



PHILIP WALTER EDWARDS

Philip Walter Edwards

1923–2015

PHILIP EDWARDS WAS BORN ON 7 February 1923 in Barrow-in-Furness. His father's family came from North Wales, his mother's from Cheshire. His father's family were not well off, but they were 'church' rather than 'chapel' and strong supporters of the Conservative Party. After distinguished service in the First World War (when he won the Military Cross), Philip's father decided to make politics his profession, and became a Conservative Party agent, initially in the north-west of England. He was promoted frequently, and so moved regularly. Philip was born during a short sojourn in Barrow. In the late 1920s, when young Philip was living with his parents in Bristol, Neville Chamberlain recruited Philip's father to run the Conservative Party in Birmingham. By this time Philip's father was moving in distinguished circles, but struggled on a modest income to maintain his social position, which entailed private schools for a large family, a car and an enormous wardrobe.

In 1934 Philip passed the entrance examination to secure admission to King Edward VI High School in Birmingham. As his early education had equipped him with a competence in Latin, French and algebra, Philip initially felt superior to the state-school boys who had won free places and had to learn these subjects from scratch. In Philip's own account, he insists that the state-school boys quickly overtook him in every subject except English and every sport except rugby, and that the experience was a lesson in humility. In the School Certificate Examination (taken at the age of sixteen), Philip failed the arithmetic examination.

Philip's father was expecting him to leave school at sixteen and become a useful citizen. Philip's uncertainty about what that might entail persuaded

his father to allow him to stay on for the Upper Sixth year. This was, however, the summer of 1939, and when war was declared Philip took the decision to leave school. He had become very political, but with convictions that had nothing in common with his father's, and he was idealistically committed to taking part in the war against Fascism. In the event, none of the services wanted to enlist a boy of sixteen and a half, and no bombs fell. One of Philip's friends had declined a place at Oxford and instead entered Birmingham University in order to make a start on a degree course before being called up. The modest financial circumstances of Philip's family meant that Oxford was beyond his financial reach, so late in the term his father gave him permission to follow his friend to Birmingham University. He was admitted, under age, by a registrar who was a family friend, and who did not expect urban universities to survive beyond Christmas. As an undergraduate Philip attended the lectures of A. M. D. Hughes, who retired as Philip arrived but continued to teach. Hughes' lecturing style was oratorical and old-fashioned, redolent of the Welsh preaching tradition. Philip's lecturing style seems to have been moulded by the experience of listening to Hughes. Sixty years later Philip was able to acknowledge his debt to Hughes when he gave the third of the A. M. D. Hughes Memorial Lectures in 2003.

At the end of his course Philip was granted a viva, but was not awarded a first. There was, however, a consolation prize: one of the examiners, Ernest de Sélincourt, was sufficiently impressed with the work of nineteen-year-old Philip that he secured for him a postgraduate scholarship. In Philip's mature assessment, he owed his entire academic career to that act of professorial patronage.

Philip deferred his scholarship until the end of hostilities, and after a brief period on Cadbury's assembly lines joined the Royal Navy. He served for three years, latterly as sub-lieutenant (the equivalent of lieutenant in the Army) in the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve on the aircraft carrier HMS *Victorious*. Philip was present for the final onslaught on Japan, and after the two atomic bombs were dropped his ship sailed to Sydney. There he collected a letter from the Birmingham registrar, who explained that he was investigating the possibility of early demobilisation under class B, a class of 'key men' who had worked in pre-war civilian occupations that were deemed vital to construction. Class B was meant to bring men in occupations such as mining, civil engineering and the police service home ahead of the rest of their release group. The registrar's ploy was successful, and by the end of September Philip was back in Birmingham, the proud possessor of an order that declared that he was being released from

the Royal Navy for work of ‘urgent national reconstruction’ as ‘an Arts student’.

Philip had cherished a plan to write about the tragic sense in Chaucer under Helen Gardner, who taught him as an undergraduate, but she left for Oxford in 1941 and Philip’s interest was not encouraged by her successor. He therefore decided to work on the seventeenth century under the supervision of Allardyce Nicoll, who had just returned to England after twelve years in America. This was an MA by research, and Philip chose to work on the courtier and intellectual Sir Kenelm Digby. At the end of the year Philip’s recently demobbed seniors and contemporaries, many of whom would never have contemplated higher education before the war, took the opportunity of FETS (the Further Education and Training Scheme) to enrol at Britain’s universities. Extra lecturers were urgently needed, and Allardyce Nicoll asked Philip to apply for an Assistant Lectureship in the Department of English. In the event the job went to another candidate, so Philip reluctantly accepted a post at Saltley Training College in Birmingham. Before he could take up this post, Nicoll effected a rescue and conjured up a second post in his department. In October 1946 Philip was appointed, without interview, as a probationary Assistant Lecturer in English at Birmingham on a salary of £400 a year.

Philip later described his first year of teaching as exhilarating, but it was full of challenges. The heating arrangements were wholly inadequate to deal with the bitter winter of 1946–7, and Philip routinely took tutorials wearing his naval greatcoat. He was for the most part younger than his students, many of whom had served for five or six years, as opposed to Philip’s three. Philip found himself acting as an untrained counsellor to men who had been scarred by war or by the return to civilian life, and he struggled to deal with the depth of their problems. He was dismayed when one of his best students, with a fine war record, crumbled during his first examination, left the room in distress, walked to New Street Station and put his head on the line. The attentive compassion that characterised Philip’s dealings with distressed students throughout his career was formed in the crucible of his experience of teaching veterans.

Philip’s salary was sufficient to enable his marriage to Hazel Valentine, the youngest daughter of C. W. Valentine, Professor of Education, a well-known child psychologist. Philip’s best man was Michael McCrum, who had been a shipmate on HMS *Victorious* and was at the time reading Classics at Cambridge; he later went on to become Headmaster of Eton and Master of Corpus Christi, Cambridge. In July 1947 Philip and Hazel set up house in the damp basement of a house called Highfield in Selly

Park Road. The flat had no lavatory, so the newlyweds had to share facilities with the owners, Philip Sargent Florence, Professor of Commerce at Birmingham, and his American wife, the campaigner Lella Secor Florence.

Philip, who had a lifelong allegiance to particular houses, was enormously pleased to be living in a house with strong literary and political associations, and the experience marked him forever. The Florences had made Highfield the epicentre of Birmingham culture in the 1930s, and rented flats in the house to colleagues at the university. Louis MacNeice had lived in the flat above the coach house for six years, and wrote about Highfield in his autobiography.¹ William Empson lived in the house after he was banished from Cambridge. There were many literary gatherings at the house, accounts of which survive in an appendix to Barbara Moench Florence's edition of her mother's letters.² Regular visitors included the poets W. H. Auden and Henry Reed, the novelists Walter Allen, Walter Brierley and John Hampson, the architectural historian Nikolaus Pevsner, and the playwrights Reggie Smith and Leslie Halward. Walter Allen declared that 'most English left-wing intellectuals and American intellectuals visiting Britain must have passed through Highfield between 1930 and 1950'.³ House guests included Ernest Bevin, Walter Gropius, Julian Huxley and Margaret Mead. In 1982, David Lodge, who was Philip's successor at Birmingham, made a television documentary about the literary culture of Highfield. The academic culture of the English Department at Birmingham was sturdily historical, but the experience of Highfield opened a new world to Philip, and left him with an educated passion for contemporary writing, especially poetry.

The summer of 1947 also inaugurated Philip's long association with Stratford. He and Hazel spent part of the summer near Malvern, in a small toll-cottage that belonged to Allardyce and Josephine Nicoll, who lived nearby. Philip was working on *Pericles*, trying to establish what light the poor quality of the text might shed on the question of authorship; at that time this was a wonderfully untilled field. Nicoll regularly drove Philip over to Stratford, where they would have long and memorable discussions about the future shape of Shakespeare studies. Their

¹ L. MacNeice, *The Strings are False: an Unfinished Autobiography* (London, 1965).

² 'Afterword' to B. M. Florence (ed.), *Lella Secor: a Diary in Letters, 1915-1922* (New York, 1978), pp. 267-73.

³ W. Allen, *As I Walked Down New Grub Street: Memories of a Writing Life* (London and Chicago, 1981).

interlocutors included people at the theatre (notably Barry Jackson, the new director), the Birthplace Trust (Levi Fox) and the British Council. Barry Jackson had brought Paul Scofield from the Birmingham Rep to play the title role in a new production of *Pericles*. It was a truncated version, directed by Nugent Monck, but it was a timely and unprecedented opportunity to see the play being acted, and for Philip it was an unexpectedly moving experience.

The other formative event of that golden summer was the Shakespeare Conference at Mason Croft, then the home of the British Council (and, since 1951, the Shakespeare Institute). Ever alert to the literary dimensions of houses, Philip noted that it had previously been the home of Marie Corelli. The conference was described as the second, but the first had been a very small private affair at which plans had been laid for a wider international conference and the launching of the journal that became *Shakespeare Survey*, the most important journal in the subject. Philip was deeply involved with the planning and running of this 1947 conference, and relished the privilege of meeting luminaries such as F. P. Wilson, Una Ellis-Fermor, E. M. W. Tillyard, J. Dover Wilson, D. J. Gordon, R. C. Bald, Alfred Harbage, George Rylands and Peter Alexander, all of whom he later came to know well. The Secretary of the conference was Allardyce Nicoll, who exercised his authority by securing a slot for Philip at the next conference (1948), where he gave a short paper outlining the conclusions of his research on *Pericles*.

Back at Edmund Street in central Birmingham, the city centre site of the Faculties of Arts and Law (yet to be reunited with the main campus at Edgbaston), the department had new recruits, including Geoffrey Shepherd, Derek Brewer, Eric Stanley and Joan Smethurst (later Rees). When the Shakespeare Institute got under way at Stratford, the new Fellows included Reg Foakes (who had been an undergraduate with Philip at the start of the war), Ernst Honigmann and John Russell Brown. Every one of these colleagues went on to distinguished careers, and Philip was quick to acknowledge his debt to them.

Allardyce Nicoll's patronage continued apace, and Philip was enrolled as the Secretary of both *Shakespeare Survey* and the newly instituted Shakespeare Conference. Much to Philip's confused gratification, Nicoll offered him a Fellowship at the Institute with senior lecturer status. It was an incredible offer for such an untried scholar and, incredibly, Philip refused it, explaining as best he could that he did not want to become a professional Shakespearean, but rather wanted to remain as a university teacher of English literature.

In September 1950 Philip endured the greatest sorrow of his life. His wife Hazel, who had a congenital heart defect, collapsed and died after climbing many flights of stairs to visit Philip in his room at the top of the building. She was twenty-five years old. Philip had already been hard hit by the premature death of his father, aged fifty-nine, a few months earlier. Philip somehow carried on. At about this time Cyprian Blagden of Longman walked into his Edmund Street room and asked whether he had a book in mind for a series on English writers. Philip had been delivering a course of lectures on Elizabethan poetry and, rifling through his mental filing cards, remembered that he had spoken with enthusiasm about Sir Walter Raleigh, whose verse at that time was little regarded. Off the cuff he suggested Raleigh, and Blagden liked the idea.

In 1953 *Sir Walter Raleigh* was published.⁴ It begins with the disarming observation that ‘there are already too many books about Sir Walter Raleigh’, which leads to a modest assertion that the distinctive feature of this book is its attention to Raleigh’s intellectual and literary treatments. After an oddly solemn discussion of how ‘Raleigh’ should be pronounced, the book becomes a humane survey of Raleigh’s works from Philip’s chosen perspective. The high point of the book is the long discussion of *The Ocean to Cynthia*. In terms of Philip’s life, the most significant aspect of the book is its analysis of Raleigh’s accounts of his voyages. This was a subject to which he was to return in the final decades of his life.

Sir Walter Raleigh was Philip’s first book, and it remains a useful account. Its importance, however, is modest by comparison to his long article on *Pericles* in *Shakespeare Survey*. ‘An approach to the problem of *Pericles*’ not only established Philip as a serious scholar, but also proved to be a seminal piece in the history of author attribution.⁵ Some sixty-five years after its publication, Philip’s painstaking account of two reporters reconstructing the text from memory, and three compositors setting the type, still commands wide assent, and is the starting point of any discussion of the text of the play. He is also alert to the implications of his findings for the question of the authorship of the play. He concludes that:

The problem that has to be solved is whether the different aptitudes of the two reporters are the *sole* cause of the difference in literary value between the two halves of the play; whether, in fact, the original play of *Pericles* was all of one standard, all by one author, and that the first reporter, in his crude attempts to

⁴P. Edwards, *Sir Walter Raleigh* (London, New York and Toronto, 1953).

⁵P. Edwards, ‘An approach to the problem of *Pericles*’, *Shakespeare Survey*, 5 (1952), 25–49.

rebuild a verse structure and in his reliance on a palpably defective memory, has perverted language such as is found in the later acts.⁶

In this conclusion lay the seeds of the debate about Shakespeare's collaboration that has extended up to the present. Philip's tentative conclusion that Shakespeare may well have been the sole author is no longer received wisdom, but that shift in the academic consensus does not detract from the analytical power of the article.

Philip's only regret with respect to his work on *Pericles* was that he was never able to prepare a scholarly edition of the play. He enjoyed excellent relations with the general editors of the Arden Shakespeare, which was then the best scholarly series of Shakespeare's plays, and he was always puzzled that he was never asked to edit *Pericles* or any other play in that distinguished series. In the case of *Pericles*, the choice of editor was in the gift of Una Ellis-Fermor, who chose to commission a former doctoral student. F. D. Hoeniger produced a satisfactory edition, and in his account of the text acknowledged that 'much of what follows is indebted to his [Philip Edwards'] article'. Philip eventually published the New Penguin *Pericles*,⁷ into which he packed some brilliant observations, but the constraints of that series did not allow him the space to pursue his interest in the text and authorship of the play.

In May 1952 Philip was married to Sheila Wilkes, who, some years earlier, had been in one of his first-year classes. At the time of their marriage, Sheila was working as an administrative assistant in the Extra-Mural Department. They were to be happily married for sixty-three years, until Philip died. Two years after their marriage Philip was awarded a Commonwealth Fund Fellowship (later called Harkness Fellowships) for a year's study in the United States. These were originally fellowships for young graduates, mostly from Oxford and Cambridge, but the Trustees had recently decided to spread their net more widely, and to recruit one or two of what would now be called 'early career scholars'. Philip chose to go to Harvard, where he wanted to work with Douglas Bush. He planned to expand his MA work on Sir Kenelm Digby into a broader consideration of the literary and intellectual circles in the court of Charles I.

Philip and Sheila sailed to America with their one-year-old son Matthew, and Philip was soon absorbed into the intellectual life of the Harvard department. Eminent scholars such as Douglas Bush, Alfred Harbage and Harry Levin were all kind to him, and Philip revelled in the

⁶Ibid., p. 45.

⁷W. Shakespeare, *Pericles: Prince of Tyre*, ed. P. Edwards (Harmondsworth, 1976).

vast resources of the Houghton Library, making copious notes arising out of his work on literary manuscripts. By the end of the year he had amassed a large pile of notes, but not developed any sense of where this material might lead. This frustration was compounded by a second challenge, which was that it was a condition of the Fellowship that the Fellow undertake a grand tour of America for a minimum of two months. Philip and Sheila had to travel with a toddler in a 1950 Studebaker, which Philip had bought as a joke because of its bullet nose. The car constantly broke down, and a disproportionate amount of Philip's scholarship stipend had to be spent keeping it on the road. Nonetheless, they drove relentlessly on, and Philip was able to visit scholars for whom he had huge respect, including Fredson Bowers in Virginia, George Reynolds in Boulder, M. H. Abrams in Cornell and R. C. Bald in Chicago.

In the summer of 1955 Philip and Sheila returned to Birmingham. They were to remain in the British Isles, but their affection for America never dimmed. On arrival in the department, Philip found an invitation from Clifford Leech to edit Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* for a new series of editions of the plays of Shakespeare's contemporaries, later to be called the Revels Plays. Philip jumped at the opportunity, set aside (forever) the notes of his year in Harvard, and plunged into work on an edition which he always held in special affection. The edition was published in 1959,⁸ and was in many ways the first scholarly edition of the play. Philip's work on *Pericles* had endowed him with a formidable ability to deal with complex textual issues and fraught questions of authorship and dating, and the scrupulous thoroughness of Philip's treatment of these issues contributed both to the standard of scholarly editing of Elizabethan plays by authors other than Shakespeare and to the emerging sense of *The Spanish Tragedy* as a play with intrinsic worth rather than a feeble foreshadowing of Shakespeare. Philip was later to return to Kyd with a short monograph called *Thomas Kyd and Early Elizabethan Tragedy* (1966),⁹ in which he set the play in its proper context rather than reducing it to a preface to Shakespeare.

In 1956, while he was still at work on *The Spanish Tragedy*, Philip was approached by Dan Davin of Oxford University Press, asking him if he would be interested in completing the Clarendon Press edition of Massinger's plays, left unfinished by A. K. McIlwraith at his death. Philip hesitated, and as he asked around he quickly discovered that he had not

⁸T. Kyd, *The Spanish Tragedy*, ed. P. Edwards (London, 1959).

⁹P. Edwards, *Thomas Kyd and Early Elizabethan Tragedy* (London, 1966).

been the first to be approached. His colleague John Russell Brown told him enigmatically that he had turned it down 'on moral grounds'; Philip never worked out what Brown meant, but there is a sense in which his own decision to accept was based on moral grounds. At this stage in his career Philip was deeply suspicious of literary criticism built on sandy foundations. Good editions, on the other hand, with sound texts, considered judgements of textual variants, proper introductions and full annotation, were the rocks on which all professional work, including literary criticism, must be built.

When the pantechnicon arrived with decades of McIlwraith's work in several tea-chests, Philip wished that he had not accepted the commission. *The Spanish Tragedy* was completed, so Philip embarked on what proved to be more than a decade of laborious work on his own. He subsequently enlisted Colin Gibson of Otago University as an enthusiastic co-editor; Philip had examined his doctoral dissertation edition of *The Roman Actor*, so he knew that he was acquiring serious competence as well as an injection of energy. McIlwraith had been a good scholar but, as they were later to admit in their preface, Philip and Colin sometimes thought 'as they puzzled their way through manuscripts and photostats thirty to forty years old that it would be quicker to edit Massinger *ab initio*'. In the event, the publication of the five-volume edition in 1976 was a triumph,¹⁰ and it was rightly praised as a major work of scholarship.

For some time Philip had had a growing conviction that he should move on from Birmingham, not because of any disaffection but because he felt that he had been there too long—as undergraduate, postgraduate, lecturer and (since 1958) senior lecturer. As the entry points in the profession were almost all at lecturer and professor level, he began to wonder whether he stood any chance of securing a chair. He decided that it would be advantageous to have a doctorate, and so in 1960 supplicated as a member of staff on the basis of his publications; the examiners were free to recommend any degree, and sensibly awarded a PhD.

Philip's first attempt to secure a chair was at Bangor, but he did not succeed. In January 1960 his close friend Donald Dudley (later Professor of Latin) told Philip that he had noticed an advertisement for the Chair of English Literature at Trinity College, Dublin (TCD), and urged him to apply. Philip had never been to Ireland, and the account of the TCD syllabus that he found in the library was utterly bewildering. Nonetheless, it seemed an exciting possibility, and he submitted an application. He did

¹⁰ P. Edwards and C. Gibson (eds.), *The Plays and Poems of Philip Massinger*, 5 vols. (Oxford, 1976).

so thinking that he would not be offered the post, because the obvious candidate was Donald Davie, who was *in situ*. What Philip did not know was that Davie had decided to leave TCD for Cambridge, and that he had no interest in a post that involved administration.

Philip was interviewed on a cold winter's day in Dublin. The external assessor was the Shakespearean Geoffrey Bullough, and Philip was always confident that it was Bullough's advocacy that led to him being appointed. He subsequently learned that his candidacy had the strong backing of a group of college officers (Professors of Latin and Modern History) who thought that Philip could invigorate what they saw as a rather comatose department. He also discovered that other colleagues looked askance at the appointment of a young Englishman who knew nothing of Ireland or TCD and had not attended either of what were regarded as England's two universities.

Philip saw the six years that he and Sheila spent in Ireland as the most important experience of their lives. The conferring of an MA *jure officii* and election to a College Fellowship were formalities, but Philip always felt proud of them. The post was extraordinarily challenging. Innovation was particularly difficult because the college's funding was utterly inadequate. Provision for English was also inadequate. English literature was only available to the four-year honours students as part of a joint degree with another language, such as French or Latin. Philip regarded joint degrees as a strength rather than a weakness, but much regretted that, in a university with a great tradition in medieval studies, the effect of the joint degree structure was that important areas of English literature, especially Old and Middle English, were not part of the syllabus. When the demand arose for medieval English from candidates for Scholarship who were seeking extra subjects, teachers were drafted in from outside the college (notably Father Thomas Dunning from University College Dublin – UCD). Philip therefore instituted the 'sole English' curriculum, and hired Joseph Pheifer from UCD to teach Old English. The new syllabus was a runaway success, and Philip was embarrassed that it drained so many students away from joint honours courses. The first Scholar in 'sole English' was John Kelly, who was later to become a distinguished student of Yeats.

Staffing was a nightmare. Philip was fond of saying that the English Department consisted of two men and a boy, and that he was the boy. A great deal of the teaching was done by part-time assistants, some of whom were very distinguished (notably A. J. 'Con' Leventhal, the friend of Samuel Beckett), but could not participate fully in the life of the

department. Philip learned a great deal by having to lecture in areas with which he was unfamiliar. He always enjoyed teaching students who had just arrived at university, and so taught a course on the history of English criticism to first-year students. What was completely revolutionary was Philip's practice of including discussion periods within his lectures, canvassing student views and promoting discussion as part of the learning process. Here was a professor who positively wanted students to talk rather than just listen.

Reflecting on the syllabus, Philip was astonished by the lack of attention to Irish literature, and found himself, an imported Englishman, instituting regular courses in Irish literature in an Irish university. He managed to create a junior lectureship for his student Brendan Kennelly, who was already a fine poet—and an Irish Catholic—to assist in establishing Irish literature on a wider and more secure footing. He was also able to create a part-time post for the short-story writer Frank O'Connor, whose weekly lectures on Irish literature attracted large audiences. Philip was immensely proud of this appointment, and wrote about O'Connor's contribution to the department in a book of tributes.¹¹

The appointment of Irish writers to teaching posts reflected Philip's conviction, shaped by his experience of Highfield, that the study of literature extended up to the present and that writers could afford insights that were denied to antiquarian academics. He also became a passionate advocate of Ireland's literary tradition, and for the rest of his professional life always taught courses on Irish literature. Visitors to his personal library later in life would be shown his Irish holdings, notably a magnificent collection of early editions of George Moore, of whose works Philip had a capacious command.

Early in 1964 Philip received an invitation from G. B. Harrison to spend the next academic year as a Visiting Professor at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. Philip had a great deal of respect for Harrison and his scholarship, and was aware that the emotional depth of Harrison's writing about loss in Shakespeare's tragedies was grounded in the loss of two sons during the Second World War. Philip accepted immediately, but when he and Sheila met Harrison in London to discuss arrangements for the visit, he was discomfited to discover that he was being asked as a trial run for replacing Harrison. Philip and Sheila loved the United States, but at that point they had no wish to leave Ireland, nor to make a permanent

¹¹ P. Edwards, 'Frank O'Connor at Trinity', in M. Sheehy (ed.), *Michael Frank: Studies on Frank O'Connor with a Bibliography of his Writing* (Dublin, 1969), pp. 120–36.

home in America. The whole family went nonetheless, and they had a fine year. Philip's colleagues included Edward Engelberg, whose knowledge of Yeats prompted him to read the whole of Yeats during his time in Ann Arbor. Philip had to give a year-long Shakespeare course, and his rereading of the whole of Shakespeare laid the foundations for *Shakespeare and the Confines of Art*,¹² which presents Shakespeare as a conscious creator of an art form that can set human experience within its confines.

Shakespeare and the Confines of Art is in many respects the most personal of Philip's books, in that it sees in Shakespeare a craftsman who battles against his own scepticism about the ability of his craft to achieve its aims. On one level the book is a series of insightful readings of the Sonnets and a selection of the plays; on another level it is a reflection of the constant need felt by Philip to justify both the utility and the capability of his own work as a scholar and teacher. Academics from very comfortable backgrounds sometimes seem content to feel that they are saying something significant to their readers; Philip was a modest man from a modest background, and never lost the anxiety that his work might not be worthwhile.

That anxiety may be one reason why Philip never deserted his research, even when he was teaching or discharging senior managerial responsibilities. He lacked sympathy for colleagues who complained that they had no time for research when they were teaching. Philip's capacious appetite for research meant that he always created research time while teaching, and research questions never left his mind. Later in his career, when he was editing *Hamlet*, he walked to lunch with a colleague after a long morning of teaching, and confessed that he sometimes woke up in the morning quivering with excitement about whether he would decide for 'solid flesh' or 'sullied flesh'. That boyish enthusiasm for literature, for textual scholarship and for teaching stayed with Philip throughout his career.

In the course of the year in America Philip's determination to stay in Ireland was gradually sapped by enquiries about his willingness to take posts elsewhere. Clifford Leech offered him a post at University of Toronto, and Hazard Adams offered him a well-paid post at the new university at Irvine in California. There were also invitations to join one of the new universities being created in England in the wake of the Robbins Report, and to join Frank Kermode as the second chair at Manchester. In the event, the decisive figure was Donald Davie, whom Philip regarded as the architect of the rest of his career (and whose memoir he was later to

¹²P. Edwards, *Shakespeare and the Confines of Art* (London, 1968).

write for the British Academy).¹³ At TCD Philip had been consulted by Albert Sloman, who was planning the new University of Essex, about the suitability of Donald Davie as Essex's inaugural Professor of Literature, and Philip was enthusiastic. Donald and Doreen had become fast friends of Philip and Sheila, and Philip was proud to have played a small role in Davie's career.

Soon the favour was reciprocated. Davie came to Ann Arbor to deliver a prestigious lecture, and pressed Philip to join him at Essex. Davie's argument was that he had agreed to the very experimental comparative syllabus that Sloman was instituting at Essex, but he wanted to ensure that the core canon of English literature was not neglected, and saw the appointment of Philip, as a Shakespearean, as a kind of conservationist insurance. He was lavish in his description of what Philip could expect with regard to the freedom to plan courses and appoint staff. After Davie left, Philip and Sheila talked about the matter at great length. They had always assumed that they would eventually return to England, and Essex was an appealing prospect. They agreed that they would go to Colchester early in autumn to look around and have a talk with Albert Sloman.

Having resolved on a plan of action, Philip got on with his work in America. He spent the spring of 1965 at the Huntington Library, working on Massinger and his Shakespeare book. Sheila and the boys came to California to join Philip, and the family embarked on a protracted holiday that began in Sequoia National Park and ended in Vermont. This experience rounded off a fine year, and Philip returned to Ireland looking forward to his impending visit to Essex.

The visit went all too well. The weather was beautiful, and the countryside of the Essex–Suffolk borders was breathtaking. While Philip was getting to know people at the university, Sheila found some attractive houses for sale, including Twentymans, the house that they eventually bought in Brightlingsea. By November it was all settled, and Philip agreed to start work in October 1966. Departure from Dublin was protracted and difficult. Philip was reluctant to leave, friends were telling him that going to Essex was a big mistake, and the challenge of finding someone to replace him at TCD after Denis Donoghue and John Holloway both lost interest left Philip feeling that he was deserting the ship. There were also practical difficulties, which reached their zenith when a bank strike in Ireland meant that Philip could not make a down payment on Twentymans.

¹³P. Edwards, 'Donald Alfred Davie, 1922–1995', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 94 (1997), pp. 391–412.

Philip published a letter in the *Irish Times* setting out his plight. He then received an anonymous telephone call inviting him to come to the back door of the bank, where he was given a sackful of banknotes. Philip and Sheila had to stuff the banknotes into envelopes for posting to the Essex solicitor who was handling the purchase.

The initial experience of Essex was a delight. Philip and Sheila loved Twentymans and its large garden, enjoyed exploring Suffolk, and made many friends outside as well as inside the university. Philip also relished the easy access to London, both for theatres and the British Museum. The university, however, was a huge disappointment, utterly alien to Philip's values. Contrary to what he had been led to expect, he found himself in a straitjacket with respect to teaching and appointments. In the wake of the destructive student rebellion of May 1968, founding professors began to leave in large numbers. To Philip's distress, their numbers included Donald Davie, his friend and ally, who suddenly departed for Stanford to succeed Ivor Winters. Philip was left as head of department administering a system in which he had no faith. His attempts to modify the arrangements were denigrated by some of his colleagues as a betrayal of founding principles, and even students turned against him: Philip never forgot being mocked and berated by angry students as he was pushing a pram holding his young daughter Kate.

Philip realised that the move to Essex had been a mistake, but he was determined to make a decent fist of it, and to outsiders he could be defensive of the Essex experiment. In the course of a Visiting Fellowship at All Souls, he endured the sneers and voiced contempt for Essex of Max Beloff and A. L. Rowse. The latter's repeated dismissal of Essex as 'third-rate' irritated Philip immensely, and he insisted that whatever its shortcomings, Essex was never third-rate. He declared that with senior colleagues such as Alasdair Macintyre, Tony Atkinson, Joseph Rykwert, Jean Blondel and Anthony King, intellectual life could never be dull.

There were many opportunities to leave, the first of which came from TCD, when Philip was invited to join the panel at the annual meeting of the 'Hist' (the College Historical Society). He was startled to be asked by the Provost, A. J. McConnell, to stay at the Provost's House. Late in the evening, over a large tumbler of whisky, McConnell invited Philip to return to his old position. Philip was utterly miserable: there was nothing for which he wished more, as he missed Trinity acutely, but he felt that he could not accept. In the event, Philip endured Essex for eight years, all the while resisting overtures from other universities.

Despite the unhappiness, the Essex years were immensely productive. Philip and Colin Gibson brought the Massinger edition close to completion, and Philip did a great deal of research and writing. He also assumed a series of demanding administrative roles. He was the university's first Public Orator, and was particularly proud to have been able to deliver the oration for Harold Wilson, who was then Prime Minister. The student troubles of 1968 took a dreadful toll on student recruitment, as parents and schools were uneasy about recommending Essex. Albert Sloman asked Philip to become his first Dean of Admissions, hoping that Philip's charm might influence schools that had given up on Essex to send students once more. The schools that he visited included Eton, where he stayed with his old shipmate Michael McCrum. Any hope that the visit might have been worthwhile was crushed when he returned to Essex; rebellion had broken out again, and he discovered that the students were being rallied into action over the Tannoy by an undergraduate who was an Old Etonian.

In the autumn of 1969 Philip and Sheila (and three of their four children) moved to Williamstown, Massachusetts. Philip much enjoyed teaching at Williams College, which offered very small classes, polite and hard-working students, and friendly and stimulating colleagues. It was a timely period of respite from the tensions of Essex, where Philip battled on. Ever alert to the importance of having contemporary writers undertake some teaching, Philip managed to persuade Robert Lowell to come to Essex for two years as a visiting professor. Philip relished Lowell's company, and took particular pleasure in discussing English Renaissance poetry with him.

The Essex years were for the most part a dreadful experience, but Philip did not regard the disaster as unmitigated. He loved his house, he enjoyed the area and, as ever, had a wide circle of friends. When, however, Kenneth Muir sounded him out in 1973 about succeeding him as King Alfred Professor at Liverpool, Philip responded very positively. Muir had built up a fine department, and Philip was far more sympathetic to its ethos than to that of Essex. He shared with Sheila, however, a reluctance to leave Twentymans and friends and countryside for the urban horrors of Merseyside, an area that has now been imaginatively regenerated but was, when Philip (and I) arrived in 1974, a very unattractive place. These reservations were exacerbated by the strains of a move that Philip described as singularly difficult, protracted and expensive. His negotiations over salary failed, the university only covered partial removal expenses and it took some time to recover his financial equilibrium.

Philip and Sheila bought a fine house on the Wirral and settled in contentedly. They were to stay in Liverpool for sixteen years, and both enjoyed the experience. Philip noted with pleasure that his students were studious, his colleagues collegial and the department was not cloven by the theory wars (as many were). He delighted in the friendship of many in the department, which suited his temperament admirably. He was a wonderfully benign head of department, but quietly insisted that standards be maintained. On one occasion those teaching a drama course, including myself, went to his room to propose a revision of the course in which English drama would be interspersed with the study of plays by writers such as Molière, Ibsen, Chekhov and Brecht. Philip responded warmly, and stipulated two conditions: one was that the colleague lecturing on the play would be familiar with the text in the original language (Nicholas Grene had Russian and I could bluff my way through Norwegian), and the other was that any joint honours students in seminars (English could be combined with French or German or Russian) would be asked to read the plays in the original language. We left the room pleased that our initiative had been taken seriously, and the course ran successfully for many years.

Provision for study leave was sufficient for Philip to make progress on books such as *Threshold of a Nation*,¹⁴ and his edition of *Hamlet* for the New Cambridge Shakespeare,¹⁵ at the Huntington, New College, Oxford and Otago University. He also became a Visiting Professor at the International Christian University in Tokyo. *Threshold of a Nation* proposed a fruitful analogy between the drama of Elizabethan and Jacobean England, which heralded what Philip saw as the birth of the modern nation, and the drama of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Ireland, which played a significant role in the emergence and identity of an independent Ireland. The edition of *Hamlet* afforded Philip an opportunity long denied him—to prepare a scholarly edition of a major Shakespeare play. Philip relished the theatrical dimension that is a central feature of the New Cambridge Shakespeare. He had little enthusiasm for the idea of the text as a document to be read and performed in the reader's head, so his careful account of textual history and his deft summary of the vast critical tradition is complemented by an insistence that the text is a theatrical document that only comes to life when the play is realised in a stage performance.

¹⁴P. Edwards, *Threshold of a Nation: a Study in English and Irish Drama* (Cambridge, 1979).

¹⁵W. Shakespeare, *Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*, ed. P. Edwards (Cambridge, 1985).

At Liverpool Philip declined the position of Dean, but accepted the office of Pro-Vice-Chancellor, partly in the hope that the extra £2,000 a year would help the family to support their son Richard in drama school. The latter part of his tenure as PVC was rendered a misery by the need to impose the cuts imposed on the universities by Margaret Thatcher in 1981, and Philip was pleased to be able to return to his department at the end of his stint. He finished his book on *Shakespeare: a Writer's Progress*,¹⁶ plunged into research on voyaging in Early Modern England and happily assumed a full teaching load. In 1986 he was elected to the British Academy, and took enormous pleasure in this honour.

In his last years at Liverpool Philip was suffering from cataracts in both eyes, and received what he later regarded as poor advice from a private consultant to delay seeking treatment. He was happy to accept an invitation to act as an external examiner at Oxford, but the usual challenges of reading handwritten scripts were compounded by the advent of word processing, because many candidates saved money by printing their dissertations in draft mode, and Philip struggled with the pale inking. He was also dispirited by the reception of his book *Last Voyages: Cavendish, Hudson, Raleigh*,¹⁷ which was widely ignored except by specialists who resented the cheek of an intruder. He later wrote that 'I never convinced my own tribe of the worth of what I was doing, nor the "experts" of my right to be in their field.'

Such experiences wholly reconciled Philip to the prospect of retirement in 1990; he was also buoyed by the thought that, for the first time, his library would be consolidated under one roof. He and Sheila had bought a retirement home in Kendal, and Philip resolved to give up academic work altogether. In the event, Kendal revived his spirits, and he soon returned to academic work with renewed energy. He defiantly decided to continue his work on early voyages, and in the years that followed published *The Story of the Voyage: Sea Narratives in Eighteenth-Century England* (1994),¹⁸ *Sea-Mark: the Metaphorical Voyage, Spenser to Milton* (1997),¹⁹ and the Penguin edition of *The Journals of Captain Cook*.²⁰ He also engaged with characteristic energy in the life of his community: he

¹⁶ P. Edwards, *Shakespeare: a Writer's Progress* (Oxford, 1986).

¹⁷ P. Edwards, *Last Voyages: Cavendish, Hudson, Raleigh* (Oxford, 1988).

¹⁸ P. Edwards, *The Story of the Voyage: Sea Narratives in Eighteenth-Century England* (Cambridge, 1994).

¹⁹ P. Edwards, *Sea-Mark: the Metaphorical Voyage, Spenser to Milton* (Liverpool, 1997).

²⁰ P. Edwards (ed.), *The Journals of Captain Cook* (London, 1999).

lectured at the local arts centre, started a poetry group and supported local causes, such as stopping quarry lorries from driving through Kendal. He was also an active opponent of the UK's involvement in the war in Iraq.

Philip's last book, called *Pilgrimage and Literary Tradition*, was published in 2005.²¹ Books on pilgrimage tend to end with the Reformation. Philip chose to make the Reformation his starting point, and to consider how pilgrimage lived on as a literary motif in the work of writers such as Shakespeare, Conrad, Eliot, Yeats and Heaney, none of whom is normally associated with pilgrimage. The book is chiefly remarkable for its account of *Hamlet*, in which Philip discerns a tragic version of pilgrimage that may have its origins in the ancient literature of Ireland. This book did not receive the wide notice that it merited, but one strand of his research for the book received national newspaper coverage when Philip first announced it in 2003.²² T. S. Eliot's seventy-nine-word poem 'Usk' contains an allusion to 'the white hart behind the white well'. Philip visited Llangybi (Usk), and there found a pub called the White Hart Inn. He soon discovered that behind the pub lay the ruins of a whitewashed beehive well that had once been a place of pilgrimage. He had solved the riddle of the lines.

Philip's writing career ended with *Pilgrimage and Literary Tradition*. Thereafter he carried on gardening as long as he could, and kept up the practice of correspondence. He always addressed his letters by hand, and his lifelong interest in calligraphy ensured that recipients took pleasure in his letters even before opening them.

Philip Edwards died on 27 November 2015. He is survived by his wife Sheila, by their children Matthew, Stephen, Charles and Kate, by their eight grandchildren and by one great-grandson. Philip lives on in their memories, and in those of the many people who enjoyed his infectious delight in literature and the warm embrace of his friendship.

GORDON CAMPBELL
Fellow of the Academy

²¹ P. Edwards, *Pilgrimage and Literary Tradition* (Cambridge, 2005).

²² See for example J. Ezard, 'TS Eliot scholar finds answer to pub poet's riddle', *The Guardian* (6 August 2003) <http://www.theguardian.com/uk/2003/aug/06/highereducation.books> (accessed 9 December 2016).

Note. Philip Edwards deposited two accounts of his life with the British Academy, in 1988 and 2000. There are of course variants and second thoughts of a type that Philip associated with the texts of Shakespeare's plays. I have also drawn on the memories (and incorporated the corrections) of Matthew Edwards (on behalf of Philip's family), Neville Davies and Nicholas Grene, all of whom kindly read a preliminary draft of this memoir.