Her early work had been informed by a rare understanding of the ways in which the teaching of Latin had to change, when beginners themselves spoke other languages, such as Old English, which had significantly different structures: a point that now seems obvious, but it was Vivien who showed how grammars were adapted to cope with the difficulty.

Many years later she was tempted away from Sidney Sussex, which she had served well as a teaching fellow and sometime Praelector since her appointment in the university, to a similar fellowship at Trinity College (1997). The conversation at the interview was largely about the tables of contents of grammars, in the Renaissance and later. Did they follow the pattern established since antiquity: first the noun, then the other parts of speech in their time-worn order? Or did the author ask which parts were

easier or more difficult for someone trying to learn the language, and decide on both the order of topics, and the weight that should be given to each, accordingly? There seems little doubt that insights of this kind reflected her own practical experience as a learner, systematically acquiring language after language, by the method of working with pencil and paper through whatever materials were available.

One of these many languages (in total more than a hundred, it was believed) was Georgian, and a very different study which she did complete, as part of a collaborative project on 'Post-Soviet States in Transition', was of 'myths' of nationality and language among its speakers ('Language Myths and the Discourse of Nation-Building in Georgia', in G. Smith, V. Law *et al.*, *Nation-Building in the Post-Soviet Borderlands* (1998), pp. 167–96, 269–78). Among all her scholarly and other activities, she came to know both Georgia and Georgians very well (and tended to take their side in any discussion of Caucasian politics). By the end, however, she was concentrating above all on what was to be her last and posthumous book, on *The History of Linguistics in Europe from Plato to 1600* (2002). The original plan had been to end it at 1900, and Robins, who was by then a close friend, hoped very much that it would replace his own *Short History of Linguistics*, then over thirty years old. In the event she included only a 'brief overview', in less than thirty pages, of the period from 1600 to the present. But it became clear that an earlier cut-off made good sense. At heart, despite the breadth of her theme, she remained a medievalist, and had a western medievalist's appreciation of the ancient world especially. She gives far more space to Priscian, for example, than to Apollonius Dyscolus, although, as Priscian himself would certainly have told her, Apollonius, in second-century Alexandria, was the genius and he the follower. The Middle Ages are in effect presented at the heart of a continuous tradition, whose source lay ultimately in one great age of intellectual upheaval, in fifth-century Greece, and which was finally transcended in another, in the northern European Renaissance. It is not surprising, therefore, that the influence of religion is also central to her narrative. Her account of 'the early Middle Ages' is preceded by a separate chapter headed 'Christianity and Language', which lays weight on the theories of Augustine. The reason she gave for ending in 1600 is that, from then on, we are no longer dealing with a single homogeneous tradition, but with separate histories in separate nations that interact in much more complex ways. One cannot but feel, however, that the gradual secularisation of linguistics, as of other academic disciplines, might have proved an uncongenial topic.

The proposal for this book had originally been accepted by the editors of the 'Cambridge Textbooks in Linguistics', and it is written at that level, in a way designed quite brilliantly to inspire and guide students. At the end of the 1980s she had already published her scholarly manifesto as a historian of linguistics (in *An Encyclopaedia of Linguistics*, ed. N. E. Collinge (1990), pp. 784–842); but her last book, on *The History of Linguistics in Europe*, is a memorial to the way she had come to teach the subject: a simultaneous insistence both on the close study of texts and on the context, in the widest possible sense, in which they were composed. It is clear too that her ideal students would be those who were themselves preparing for research. The book is full of hints on how to become a historian of the subject, and of the basic information that researchers need. Both the medieval and renaissance chapters, for example, include indispensable charts of the types and dates of grammars, of Latin, of the European vernaculars and, by the end, of other languages, which will enable and encourage subsequent scholars to navigate previously uncharted seas.

A project like *The History of Linguistics in Europe*, covering 2000 years in a bare 300 pages and exhibiting a mastery of both detail and broad synthesis, could have been executed only by someone who had learned to write with perfect clarity and concision. Despite this enviable ability, however, Vivien was a very prolific scholar. In addition to the books already mentioned, she published some sixty-five articles, of which several of the most important, in her first field of research, were revised and reprinted in her *Grammar and Grammarians in the Early Middle Ages* (1997). This collection, used in conjunction with her bibliography of early medieval grammar published in a book which she edited (*History of Linguistic Thought in the Early Middle Ages* (1993), pp. 25–47), and with the wider coverage of the Middle Ages in her last book, provides an excellent introduction to the subject, and the complex problems of interpretation which it poses. It was on the strength of her work as a medievalist that she was elected to the British Academy in 1999, the letter from the Secretary coinciding, cruelly, with the diagnosis of her cancer and the knowledge that she would have to undergo what were, in the event, a series of operations. It was on the strength of this work too that she had been appointed, two years earlier, to a readership in the university. The title she chose, however, was Reader in the History of Linguistic Thought, without qualification as to period. It is the promise and resolve behind this choice that was to remain so sadly unfulfilled.

In spite of her commitment to study, Vivien was active in societies and remained easily accessible and deeply loyal to her many students, colleagues and friends. At her death she was still serving as the executive chairman of the Henry Sweet Society for the History of Linguistic Ideas, of whose publication series she had been a founding editor; she had only recently, in her final illness, resigned as chairman of the local regional society of the Institute of Linguists. She was also active in the Philological Society, and was the inspiration, amid all else, of a volume published posthumously in its series, of autobiographical essays by scholars in or near retirement, conceived as a primary source for later historians (*Linguistics in Britain: Personal Histories*, ed. Keith Brown and Vivien Law (2002)).

In 1978 she had married Nick (now Sir Nicholas) Shackleton, a distinguished quaternary geologist, with whom she shared a love of walking and playing chamber music. She herself played the flute and piccolo to professional standard, and they had met when she had asked if she could borrow a baroque bassoon from his (internationally renowned) woodwind collection. In the week before her memorial service in October 2002, at which he played a moving piece for solo clarinet, he received an e-mail from the last class of undergraduates, by then scattered across four continents, that Vivien had been able to teach for an entire year. Only a few words could be cited in the address delivered at the service. But it is a touching tribute to the kind of teacher of whom, as they put it, 'Cambridge legends are formed'. Being her student was 'an enormous privilege and a special joy'.

Before the end of that academic year, in 2000–1, her cancer had returned and was found to be inoperable. She received the news with an equanimity strengthened by her faith since childhood in anthroposophy, and began the following year determined to work normally, or as normally as possible, for as long as she could. She sent her last book to the press; she attended her last conference, of the Henry Sweet Society, at the end of September; and in October she started lecturing several hours a week to a final group of undergraduates, hoping to get through the whole field before Christmas. From then on candidates would do supervised projects. She simultaneously began work with her last research student. But, halfway through the Michaelmas term, even she could not continue. She was forced to abandon her teaching duties, and died a few months later, on 20 February 2002.

The tragic sense of loss at her premature death that is felt by all her students, colleagues and friends should not overshadow the very

significant contributions which she made to our understanding of the fields of early medieval grammar and the history of linguistics. She trained a number of students who now have university posts and are in a position to carry on her work in these fields. And for those who did not know her and did not have the privilege of being trained by her, the substantial body of her publications will provide guidance in fields which before her were scarcely, or only dimly, known. Even scholars who have lived active lives through to decrepit old age have not always been able to achieve as much.

MICHAEL LAPIDGE
Fellow of the Academy

PETER MATTHEWS
Fellow of the Academy

Note. We should like to express our gratitude to Vivien's husband, Professor Sir Nicholas Shackleton, for generously allowing access to her papers and library, and to her brother, Dr Adam Law, for answering many queries about her early life and family. There is a bibliography of her publications by E. F. K. Koerner, 'Bibliography of Vivien A. Law, 1975–2002', in *Historiographia Linguistica*, 29. 1–2 (2002), 5–11. A number of personal recollections by her friends and pupils are gathered together in *The Henry Sweet Society Bulletin*, 38 (May 2002), 5–26. The text of the address delivered by Peter Matthews at her memorial service (19 October 2002) is printed in the *Trinity College Annual Record 2002*, 72–6. A volume of essays in her memory is being prepared by many of her former students.