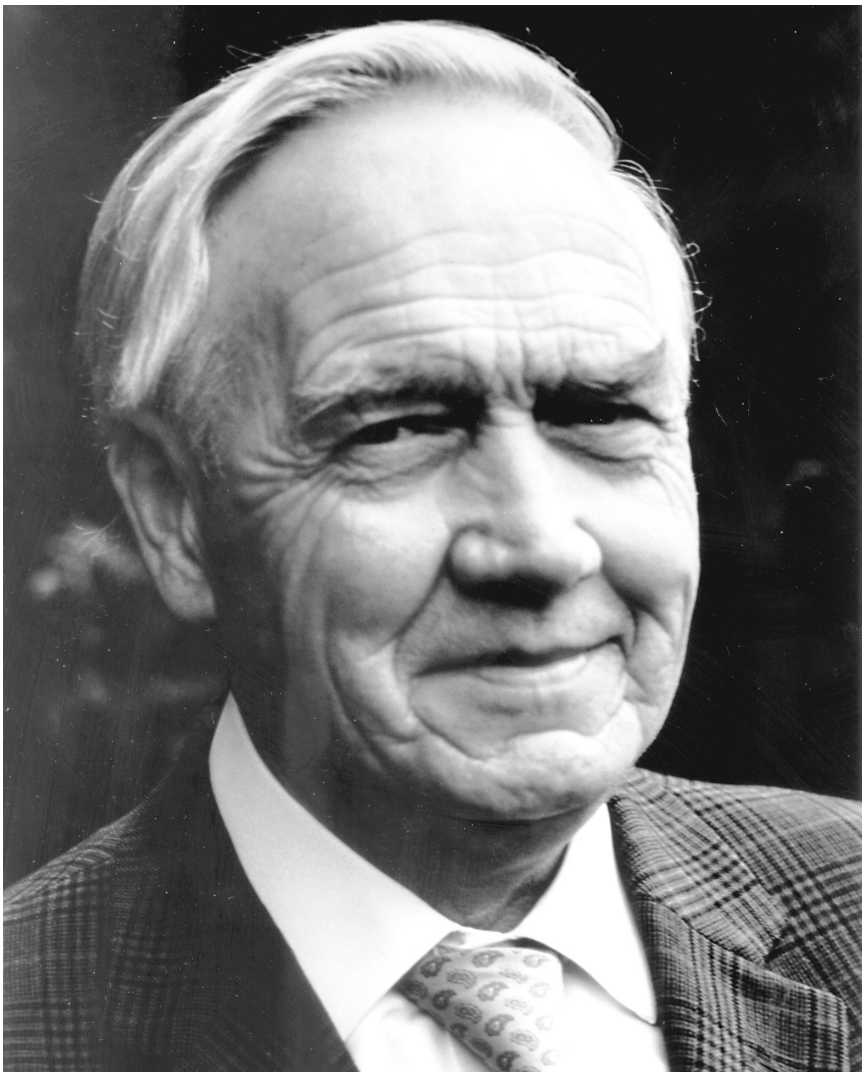

W. S. WATT

William Smith Watt
1913–2002

W. S. WATT, known to his friends as Bill, was one of the leading Latin scholars of his time. His long and energetic life makes an impressive story. To look back at it prompts reflection on the changing patterns of education and scholarship in the twentieth century.

Watt was born on 20 June 1913, the son of John Watt and his wife Agnes (née Smith). His birthplace was a moorland farm at Harthill, to the east of Glasgow, where his father was the tenant, and his mother also came of farming stock; he was always grateful to his parents for the support they gave him, but in later life showed no wish to revisit the landscape of his youth. After the local primary school he proceeded to Airdrie Academy where he was dux in 1929; as in other Scottish schools, the Latin name was given to the best scholar. Here he received a solid grounding in classics, a subject suited to stretch clever boys and girls before they are experienced enough to write original essays; such an education could then be provided in Scotland not just in the big cities but in the smaller towns, whose academies and high schools sometimes figure in the memoirs of the British Academy. Shortly before his sixteenth birthday he entered the bursary competition at Glasgow University on a trial run, and to his surprise (for he was always cautious as well as ambitious) came second out of 438 candidates. In the biographical notes that he wrote sixty years later he recorded that his bursary enabled him to take a university course without causing undue financial hardship to his parents; the fact that he could remember the exact sum (£40 for four years) shows how much he depended on the money.

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In October 1929 he entered Glasgow University; he would leave home at 7.20 in the morning, walk three and a half miles to the station, and arrive in time for the 9 o'clock lecture. In each of his four years he came first in both Humanity and Greek: Humanity was the old name for Latin in the Scottish universities, a reminder of the subject's traditional place in Scottish education. Among Watt's teachers were R. G. Austin, later best known for his commentaries on Virgil, A. W. Gomme, the future commentator on Thucydides, H. D. F. Kitto, later to write books on Greek tragedy, R. G. Nisbet (the father of the present writer), expert in Latin syntax and idiom and the future commentator on Cicero's *De Domo*, and W. Rennie, part-editor of the Oxford text of Demosthenes and commentator on the *Acharnians* of Aristophanes; C. J. Fordyce, the future commentator on Catullus, who had been educated in the tradition that Watt was following, did not return to Glasgow till 1934. Watt formed a particular rapport with Austin, who was then only about thirty; his humane scholarship was less austere than Watt's, but he had a gift for encouraging talents different from his own (as he showed later when Professor of Latin at Cardiff and Liverpool). A life-long friendship developed, and in his commentary on Cicero's *Pro Caelio* (3rd edn., 1960) Austin pays tribute to Watt's 'unerring finger'.

It was the ambition of the best classical students at Glasgow (provided they were men) to win the Snell Exhibition to Balliol College, Oxford. This had been founded by John Snell[1] in 1679 with the intention that his beneficiaries should return to Scotland and preach according to the forms of the Episcopalian Church, but after protracted litigation the House of Lords permitted a laxer interpretation of the testator's wishes. The interaction of Glasgow and Oxford proved fruitful: Snell's award-holders have included Adam Smith (1740), who complained that there was too much praying at Balliol, J. G. Lockhart (1809), Scott's son-in-law and biographer, W. Y. Sellar (1842), Lewis Campbell (1850), D. B. Monro (1854), Edward Caird (1860), Andrew Lang (1864), W. P. Ker (1874), W. M. Lindsay (1877), C. J. Fordyce (1920), G. Highet (1929), R. Browning (1935), R. G. M. Nisbet (1947), F. Cairns (1961), D. N. MacCormick (1963). At Austin's suggestion Watt sat the examination in December 1931 to gain experience for the following year, but once again surprised himself, though not anybody else, by winning the award. The emoluments

[1] See W. Innes Addison, *The Snell Exhibitions* (Glasgow, 1901); L. Stones, 'The Life and Career of John Snell (*c*.1629–1679)', *Stair Society*, *Miscellany*, 2 (1984), 148–220; John Jones, *Balliol College, a History: 1263–1939* (Oxford, 1988), pp. 125–7.

(£100 for four years) were doubled by the Newlands scholarship; Watt also won the Logan medal (for the most distinguished graduate of the year in Arts) and the Ferguson scholarship[2] in classics (open to the graduates of all four Scottish universities and worth £110 for two years). These awards, which he dutifully remembered, were not just badges of honour but were to make all the difference between bare subsistence and what he called reasonable comfort.

At that time research degrees played little part in classics at Oxford, so graduates from Scotland and elsewhere undertook another undergraduate course, Classical Moderations ('Mods') on language and literature for the first five terms, and Literae Humaniores ('Greats') on philosophy and ancient history for seven terms. Mods might seem repetitive for a graduate, but Greats did not include literature till some forty years later. Watt was still only twenty, and he had studied classics for a shorter time than the products of some English schools. The course demanded a precise knowledge of Latin and Greek: thus candidates were expected to read all forty-eight books of Homer with great accuracy, so that they could remember most of the words for the rest of their lives, but not to write significant essays on the interesting problems raised. In one respect Mods went beyond anything offered at Glasgow: the questions set on some of the prepared books dealt predominantly with textual criticism. Candidates were presented with short extracts or 'gobbets' from these authors, and invited to consider the various readings with arguments for and against; to conclude that the crux was insoluble and deserving of the obelus might be taken as a sign of precocious perspicacity. The direction of scholars' studies depends on early influences more than one likes to admit, and all his life Watt was to be superb at doing gobbets, though as time went on he hit the nail on the head more expeditiously than was thought necessary in Mods.

Besides set books the staple of the Mods course was composition in Latin and Greek, not just in prose as at Glasgow, but if a candidate wished it in verse as well. Those who aspired to an academic career competed for the University scholarships, the Hertford for Latin only (which Watt won in 1935), the Craven and Ireland for Latin and Greek combined (which he won in 1934 and 1935). These examinations included quite difficult unseens and a 'Critical Paper' where essays and gobbets were set on authors outside the syllabus; old papers look fairly formidable, but as usual much depended on a tutor's understanding of what was likely to be

[2] See William Douglas, *The Ferguson Scholars 1861–1955* (Glasgow, 1956), pp. 322–3.

asked. But greater emphasis was put on composition, not just the standard exercises in prose and verse but the curiously named 'Taste Paper', where passages were set for translation into the individual style of perhaps Theocritus or Lucretius. This may seem frivolous dilettantism to many in more recent times, but it too was important for Watt's later output. Though expert textual critics are inevitably few, Britain in the last century produced more than Germany, and this sensitivity to the finer shades of language seems to have something to do with the many hours spent on proses and verses.

After his first in Mods Watt proceeded to Greats, where he was more interested in ancient history than in philosophy. In January 1937, a few months before his final examination, he was summoned to see the Master of Balliol, A. D. Lindsay (another Glasgow man); when Watt entered his study the Master looked up and said 'Ah, Watt, the fellows have been discussing arrangements for teaching Mods after Cyril Bailey retires: would you like the job?' Appointments were sometimes made like that in those distant days, without research degrees or evidence of publication, without testimonials or interviews, without interference from professors or boards, without so-called 'lecturettes' to committees of non-specialists. The procedure encouraged inbreeding, but colleges liked to appoint young scholars who could relate to undergraduates and who understood the system; suitable 'Mods dons' were hard to find, as some of the best classicists were lost to philosophy or ancient history, and colleges had every incentive to choose somebody who would be effective. After this vote of confidence Watt felt that he simply had to get a first, so he worked harder than ever; in view of the high standards expected and the quirks of an archaic marking system, even the best scholars could not allow themselves leisure to ruminate. But needless to say he got his first in Greats.

Watt had a gap year before he took up his fellowship, and it was originally planned that he should go to Munich to work on the *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae*, the indispensable lexicon that was begun in 1900 and is not yet complete. This kind of scholarship would have suited him well as he was exceptionally clear-headed and decisive: when lexicographers are confronted with an unfamiliar passage they must make their minds up without agonising too much about the possible fuzziness of language. At this juncture he received a letter from William Rennie, the Professor of Greek at Glasgow: Gomme had obtained a Leverhulme award to work on Thucydides, and Watt was invited to take his place as a lecturer for a year. He accepted with relief, for 1937 was not the best of times to go to Munich.

Watt enjoyed his return to Glasgow, where he taught Greek history as well as Greek; from his salary of £500, twice the usual rate for beginners, he was able to buy a house for his parents. He took up his fellowship at Balliol on 1 October 1938, two days after the signing of the Munich agreement and four weeks before the Oxford by-election in which A. D. Lindsay lost to Quintin Hogg. In 1938–9 he shared the Mods teaching with Cyril Bailey, well-known for his commentaries on Epicurus and later Lucretius, in 1939–40 with Roger Mynors, later to be Professor of Latin at Cambridge and then Oxford; both tutors taught both ancient languages, as was the custom before specialisation became so extreme. Their styles were complementary: while Mynors introduced his pupils to topics remote from the syllabus, Watt thought that their interests would be best served by concentration on the needs of the examination. In 1940 Mynors left for a post at the Treasury; Watt was rejected for military service because of a defective eye and continued teaching till 1941. In the meantime he was appointed keeper of the College minutes, a duty which he discharged with typical efficiency till he left Balliol; the orderliness of his mind was reflected in the tidiness of his desk, for he was never one of those scholars whose thoughts sprout from a litter of half-read offprints and half-written lectures. He was also treasurer of the Oxford Basque Children's Committee, which supported a few of the victims of the Spanish civil war; it was characteristic that he made himself useful in this practical but unostentatious way.

In May 1941 Watt joined the Inter-Services Topographical Department, then based in Oxford, as a temporary civilian officer, Admiralty; the department had been set up by Admiral J. H. Godfrey,[3] the Director of Naval Intelligence, who had been appalled by the lack of geographical information in the bungled Norwegian campaign in the spring of 1940. It was the duty of the civilian officer to coordinate and edit the data about beaches, roads, and possible airfields collected by the representatives of the three services. Watt commonly worked a twelve-hour day, and sometimes into the night as well when information was needed for plans that were not necessarily executed (perhaps they included some of Churchill's rasher inspirations). Classical scholars were thought suitable for such research as they were used to collating defective scraps of evidence, their pedantic exactitude was seen to be worthwhile when lives were at stake, and they had a reputation at that time for writing concisely and clearly;

[3] See Patrick Beesly, *Very Special Admiral: the Life of Admiral J. H. Godfrey* (London, 1980), p. 205.

among Watt's colleagues were such scholars as W. S. Barrett (see above, pp. 25–36), F. H. Sandbach, and A. F. Wells. Watt played a particular part in the preparation for the landings in North Africa in November 1942 ('Operation Torch'); Admiral Sir Andrew Cunningham, the naval commander, and General Eisenhower, the supreme commander, expressed their appreciation of the department's work, and Admiral Godfrey minuted to the Board of Admiralty 'I doubt if a commander of an operation has ever before been given his intelligence in so complete and so legible a form'. Later he gave Watt a testimonial saying that he possessed 'remarkable practical and intellectual ability and phenomenal staying power', qualities that his later pupils and colleagues will recognise.

In July 1944 Watt married Dorothea (Thea), daughter of R. J. Codrington Smith, the area manager of Cable and Wireless in Cyprus. She was then a junior commander in the ATS and attached to the Inter-Services Topographical Department; they first met when she disturbed him by drilling her young women outside his window. Their happy marriage was to sustain him for fifty-eight years.

In 1945 Watt resumed his position as a tutor at Balliol; in the over-crowded conditions of the post-war period he kept himself very busy, teaching up to twenty-five hours a week, sometimes even after dinner; but his load was lightened in 1948 with the appointment of a second classical tutor, K. J. Dover. Watt based his teaching on the correction of compositions and the return of 'collections' (i.e. College test-papers); essays played little part, but that was a consequence of the way the subject was examined, and at that time there were far fewer books and articles in English than was later the case. Watt was an excellent tutor, who not only instilled some of the respect for accuracy on which all deeper understanding must depend, but provided the unobtrusive encouragement that counts for more than memorable observations; Balliol had been a competitive college since the Masterships of Jenkyns and Jowett, and Watt's own career made him conscious that success in examinations might be decisive in the lives of others. He recorded with satisfaction that in the six years from 1947 to 1952 half his pupils obtained firsts in Mods; he even compiled a table showing the proportion of firsts awarded in all subjects in all colleges, a precursor of the 'Norrington Tables' that were to receive even greater attention in the quality press than prowess on the river. He could not have foreseen the enthusiasm of later politicians and educationists for weighing the imponderable and comparing the incommensurate.

Tutoring and examining (always a burden in Oxford) were so labour-intensive that Watt had relatively little time for his own researches.

Eduard Fraenkel, the Corpus Professor of Latin since 1935, had brought to Oxford some of the breadth of approach that at the beginning of the century characterised the Berlin of Wilamowitz, and through his lectures and seminars he exercised a profound influence on both 'senior members' and the best undergraduates. But he was too self-centred to be good at fostering other people's researches, and though Watt was highly regarded by him, like others he felt constricted by so dominating a presence. Nowadays, when there is pressure on young scholars to publish too much too early, it is hard to understand a time when the prevailing ethos might induce writer's block. Even so, Watt was able to prepare expert lectures on Cicero's letters; like those of his friend W. S. Barrett on Euripides, they might seem too detailed to some, but to others, and not just those who were to become professional classicists, they conveyed something of the ideals of scholarship.

In 1952 Watt was appointed Regius Professor of Humanity in the University of Aberdeen, a chair founded in 1505. At that time he had published only two short notes and a few reviews, but good Latin scholars were then hard to find, and publication was not thought important when somebody was known to be outstanding. Fraenkel wrote of him 'He is possessed of unflagging energy and a capacity for sustained hard work which I believe is uncommon. He is a born grammarian, and I have to think twice before I query any statement of his on points of language. Owing to the perfect lucidity of his mind and his severe self-discipline he is also an excellent textual critic.' That is a just assessment, and as an undergraduate I was impressed to see Fraenkel back off at one of his seminars when Watt had quietly pronounced. Fraenkel added 'If he perhaps tends every now and then to be somewhat too rational, that is, in a young man, a fault in the right direction, which will probably correct itself as he gains in experience.' There was something in this qualification, but Watt never became any less rational.

Watt's main scholarly aim at this time was to develop his work on Cicero's letters. In view of the inadequacy of L. C. Purser's Oxford text he had proposed to the University Press that he should re-edit the whole corpus, and this offer was accepted. The textual criticism of the letters is unusually difficult: the manuscripts are often unreliable, the private letters show the informality and jerkiness characteristic of the genre, prose-rhythm seldom provides the control that we find elsewhere in Cicero, there are learned literary jokes and references to obscure political and financial transactions, the scraps of Greek are persistently corrupted. The Swedish editor Sjögren had built on the work of C. Lehmann to present

a convincing classification of the manuscripts, but he was much too ready to accept the transmitted reading. Watt's edition of the letters to Cicero's brother Quintus and to M. Brutus the tyrannicide was published in 1958 and set new standards of accuracy and acuteness, though only those who have studied the problems in detail will see how much thought and labour such a book required. He persuaded the Press to let him record where conjectures were first published; this is useful when a scholar gives reasons for his proposal, and it is right that we should be reminded of the contributions of the sixteenth century to the correction of the text. But for Watt precision in such matters was a duty in itself, and when I called Burman 'Burmann' he was good enough to let me know.

Watt next proceeded to the much bigger collection of Cicero's letters *Ad Atticum*. Because of his administrative responsibilities he knew that his progress was likely to be slow; so he proposed a collaboration with D. R. Shackleton Bailey, then a fellow of Jesus College, Cambridge, who had published some notable emendations to the text. The partnership failed to prosper, as both parties held firm opinions, so it was agreed that Watt should edit books 1–8 and his colleague books 9–16. When Shackleton Bailey produced a volume of *adversaria* on the subject,[4] Watt reviewed it.[5] Though some of his criticisms were justified, as was inevitable with so difficult a text, the tone of the whole was unduly combative, but this was a long-standing tradition with classical reviewers that sometimes surprises their colleagues in other disciplines. As a result the two leading experts in the field found themselves at loggerheads, though later they were to refer to each other's work with proper respect.

In 1965 Watt published his Oxford text of Cicero, *Ad Atticum* 1–8, and between 1965 and 1970 Shackleton Bailey produced in seven volumes his Cambridge edition of all sixteen books; this included a commentary that was strong on historical as well as textual details, and was made more accessible by an elegant translation. Watt was unlucky to compete with this more elaborate work: a commentary would have given greater scope for his talents than a text, for he had an impressive grasp of Latin idiom (he described the *Lateinische Grammatik* of Hofmann and Szantyr as an exciting book), he was good at noticing and coordinating relevant evidence, and Roman political history was already one of his interests. In fact both editions are indispensable, as pointed out in a judicious review

[4] *Towards a Text of Cicero*, Ad Atticum, Transactions of the Cambridge Philological Society, 10 (Cambridge, 1960).

[5] *Journal of Roman Studies*, 50 (1960), 278–9.

by F. R. D. Goodyear,[6] who compared Watt's text with the first volume of Shackleton Bailey. He concluded that while Watt made some good conjectures Shackleton Bailey was his superior in this respect, but that Watt had the advantage in the fullness and precision of his *apparatus criticus*.

For most of his twenty-seven years as a professor at Aberdeen Watt's talent for administration led to many calls on his time. From 1954 to 1959 he was the energetic curator of the University Library; he was resolute in the defence of his territory when he saw a point of principle, and foiled the attempt of a well-known scientific colleague to transfer the books on his subject to his own department. From 1963 to 1966 he was Dean of the Faculty of Arts, and played a major part in the great expansion of numbers that followed the Robbins report. From 1966 to 1977 he was a member of the University Court, and one of his successors noted that 'his incisive mind had obviously been applied to produce practical solutions to problems';[7] from 1969 to 1972 he was Vice-Principal of the University. He served on central bodies concerned with the training of teachers and university admissions. He was President of the Classical Association of Scotland from 1983 to 1988, and for a number of years was a member of the executive council of the Scottish National Dictionary Association. When he was convenor of the Studies Committee of Aberdeen University he set in motion the publication of the important Greig-Duncan collection of folk-songs,[8] which contains over three thousand texts and tunes; happily he was able to see the last of the eight volumes shortly before his death.

Watt became an excellent lecturer who made the right answer very clear even to the less experienced. He gave thought to the future of his best honours students, some of whom with his encouragement moved on to Oxford or Cambridge and pursued successful careers in classics or other fields. He still based his teaching on prepared books and prose composition, following the tradition that was changing in other universities; essays on Latin literature (as opposed to ancient history) were not required, but in later years he set passages for linguistic and literary comment, a form of exercise that is perhaps not practised enough. When he went to Aberdeen, Latin was in effect a compulsory subject for the ordinary degree of MA, but that was a line that he had no wish to hold even if

[6] *Gnomon*, 38 (1966), 364–71, reprinted in Goodyear's *Papers on Latin Literature*, K. M. Coleman *et al*. (eds.) (London, 1992), pp. 169–75.

[7] M. Meston, *University of Aberdeen Newsletter* (Feb. 2003), 11.

[8] Edited by Pat Shuldham-Shaw and Emily B. Lyle, published by Mercat Press for the University of Aberdeen, 1981–2002.

it had been possible. Inevitably numbers went down: Latin and Greek were disappearing in many Scottish schools with the same unfortunate results as in England, and Aberdeen was particularly dependent on its hinterland to provide competent students. In 1973 a course was started in 'classical civilisation' for those without Latin or Greek, but not surprisingly Watt did not himself teach for it. It is a matter for regret that there is no longer a classical department in the University of Aberdeen.

After his retirement in 1979 Watt had time for his own work as never before. His Oxford text of Cicero's letters *Ad Familiares* appeared in 1982; in a laudatory review F. R. D. Goodyear commented 'W.'s conjectures are usually of a high standard, being apt, neat, sensitive, and realistic . . .; many others are plausible, and were, at the lowest estimate, worth floating . . .'; at the same time he praised Watt's *apparatus criticus* as a model of brevity and precision.[9] In comparing the text with that of Shackleton Bailey,[10] which he greatly admired, he judged that in the choice of readings and conjectures honours were about equal; as he said 'it is instructive to see two exceptional scholars grappling with the same problems, sometimes problems of great subtlety'. He rightly concluded that all serious students of *Ad Familiares* need to consult both editions at all times.

Also in 1982 Watt and Philip J. Ford produced for the Aberdeen University Press a short commentary on George Buchanan's interesting *Miscellaneorum Liber*, which includes Latin poems to Henry VIII, Henry King of Scots (i.e. Lord Darnley), and Thomas Cromwell, not to mention an elegy on Calvin; his retentive memory enabled him to cite relevant classical material. In 1988 he brought out for the Teubner series a text of the minor Roman historian Velleius Paterculus (reprinted with a few improvements in 1998). The text depends on a single manuscript discovered by Beatus Rhenanus in 1515 in a Benedictine monastery in Alsace and described by him as 'tam prodigiose corruptum ut omnia restituere non foret humani ingenii'; the manuscript was later lost and its reconstruction from the first edition and other copies has generated some discussion. Watt showed his usual judgement in admitting old conjectures and added some of his own; as a result his text is much more satisfactory than the over-conservative Budé edition of J. Hellegouarc'h (Paris, 1982).

Up to his retirement Watt had published only a score of articles, mainly short notes on problems in Cicero. In the next twenty-three years

[9] *Classical Review*, NS 36 (1986), 241–3, reprinted in Goodyear's *Papers on Latin Literature* [n. 6], pp. 203–4.

[10] Cicero, *Epistulae ad Familiares*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, 1977).

he added over a hundred and twenty more; as each contained discussions on a series of passages (over sixty in one posthumous paper), the total number of conjectures was too great even for the author to count. Instead of confining himself to Cicero he now ranged over some fifty Latin writers both in prose and in verse. In 1989 at the advanced age of seventy-six he was elected a Senior Fellow of the British Academy; though usually undemonstrative, when Professor Parsons greeted him with the words 'a legendary figure', he beamed with pleasure. As he distributed his articles over some forty periodicals at home and abroad, a list will be deposited in the library of the Academy.

Work on ancient texts takes different forms and some distinctions must be drawn. On the one hand there are the palaeographers who can date a manuscript within narrow limits, identify its provenance and perhaps even the scribe, and place it in a stemma or family-tree. Unlike his tutor and early colleague Sir Roger Mynors, Watt was not an expert of this kind, though he could support his conjectures with book-learning about typical corruptions. To heal a corruption needs different skills that palaeographers do not necessarily possess; after they have laboriously collected the evidence the judgement of the textual critic may still be required. Ideally a critic should be both rational and intuitive, but one of these virtues tends to predominate: Madvig would fill a lacuna with a clear-headed assessment of what the argument required, but Heinsius could clutch the solution out of thin air without any apparent effort.[11] Here Watt belonged to the rational end of the spectrum. He could see better than others what was wrong with a passage and the traditional explanations. He would then produce a proposal that could not easily be bettered. Certainty was often impossible, particularly when he was discussing a passage with no striking qualities of style. Even so, many of his conjectures were unanswerable, and would have attracted more attention if they had been presented less modestly and had not been mixed up with others that were merely probable or reasonable.

One of the obituaries referred to Watt's admiration for Housman; though this can be taken for granted, some qualifications are needed. They may seem alike in their obsessive love of truth (what Housman called 'the faintest of the passions'), even in minor matters like the attribution of conjectures; in the same way a colleague recalls the intensity

[11] See A. E. Housman, *Classical Review*, 13 (1899), 173, reprinted in his *Classical Papers*, J. Diggle and F. R. D. Goodyear (eds.) (Cambridge, 1972), 2. 472; E. J. Kenney, *The Classical Text* (Berkeley, Calif., 1974), pp. 58–9; G. P. Goold, *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies*, Supplement 51 (1988), 28.

with which Watt condemned editors who unthinkingly take over their predecessors' punctuation. But he did not join in the idolatry of Housman that prevailed at one time in Cambridge, where some scholars regarded him as virtually inerrant, and spoke of his texts and even his lectures as the supreme intellectual experience of their lives. When I was an undergraduate at Balliol Watt let me see that Housman on Juvenal was not necessarily right; and many years later those who attended a class on Lucan at Aberdeen were given a similar message. Watt disapproved of Housman's rhetorical presentation, which was different from his own dispassionate procedure; and though he shared Housman's intolerance of error, he learned in print at least to control his indignation. He was unhappy with the contortions of word-order that Housman was ready to posit in unsuitable authors, and with Housman's over-complicated explanations of how one word was corrupted to another (a tendency from which he himself was not immune). It remains obvious that he could not aspire to the resourcefulness of Housman at his best, particularly in his editions of Manilius.

Watt's scholarship resulted from the impact of particular educational experiences on a powerful and confident intelligence. Glasgow grammar and Oxford gobbets determined the direction of his studies, and with his unfailing realism he knew that the broader vistas were not for him; he never tried to reinvent himself, to use a modern expression that he would have liked as little as the concept. He had a Victorian belief in the written examination, which proved a more effective vehicle for social mobility than some more recent initiatives, at least as long as some schools could provide the necessary grounding. He was a man of uncompromising integrity both in his writing and his personal relationships; he did not flatter even to oil the wheels, nor could he be flattered as I found once when I tried. He followed the Aristotelian ideal of neither over-estimating nor under-estimating himself, and was critical of those whom he judged guilty of either failing. Nonsensical or pretentious articles could provoke a vigorous reaction, as when he cancelled his subscription to a periodical because he thought a contributor too self-indulgent, but there was no malice in his strictures, which were expressed with a robust humour and a deep chuckle, and sometimes enlivened with a joke from some ancient poet or an insult from Housman's prefaces.

He could seem formidable on matters of business (though his fairness was always respected), but that was only one side of a warm and sympathetic human being. Though he was a very private person, we get glimpses of him cycling with Thea near Oxford to buy furniture, energetically

cultivating strawberries in his first garden at Aberdeen, lunching with congenial acquaintances at meetings of the Aberdeen Business and Professional Club (of which he was chairman in 1968), happily driving his car (a skill acquired in middle age) to visit Thea's relatives in Cornwall or his son and his son's family in Dundee, and writing friendly letters to fellow-scholars on questions of textual criticism. He could laugh at himself as well as others, as when he observed to a former colleague 'I have just written my hundredth article since my retirement, and it was very boring even for me'; but of course he was not boring to those who can still enjoy precise verbal scholarship. Few knew of his love of English as well as Latin poetry: as a young man he had learned by heart the whole of Palgrave's *Golden Treasury*, much of the anthology of longer poems known as *The English Parnassus*, and (like Macaulay) all of *Paradise Lost*, so that fifty years later when given a line he could continue; this was an astonishing achievement even for the days when learning poetry was thought to have more educational value than writing about it. In Latin he knew by heart all of Lucretius and Virgil and much else besides, which he could declaim with an exuberant feeling for the power of rhythm and poetic language; if delayed on a station platform on the way to one of his numerous committees he would recite silently to himself. This love of words must have contributed to his textual criticism, which need not be so arid an activity as is often supposed, but he seems to have thought it unprofessional to reveal his enthusiasm to the public gaze.

Even when he was well on in his eighties the flow of *adversaria* did not dry up. In spite of various infirmities and finally terminal illness he kept on writing, like the grammarian in Browning's uplifting poem. A late observation of his is characteristic: he noticed that in a line where the same word appeared twice, a copyist repeated the wrong word (a thing that can also happen with the digits of a telephone number). Most people would have left it at that, but Watt began collecting instances of the same phenomenon. He called it 'Error Wattianus',[12] not that he was ever likely to make such a mistake himself, but in the way that a perceptive clinician might perpetuate his name in a syndrome.

Watt died peacefully in Aberdeen on 23 December 2002 at the age of 89, fifty years almost to the day after his arrival in the city. He is survived by his wife and their son Robert, who is a member of the English Department

[12] Thus at Juvenal 9.54 'cui tot montis, tot praedia servas?' some manuscripts read 'cui praedia'. The article on the *Error Wattianus*, revised by Professor H. M. Hine, is appearing in *Classical Quarterly*, NS 54 (2004).

in the University of Dundee. He recalls how even when he was a small boy his father treated him as grown-up and rational.

R. G. M. NISBET
Fellow of the Academy

Note. In preparing this memoir I have consulted Professor J. Delz, Sir Kenneth Dover, J. C. B. Foster, Professor H. M. Hine, Dr D. C. Innes, T. E. V. Pearce, G. F. C. Plowden, Professor N. Rudd, Professor D. A. Russell, R. J. C. Watt. I have also benefited from the obituaries by Dr G. P. Edwards (*The Guardian*), Dr I. Olson (*The Times*), and Professor Russell (*The Independent* and the *Balliol College Annual Record, 2003*).