COLIN AUSTIN

Colin François Lloyd Austin
1941–2010

Colin Austin's father, Lloyd James Austin (1915–1994, FBA 1968), was an Australian expert on French literature. In 1937 a French Government scholarship took him to Paris; there he wrote a doctoral thesis on Paul Bourget, and at the British Council met Jeanne-Françoise Guérin, then working for her *agrégation* in English. They married at her native Rouen, he submitted his thesis and, as the war came closer, together they caught the penultimate boat for Australia. It was in Melbourne that Colin François Lloyd Austin was born, 26 July 1941, the second of four children. His early life and education followed his father's career: from 1951, with his father back researching in Paris, at the Lycée Lakanal, and then, successively in Cambridge and Manchester, where his father held the Chair in Modern French Literature and Austin attended Manchester Grammar School. In a quirky reversal, Austin went up to Jesus College, Cambridge in 1959, to be followed by his father who returned to Cambridge in 1961 as a University Lecturer and was then in 1967 elected to the Drapers Professorship of French. The family kept their house outside Paris and their cottage at Brionne in Normandy, and all things French always remained a very important part of Austin: he once described himself as '*mi-français* and half Australian' and he dedicated his first book 'à Maman'; one of his greatest regrets was that he never wore the *maillot jaune*.

As an undergraduate, he read the Classical Tripos under the grumpy but benevolent supervision of D. R. Shackleton-Bailey. His prowess earned him a series of prizes and scholarships, including the Sir William Browne Medal for a Latin Epigram and the Porson Prize for translation into Greek Verse. Greek comedy was already then his first love, for 1958

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had seen the publication of what was the first virtually complete play of Menander to have survived, *Dyskolos* ('*The Grouch*'). For his graduate studies he moved to Oxford in 1962, where, under the supervision of Hugh Lloyd-Jones, he wrote a D.Phil. on Aristophanes' *Thesmophoriazusae* ('*Women celebrating the festival of the Thesmophoria*'), perhaps the most brilliantly 'literary' of all Aristophanes' plays (much of it is parody of tragic scenes), though also one of the most textually difficult. The problems of Aristophanes' text were, however, as nothing compared to the weather: as Senior Scholar of Christ Church, Austin endured some of England's most famously bitter winters in an attic where the water froze in the bedside pitcher. While at Christ Church, he met Peter Parsons, who, in Austin's words, 'taught me Papyrology', and the combination of Greek comedy and papyrology was to determine the whole course of Austin's career. His supervisor, Hugh Lloyd-Jones, had a daunting reputation, but Austin, even then, was not a very dauntable person. Lloyd-Jones recognised his remarkable abilities, and, as was his custom, sent him for a year to Berlin, to the even more daunting Rudolf Kassel. That partnership was to prove extraordinarily productive.

In 1965, the year in which he gained his doctorate, Austin returned to Cambridge as Research Fellow of Trinity Hall, where he then served as Director of Studies in Classics until 2005, and as University Lecturer (from 1969), Reader (from 1988) and finally as the holder of a personal chair as Professor of Greek (1998–2008) in the Faculty of Classics. He was elected to Fellowship of the Academy in 1983. His ashes lie in the College garden, beneath the gingko tree that he himself presented to the College on his retirement.

Austin had chosen Greek Comedy as his field. From his doctoral engagement with the carnivalesque comedy of Aristophanes and his contemporaries, 'Old Comedy', he moved to 'New Comedy', the more domestic comedy of manners that flourished, at Athens and elsewhere, in the late fourth and early third centuries BC. These comedies played variations on themes still familiar: love, chance and intrigue, crusty elders, infatuated youths and pregnant teenagers, boastful soldiers, manipulative slaves and golden-hearted courtesans, the good who end well, the bad who end badly and the long-lost baby that finds its family. The genre left an enduring mark on western dramatic culture, through the Latin imitations of Plautus and Terence: its descendants include *Le mariage de Figaro* and *The Importance of Being Earnest*, *Carry on Jeeves* and a boxful of soap operas. Yet the plays themselves disappeared in transmission, even those of Menander, which later generations recognised as classics of their kind. In a world

where any book must be copied by hand, survival was not automatic; and since scholars and schoolmasters did not regard Menander as a classic in the narrower sense, his works ceased to circulate in the early Middle Ages. When Greek studies revived at the Renaissance, nothing remained of him but his name, some quotations, and the Latin tradition. So things stood until the late nineteenth century, when chance and excavation began to reveal the libraries of those Greek immigrant families who had, for ten centuries, provided the ruling class in Egypt, where the hot, dry climate allowed papyrus, the primary writing material of the ancient world, to survive in the sand for nearly two millennia. Chance led, in 1905, to a pottery jar, in which Dioskoros the notary had stashed his private papers; by way of stopper he had added eleven crumpled pages of Menander. With these pages, the game was afoot; and systematic excavation, at Oxyrhynchus and elsewhere, confirmed that the Egyptian Greeks had read Menander in quantity.

Over the next half century, small finds contributed piece after piece to the jigsaw. Then, in 1953, the bibliophile millionaire Martin Bodmer (1899–1971) began to acquire a group of Greek papyri and parchments which had made its way covertly from Egypt. The manuscripts, mostly codices, found a home in Bodmer's villa at Cologny, near Geneva; and their publication was initially entrusted to experts from the University of Geneva. Victor Martin (1886–1964) undertook P. Bodmer I, *Iliad* Books 5 and 6 (1954), P. Bodmer II, *Gospel of St John* (1956), and then, in 1958, P. Bodmer IV, Menander's *Dyskolos* ('*The Grouch*'). For once, the play was practically complete, together with its introductory summary, performance details and list of characters. The next major find came from Paris. A neglected mummy-case at the Sorbonne proved to contain parts of Menander's *Sikyonioi* (1964). Austin, whose French background was to prove a significant card in his hand, visited the Institut de Papyrologie to collate the originals in detail, one of several services he performed in these years for Rudolf Kassel, whose edition of the play appeared in 1965; in the Preface Kassel warmly thanks the young Austin for his *collatio exactissima* and his 'prudent advice on many matters'. In Paris Austin met the Director, Jean Scherer, who clearly warmed to the francophone prodigy: he 'came up to me', wrote Austin, 'and said: "Nous avons aussi un texte tragique, Monsieur Austin. Je vous le donne: il est à vous'. This papyrus contained some 100 verses of a lost (and very important) tragedy of Euripides, *Erechtheus.* With Kassel's encouragement, Austin first published it in a French papyrological journal in 1967, and then again, with other addenda to the Euripidean canon, in his first book, *Nova Fragmenta*

Euripidea in papyris reperta (Berlin, 1968); in the Preface, however, Austin felt compelled to admit that comedy was '*mihi magis . . . curae cordique*'.

In the meantime publication of the Bodmer collection continued with notable Christian texts, edited by Martin himself, by Michel Testuz and by Rodolphe Kasser. But more remained of the codex that contained *Dyskolos*, notably parts of two other plays, *Aspis* (*The Shield*) and *Samia* (*The Girl from Samos*). Their existence was known, and indeed a pirate transcript of *Samia* went the rounds. Publication was, however, delayed; rumour suggested that the missing pages might come on the market, and in fact two small detached fragments from the Bodmer codex did turn up, one in Cologne and one in Barcelona. Eventually Kasser undertook the publication himself, although, as a Coptologist, he had no special expertise in Greek literature. As Austin recounted the story, it was the influential Olivier Reverdin, academic and politician, who suggested to Bodmer that Austin might usefully join in the work. 'I will never forget', wrote Austin, 'the look of total disbelief in the eyes of Kasser and Mlle Odile Bongard (Bodmer's secretary) when they welcomed me at Geneva airport. They were expecting a middle-aged professor, not a young post-graduate student still in his twenties.' The first edition of the plays came out in 1969, as the work of Kasser 'avec la collaboration de Colin Austin': a minimalist edition, offering only a careful transcript and palaeographic notes. Austin meanwhile was constructing a more usable version, which combined an emended and interpreted text with a second volume of brief, explanatory notes in Austin's brisk, flawless Latin. The brevity was matched by the relevance and point of the notes: in the Preface Austin quotes Hesiod's πλέον ἥμισυ παντός ('half is more than the whole') and later Austin was never to tire of telling his students that 'less is more'. These volumes appeared in de Gruyter's series of *Kleine Texte* (1969, 1970).

'Those were heady days,' wrote Austin, 'a truly golden era.' The vast findings from Oxyrhynchus still possessed substantial Menandrean reserves: Menander had been widely read, but E. Lobel, who had primary charge of the collection, thought him not worth publishing ('Was there ever such muck?', he observed after reading the *Dyskolos*). It was a new regime, under the leadership of Eric Turner and in collaboration with his colleague E. W. Handley, that began to catch up. Fragments of other plays followed in quick succession, notably *Misoumenos, 'The Man She Hates'* (1965, 1968) and *Dis exapaton, 'The Double Deceiver'* (1968): the latter, uniquely, a scene for which we have Plautus' Latin adaptation, and therefore a document of the utmost importance for the study of the ancient comic tradition. In discussion and publication, Austin played his part as critic, adviser and

restorer, as he did later, when further finds provided central scenes from *Epitrepontes, 'Arbitration'* (1983) and the whole opening scene of *Misoumenos* (1977, 1983). Hardly any major discussion of these new texts from the last decades of the twentieth century is not adorned with one or more expressions of thanks to Austin for his acute suggestions, and this activity continued to the end. Even in his last illness, he took the leading role in a colloquium at the British Academy (10 December 2007): a Vatican palimpsest had revealed, beneath two later levels of writing, 200 verses of Menander's *Wet Nurse*, and it was Austin who identified the play and produced a full scale reconstruction of the evanescent text.

Papyri typically see the light in scatters, so that their contribution to the whole and their relation one to another require almost physical manoeuvres. Early in his career, Austin set out to collect all the papyri related to Greek Comedy, and in collecting to revise and explain them. The four hundred pages of *Comicorum Graecorum Fragmenta in Papyris reperta* (*CGFPR*: 1973) represent an extraordinary feat of detailed focus and informed intuition, which put, as several reviewers observed, the scholarly world very much in Austin's debt. In one generous volume, Austin gathered together all the texts of Greek comedy which had survived on papyrus, except for fragments of the surviving plays of Aristophanes and the major known plays of Menander. The exactness of his transcriptions and the brief but always illuminating explanatory notes and parallels placed beneath the text foreshadowed what was to come for, as Austin announced in the Preface, *CGFPR* was designed simply as a stepping stone to a much larger project. The grand edition of all the fragments of Attic Comedy by T. Kock (1880–8) was by now obsolete; a replacement by J. M. Edmonds (1957–61) proved slipshod, arbitrary, inaccurate and underinformed. Edmonds's publishers, Brill, had suggested to Austin that he should revise Edmonds's work, but Kassel and Lloyd-Jones advised against, partly because the work was too much for one man. Instead a new plan was hatched, with Kassel as partner: together, he and Austin were to produce an entirely new edition of all the comic fragments, on the most generous scale and to the highest standard of detail and precision. There was a precedent in the family: Austin's father had edited, almost single-handedly, the eleven volumes of Mallarmé's collected letters (1959–85).

Between 1983 and 1991 five substantial, large-scale volumes of *Poetae Comici Graeci* (*PCG*: 'Kassel–Austin') appeared with De Gruyter, covering the fragments of Old, Middle and New Comedy from Agathenor to Xenophon. The fragments are accompanied by a full textual history and a spare Latin commentary which always goes straight to the point and the

problems; the user of *PCG* is almost always directed to the ancient text or the modern note which throws most light on the interpretation of the relevant fragment. Matters of punctuation, distribution between speakers, and linguistic register are all treated with exact judgement, informed by a profound knowledge of Greek literature. This is not the last word on these thousands of fragments, but *PCG* sets out with stark clarity what is and is not known, and has transformed the way in which the fragments of comedy can be used to shed light on Greek cultural and literary history. 'Kassel–Austin' brought hundreds of verses of Greek poetry out of the closet and put them in the mainstream, where other scholars can no longer think of them as inaccessible or unimportant. It is almost like having several volumes of quite new texts, as well as an inexhaustible supply of learned and helpful commentary.

The problem of Menander remained, however, and for two years Austin worked entirely on him. The material was bulky; it soon became clear that it would occupy two volumes—one for the major plays, one for the lesser fragments. The second contained largely fragments transmitted by other ancient authors, and posed no particular problems in the hands of two such skilled editors; it duly came out in 1998. The first involved far more complex problems, since the favourite plays tended to put out green shoots, year by year, as new papyri accrued. It was therefore agreed to wait, and give priority to the two other volumes of *PCG* that would complete the series: *Adespota* (1995) and Doric Comedy (2001) both made their appearance. Austin's substantive work on Menander remained in drafts made about 1995.

In the meantime Austin suffered increasing problems of health, which coincided with a new project. He had been corresponding with Guido Bastianini in Florence about another new papyrus: a collection of 112 epigrams, almost all unknown, two elsewhere attributed to Posidippus. In 2000, with their edition only half-finished, the Florentines asked him to join in the work. Not much later, he was rushed off to Papworth Hospital with unstable angina, the first of three operations. Hospital did not keep him from Posidippus; the complete edition was published on a lavish scale in 2001 'con la collaborazione di Colin Austin', and an *editio minor* by Bastianini and Austin followed in 2002. Austin once said 'Posidippus saved my life': his will to work sustained his will to live. Although Austin had never worked on epigrams before, this verse form was just made for his talents: self-contained, sharp of point, with no word wasted, no great external system of knowledge to be absorbed and internalised, just a nearly (and neatly) closed-off world for the free play of the Greek language.

In the lull that followed, Austin was able, in collaboration with Professor Douglas Olson of the University of Minnesota, to complete the edition of Aristophanes' *Thesmophoriazusae* which he had begun as a doctoral student: that came out with Oxford University Press in 2004. Menander, however, remained on his mind, but with a new perspective. The major plays had, for the most part, received individual commentaries, and the general commentary of A. W. Gomme and F. H. Sandbach (Oxford, 1973) continued to provide the basics, and rather more: the detailed annotation of *PCG* would largely duplicate existing resources and would inevitably lead to very expensive volumes which would not necessarily allow Menander to reach the audience which Austin believed he deserved. At this time, too, he and Kassel decided to end their collaboration: we 'no longer saw eye to eye about matters big and small', wrote Austin, and the timing and format of the principal Menander volume was certainly one of those issues; Austin knew, for example, that there were important papyri still to be published. He decided, therefore, that he would replace the 'Oxford Classical Text' of his old friend and partner in Menander, F. H. Sandbach, which had first appeared in 1972 and then had been expanded, but not revised, with an appendix of new papyri in 1990. Austin's retirement, in October 2008, should have given leisure for this culminating endeavour, but now cancer made its appearance, with three operations in 2008–9. Nonetheless he pushed ahead, and made revised versions of eleven shorter plays: these were published posthumously in 2012, together with his own autobiographical preface, in a volume sponsored by the Cambridge Philological Society, a society which Austin, ably assisted by his wife Mishtu, had served as Treasurer for forty years. The nine longer plays remained essentially in the drafts of 1995. An editorial team, under the general supervision of Peter Parsons, is working to bring the new 'Oxford Classical Text' to fruition.

'In papyrology a primeval urge, akin to love or madness, drives me on relentlessly: Posidippus is my seventh direct encounter on this mystic journey back in time.' So wrote Austin in 2005. He enjoyed the pursuit, as well as the conquest, excitements as well as certainties. His scholarship continued the older traditions of France and of England. His technical mastery had one object: to recover the letter of the text. For him, hardware and software meant paper, pencil and brains; he eventually allowed email into his life, but only when bribed with two bottles of calvados. He had no taste for Wagnerian fanfares of random learning and scattergun bibliography. Menander needed a Mozartian editor, and Austin, who once indeed compared his own 'sorcery' to that of Papageno, was of one mind with his

author. The papyri are broken and illegible: you must assemble an intelligible jigsaw from jagged fragments, truncated lines and eroded ink. Austin, with wonderful creative empathy, could conjure the building from the ruins, almost as if he were composing the play himself. He thought Menander, in Menander's rhythms, and in Menander's Mozartian way: the slight tilt to a cliché, the odd inflexion of a question, the twist to the conventional situation, the humanity transforming the stock characters, the subtle counterpoint of dialogue and verse-form, all that distinguishes the Molière of the Greeks. The challenging unpredictability of Menander's Greek means that lateral thinking—in which Austin specialised—is often necessary, and time and again Austin produced plausible supplements because he took a different tack from everyone else.

There are, of course, dangers here. Austin would have been the first to acknowledge—he did indeed acknowledge—that he could, and did, get carried away (he famously described papyrology as an elixir whose magic transported one into a lost world of a new reality); he spoke half-teasingly of the inspiration of his Muse, and even of the hallucinatory effects of the drugs with which his cancer was treated, and some of the lectures on fragmentary texts which he delivered to adoring audiences, particularly in Italy, have something of the flavour of a compositional *ludus* about them. Nevertheless, his extraordinary fertility for supplementation and composition brought far more hits (even hermeneutic ones) than misses, and what is perhaps most remarkable of all, very few spectacular own goals. This fertility was married to very close attention to nuance of style and hard papyrological fact, and extraordinary control of modern bibliography; with chalcenteric thoroughness, Austin relentlessly chased the identity of the original proposers of emendations through some of the University Library's least consulted volumes, and was not slow to point out in reviews where others had not been so diligent. A final piece on Menander's *Epitrepontes*, published posthumously in a *Festschrift* for Peter Parsons, is an excellent illustration of these virtues.

In Cambridge, the centre of Austin's life was with his family and his College, where he was a devoted and convivial presence, as colleague, supervisor, Praelector and (amiably learned) wine-steward. Students and visitors who turned up at his lovely house on Park Terrace might find their host watching Wimbledon or the Tour de France or mowing the lawn in rational stripes, but his wife Mishtu's cooking always made the journey more than worthwhile. For the Faculty of Classics Austin carried out his duties—including a stint as Secretary of the Faculty—with great good humour and efficiency, though he was not a born or particularly willing

administrator; his rare intelligence was, however, often enough to see him through to solutions. Although he was a very caring and very successful Director of Studies to Trinity Hall undergraduates, modern literary criticism (of any persuasion) was not to his taste and, moreover, not everyone shared his own interests; this naturally contributed to the fact that he had relatively few graduate students (though he had in the 1970s proved a very generous supervisor to the current Regius Professor, also newly arrived from Australia). Prose, for example, was for him simply less enchanting than verse: he once claimed that reading Plato gave him a headache, and it is not easy to know exactly what sort of joke that was. Austin did not, moreover, like making generalisations, because the next papyrus could prove them worthless, but explanation of historical process or shifts in cultural attitudes, the kind of 'big questions' which came to dominate the subject and humane studies more broadly in his later years, cannot do without generalisations. It was a great pleasure for Austin that, towards the end of his Cambridge years, two Greek students, Eftychia Bathrellou and Efrosini Stigka, completed papyrological dissertations on Menander under his careful supervision. Austin's reputation and international contacts meant, moreover, that a steady stream of visiting graduate students and younger scholars beat a path to Trinity Hall to discuss their work with him. To them he was always unfailingly generous with his time, his scholarship and his friendship.

At Cambridge Austin lectured on a wide range of Greek texts, and took great pleasure in teaching Greek to absolute beginners. For many years he devoted particular energy to lectures for final-year undergraduates on the textual criticism of Greek texts. He derived enormous enjoyment from initiating them into such mysteries as the *saut du même au même*, and the fact that such wonders were in French clearly delighted him. What came across very strongly in these lectures was his genuine admiration for those who had, in his view, improved the text by conjecture, and also his beaming pleasure when he thought that he had got to the truth before anyone else; the triumphant smile, the almost child-like grin of knowing more than his audience, conveyed an enthusiasm for his subject that was infectious and inspiring. To all—colleagues, graduate students, undergraduates—who sought his advice or simply listened to him he conveyed the sense that scholarship is an exciting collaboration of the like-minded, one demanding discipline and attention to detail, but also one which requires an emotional commitment not unlike love.

Austin is survived by his wife Mishtu, their children Teesta and Topun, and four grandchildren. They were at the very heart of his life: love of

family and love of scholarship combine in the books dedicated to them severally. He also took particular delight in writing Greek or Latin verse to accompany Mishtu's marvellous batiks, and in his later years he and Mishtu were an increasingly familiar and happy sight at international conferences. It was with his family's support and strength that, in the last years, he faced down operations for angina and for cancer, and continued working on Menander until the last evening of his life. He died on 13 August 2010.

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PETER PARSONS
Fellows of the Academy

Note: We are grateful to Mishtu Austin for much help and advice in compiling this memoir. Among printed sources, note especially:

Austin, C., 'Back from the dead with Posidippus', in K. Gutzwiller (ed.), *The New Posidippus* (Oxford, 2005), pp. 67–9.
Austin, C., *Menander: Eleven Plays* (Cambridge, 2012), pp. vii–xiii, 'Preface'.
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Scott, C., 'Lloyd James Austin: 1915–1994', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 90 (1995), 267–79.