

## Walter Horace Bruford 1894–1988

WALTER HORACE BRUFORD was born in 1894, when Queen Victoria was still on the throne. He was educated at Manchester Grammar School, where he acquired what he later called the fascination with German things which never left him. The High Master of Manchester Grammar School, the great J. L. Paton, was interested in modern languages. His father, J. B. Paton, was a prominent Congregationalist minister who had close contacts with German theologians, especially in Halle. He saw to it that all his children had part of their schooling in Germany, and so it was that the future High Master of Manchester Grammar School went to school at Halle.<sup>1</sup> The contacts he made there and his general familiarity with German life were valuable for young Bruford; he first visited Germany as a Sixth Form boy in 1911, when he went to Musterschule at Frankfurt am Main. Young Germans at this time were much affected by the Jugendbewegung and the discovery of the open air and the countryside generally which had also had their effect on Paton. Young Bruford was greatly impressed by the river-bathing and sunbathing (neither much practised in Manchester), which were quite new to him. Some of the friendships he made there survived two wars.

He came up with a scholarship to St John's College Cambridge in 1912 to read French and German in the newly developing Modern Languages Tripos. His promise was soon apparent and, as was common in those days he gravitated towards comparative philology; it was probably his visit to Germany which influenced his choice of Germanic and Indoeuropean philology rather than Romance. He prepared himself as an Indoeuropeanist by the study of Sanskrit and was awarded the Bendall Sanskrit Exhibition in 1913; Latin and Greek he had from school. He added to these Old

<sup>1</sup> J. Bentley, *Dare to be Wise: a History of the Manchester Grammar School* (London, 1990), esp. pp. 89–106; J. L. Paton, *John Brown Paton* (London, 1914) p. 177.



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Norse; Old English, Old Irish and Russian, and took his degree in 1915 with a First Class in both parts of the Tripos. He seemed predestined for a career in comparative philology under the influence of E. C. Quiggin of Caius. Meanwhile however the war had changed everything. Bruford was short-sighted and unfit for military service so he went back to his old school to teach and replace masters who had volunteered.<sup>2</sup> Quiggin had gone into Naval Intelligence, the celebrated Room 40 which broke German Naval and other cyphers.<sup>3</sup> Remembering Bruford's gifts of linguistic analysis and synthesis he arranged for him to be offered a post there too. He must have been the youngest officer in the unit. He found there not only Quiggin and a fellow Cambridge Mancunian, Gilbert Waterhouse, but also Edward Bullough, 'our chief guide to modern German literature at Cambridge', an inspiring teacher of great originality of mind and range of interests whose lectures at Cambridge Bruford later said had been the only ones worth going to. Bullough had been educated in Germany (indeed he retained a slight German accent to the end of his life), and with a foot in both camps he was able to encourage young Bruford in his study of German and English things, especially the theatre, where social history and literary study came together. He was an early practitioner of comparative literature in Cambridge and his lectures on comparative topics were still inspiring in the thirties. In 1934 he became Serena Professor of Italian; his inaugural lecture was memorable. His studies in aesthetics are still important.<sup>4</sup> It was surely thanks to him that when the war was over Bruford transferred his main interest from philology to literature. He always acknowledged his debt to Bullough.

When he was released by the Admiralty in the summer of 1919 he was anxious to go on to academic work. Karl Breul, the professor of German at Cambridge, awarded him the coveted Tiarks German Studentship for study in German lands. There were practical difficulties about study in Germany itself, so Bruford went to Zürich. He was eager to follow up his ideas about what was already being called the problem of the two Germanies, 'the apparent transformation of Goethe's Germany into the Germany of Kaiser Wilhelm II'. This was to remain the dominating interest in his life and subsequent events made its importance ever clearer. No one in Cambridge, he remarked later, could suggest a supervisor for

<sup>2</sup> While there he had produced a book with Professor J. J. Findlay, *Sound and Symbol, a scheme of instruction introductory to school courses in modern languages and shorthand* (Manchester, 1917), which I have not seen. (No copy in ULC or BL).

<sup>3</sup> P. Beasley, *Room 40* (London, 1982), with a photo of young Bruford at p. 242.

<sup>4</sup> E. Bullough, *Italian Perspectives, an Inaugural Lecture* (Cambridge, 1934); *Aesthetics: Lectures and Essays*, edited with an introduction by E. M. Wilkinson (London, 1957). See Bruford's *First Steps in German Fifty Years Ago*, esp. p. 12f.

such a piece of research (though Bullough must have looked on it with favour). So in Zürich on his own he studied economic history alongside German literature, working towards a sociological study of Germany in the eighteenth century and the literature it produced.

With the end of the war German studies in Britain got off to a new start. The general attitude to foreign languages had been that they were spoken by foreigners and should therefore be taught by foreigners. This applied both at school and university level. At the beginning of the war German nationals were interned and so German Departments all over the country were denuded of staff. German heads of department survived, so Bruford recalled, only at Oxford, Cambridge, King's College London and Edinburgh. What were called 'Modern Studies' had been the subject of considerable thought during the war by a committee appointed by the Prime Minister in 1916, of which Bullough was a member.<sup>5</sup> Its report in 1918 was one of the factors inducing Bruford to leave philology for literature and social history. It had recognized the disadvantages of having languages taught by foreigners and had made the valid point that the conditions of work did not attract the best type of foreigner ('höhere Turnlehrer' somebody once called them). There was therefore a need for home-produced teachers of languages both at school and university. There remained however a tendency for the top posts to go to native speakers,<sup>6</sup> and many up-and-coming young modern linguists felt that the higher echelons of the profession were closed to them. Younger men were feeling that this should not be allowed to continue in the changed circumstances, and present-day modern linguists owe a great debt (of which most of them are not aware) to Bruford's generation for clearing the way for them.

It was a period of expansion; it has been said that Breul of Cambridge and Robertson of London divided up the field of German studies between them into spheres of influence, placing their men strategically like putting pins into a staff map. So it was that Breul recalled Bruford from Zürich before he had been there more than three months in order to apply for a post at University College, Nottingham. He was already appointed when Breul heard of a 'much better' post as lecturer at Aberdeen, where he was interviewed and duly appointed, resigning from Nottingham. (One suspects some manœuvre by Breul in order to outflank Robertson). At the same time he was elected Fellow of his old college St John's on the basis of a thesis on 'The economic background of German classicism' which

<sup>5</sup> *Modern Studies, being the Report of the Committee on the Position of Modern Languages in the Educational System of Great Britain* (London, 1918).

<sup>6</sup> A notable exception was J. G. Robertson of University College, London, the first and, until the election of Bruford, the only Germanist Fellow of the Academy.

summed up the work he had been doing in Zürich. He held the fellowship for a short time in absentia and settled down in Aberdeen. All this in 1920.

At Aberdeen he was a one-man department, covering the whole syllabus himself. He later said that he had had an unusual academic career in that he had never been anything but a head of department, even if it was only a department of one. Among his students was Duncan Mennie, later to be Professor of German at Newcastle. He writes:

Bruford made it clear to us undergraduates that it was the life and culture of German-speaking Europe we were going to study. The classroom in which he taught had on its walls reproductions of Dürer engravings and of nineteenth-century paintings. Berlin, Munich and Vienna were brought to life for us as real places with theatres, art galleries and churches we would one day go and visit.

Mennie became a medievalist and still remembers Bruford's lectures on medieval German literature with respect. It is clear that he was consistently pursuing the studies in German life and culture he had begun in Zürich and was passing on his enthusiasm to his pupils. The university soon recognized his quality and made him a Reader. It was here that he met Gerda Hendrick, the daughter of a senior colleague, whom he married in 1925. They had two daughters and a son and stayed in Aberdeen until 1929. Bruford had the knack of recruiting able young foreigners as assistants. At Aberdeen he had Eugen Dieth from Zürich, later professor of English there. He had experience of dialectology with the *Schweizerisches Idiotikon* and during his five years in Aberdeen he wrote what is still a standard work on the dialect of Buchan. Later he worked on the *English Dialect Atlas* with Harold Orton. Another able assistant was Heinrich Henel, who went on to become a professor at Yale and a Germanist of international repute. Bruford's knack did not leave him when he left Aberdeen for the Chair of German at Edinburgh in 1929. Among his assistants were Günther Weydt, now professor emeritus of German at Münster, and Robert Stumpfl, the distinguished *Theaterwissenschaftler*, who died young; his work was important to Bruford but not his political opinions: Stumpfl was a convinced Nazi.

Edinburgh is classic ground for the study of German culture in the age of Goethe, starting with Henry Mackenzie, Walter Scott and Adam Ferguson. Also it has excellent libraries strong in this field. It was the right place to complete a book on *Germany in the Eighteenth Century*, which appeared in 1935, and was translated into German the following year under the happy title *Die gesellschaftlichen Grundlagen der Goethezeit*. The English title suggests a work of straight history; the German title implies a literary period and includes the name of Goethe. Bruford's paper

to the English Goethe Society, 'Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister* as a Picture and Criticism of Society',<sup>7</sup> had led up to it. It was easy to forget the subtitle: 'The social background of the literary revival'.

The book was well received ('This admirable book', TLS) and in 1939 went into a second edition (there were several further editions). German scholarly journals were welcoming but rather condescending. 'Geistesgeschichte' was in fashion there and Bruford's combination of historical and literary scholarship looked to German readers like old-fashioned outdated positivism. One suspects too that another thing which counted against the book was that it was easy to understand. German readers were (and are) inclined to mistake this for naïvety. Bruford's gift for happy formulation, which made complicated things comprehensible, was not felt to be a virtue by those living in an academic tradition which favoured complexity and did not discourage obscurity. There were however choice spirits who appreciated what Bruford had to offer. The German translation was favourably reviewed in the *Historische Zeitschrift* in 1940–2 (!) by Rudolf Unger, one of the leaders of 'Geistesgeschichte' in Germanistics. Sometimes such utterances were not easy to interpret. Hermann Schneider of Tübingen said to a Cambridge student on the book's appearance: 'Alle Achtung! nun haben wir hierzulande endlich erfahren, mit was für Pistolen Werther sich erschossen hat'. When I heard this I assumed that he was ironizing the sort of trivia that foreign professors of German could be expected to waste their time on. The student, now Dr Elisabeth Stopp, to whom I owe the story, assures me that it was said in admiration of Bruford's detailed and accurate scholarship.<sup>8</sup>

In Edinburgh Bruford was able to build up a strong department, which meant that he no longer had to cover the whole syllabus himself. He had time for extended study and, partly under the influence of Robert Stumpfl, he devoted himself to the history of the German theatre; Bullough had aroused his interest in it years ago. The fruit, delayed by service in another war, was the major monograph *Theatre Drama and Audience in Goethe's Germany* (1950), a title which neatly summed up his personal approach.

In 1939 Naval Intelligence claimed him again; he went back to Admiralty<sup>9</sup> and then on to Bletchley Park, the centre of cryptographic intelligence. Though work on German communications was dominated by

<sup>7</sup> *Publications of the English Goethe Society, New Series*, 9 (1933).

<sup>8</sup> I used this anecdote in my brief obituary of Bruford in the *Jahrbuch 1988* of the Deutsche Akademie für Sprache und Dichtung, taking it to be derogatory. I am glad to have this opportunity to put the record straight. But the book itself contains no mention of Werther's pistols . . .

<sup>9</sup> N.I.D. was already working three shifts in September 1939. Bruford with characteristic generosity and absence of fuss took my night watch so that I could get married.

the Enigma machine there was still important material which could be attacked by what was later described as 'steam methods' (compared with the electronics needed for the Enigma). Bruford's skill had not deserted him and it is on record that he broke the German Merchant Navy traffic 'virtually single-handed'.<sup>10</sup> This, like the rest of his work, was unspectacular (movements of German merchant shipping were of less operational consequence than the movements of U-boats), and many of his associates did not fully realize its importance. When he returned to Edinburgh in 1943 he had done what he could and nobody spoke of it. And so for 15 years he could devote himself to theatre, drama and audience in Goethe's Germany in all their aspects.

In his spare time in Bletchley he had been reading intensively in Russian as a relaxation from demanding cryptographic work. Indeed he had been heard to say that he was coming to regret having devoted so much time to German literature when he might have been spending it on Russian! And so he came to give Chekhov's Russia the same treatment he had long been giving Goethe's Weimar. The result was *Chekhov and his Russia, a Sociological Study*, which appeared in 1947 in the International Library of Sociology and Social Reconstruction. Chekhov's championship of 'humane ideas' brings him close to Goethe,<sup>11</sup> and his unobtrusive but powerfully directed criticism obviously appealed to Bruford. As one reads one senses that Bruford is dealing with a kindred spirit. The book is still much read (library copies are often rebound). It is remarkable how Bruford, who never visited Russia and thus had not the same firsthand acquaintance with Russian things that he had with German things, was able to make this penetrating study and master a vast secondary material. The book has dated to the extent that it is clear that the final chapter was written at a time when Britain and Russia were still allies. It has its place in the literature of Russian studies in English, and many of its readers seem to be unaware that the author was a professor of *German* literature (though it is stated on the title-page). He followed it up with a short appreciation of Chekhov in 1957. His interest in Russian things never left him and it is noticeable how often in the later books his argument is illuminated by allusions and cross-references to Russian conditions.

*Theatre Drama and Audience in Goethe's Germany*, by its treatment of the reception of drama by contemporary German audiences, showed it in a completely different light from that in which foreign, and especially

<sup>10</sup> Christopher Morris, 'Ultra's poor relations', *Intelligence and National Security*, 1 (1986), p. 116.

<sup>11</sup> He brought the two together in the essay 'Goethe and Chekhov as liberal humanists' in the *Festschrift* for H. A. Korff in 1957.

British, Germanists had seen it, for they necessarily knew it mainly from the printed page. Bruford was well ahead of his time in treating the reception of literature. The climate of the time was dominated by the New Criticism and its discount of extra-literary factors. Bruford showed literature in intimate contact with life; he also showed the 'dangerous dichotomy in the life of the German people' expressing itself not only in literature but in the response to literature; the theatre as escape; and the connection between 'culture' and authoritarianism. He finds the form of words: 'Germany's one-sided cultivation of the things of the mind'. The book was perceptively and generously reviewed in the *Historische Zeitschrift*, 203 (1966) by the Germanist H. O. Burger, whose own approach was rather similar. He found the happy formulation that Bruford moved 'im vorästhetischen Bereich', i.e. that he provided the information you needed before you could form valid aesthetic judgments. There were people who thought that he stopped there and left aesthetic judgment and literary criticism to others. Those who knew him better know how wrong this was. This book crowned his time in Edinburgh, which was also a time of close personal contact with Germans and Germany. He has given some account of these contacts in his Bithell Lecture of 1979. The move to Cambridge came in September 1951.

This meant among other things the return to St John's College, which made him a professorial fellow. It also became easier to visit the continent, and so he began to see more of Germany and Austria than before and to receive more German visitors. It also brought him nearer the source material for his own work in the Cambridge University Library and the British Library. Colleagues remember especially the colloquia he organized fortnightly on Friday evenings and the relaxed atmosphere he created there. They remembered how, after the paper, 'he would start the ball rolling in his modest way with a question that often went to the heart of the matter, only you didn't notice that always at first go'. Here German visitors too were welcome. His international contacts made it natural for him to be consulted about the foundation of an international association of Germanists in 1954. This was in fact founded at the first international conference of Germanists since the war held in Rome the following year. A lot of those present (not only the English contingent) would have liked to see Bruford as its first President, but he modestly declined, though he consented to be Vice-President and took on the onerous job of Treasurer. The Internationale Vereinigung für germanische Sprach- und Literaturwissenschaft (I.V.G.) has met every five years since then. Bruford's part in its foundation was important and meant a lot to him. He was 'tireless and persistent in laying the foundations of a sound relationship between individual scholars, committees of the Association, and national

groups, and it is impossible to overestimate the benefits which have accrued to the I.V.G. through his known integrity and the evidence of his devotion'.<sup>12</sup>

These and similar international contacts took up much of his time in his years of office in Cambridge, and during that time he published very little. But all the while he had been working on two major books which appeared soon after his retirement, and as soon as he had his hands free he was able to devote himself full time to the crowning work on the transition from Goethe's Weimar to the totalitarian Germany he had known all his life.

The first of these was *Culture and Society in Classical Weimar 1775–1806*, a study of Goethe's Weimar in depth; the second *Deutsche Kultur der Goethezeit* (not a translation of the first but an entirely new work) in the *Handbuch der Kulturgeschichte* series, a piece of straight social history.<sup>13</sup> The finding and provision of the illustrations alone is no mean achievement. The circumstance that this central volume in this important series should have been entrusted to a foreigner and that foreigner Bruford speaks for itself. The final chapter of *Culture and Society* is entitled 'Later History of the Weimar Ideals'; it deals with the progressive victory of self-cultivation over social activity, and thus clears the ground for Bruford's final work which came out when he was in his eighties, *The German Tradition of Self-Cultivation*. Here he mapped out the turning away from politics and social improvement towards 'inwardness', the cultivation of the self and the consequent enslavement of intellectuals to the state from Wilhelm von Humboldt to Thomas Mann. One feels that for Bruford the rot set in when Humboldt on his marriage laid down his civil service post and devoted the rest of his life to self-improvement.

In his conclusion he says: 'The efflorescence of German literature and philosophy in the later eighteenth century, looked at in the context of European history, appears as a delayed Renaissance'. Noel Annan indeed called it just that and emphasized its importance for Our Age (by which he meant his own generation). 'How was it that the Germany of Goethe and Beethoven had become the Germany of Bismarck and Hitler?' he lets members of that generation ask,<sup>14</sup> unaware apparently that Bruford had

<sup>12</sup> Bruford-Festschrift (see below), p. 9.

<sup>13</sup> 'Die soziologische Auffassung der Kultur, die bei Herder . . . angedeutet wird, wollen wir in unserer Darstellung der Kultur der Goethezeit soweit wie möglich mit der geistesgeschichtlichen verbinden, ohne allen Ehrgeiz, das Schöpferische "von unten" zu erklären', p. 7. He never tried to 'explain' literature, only to make it easier for people to understand it.

<sup>14</sup> *Our Age: Portrait of a Generation* (London, 1990), p. 248 ff., chapter 'The Impact of the German Renaissance'.

been asking it in the generation before them and had already come up with an answer.

His work altogether was ahead of its time, but because he kept so quiet about it very few people noticed. After his retirement someone in conversation mentioned the new fashionable trend towards 'Rezeptionsforschung'; he said mildly: 'Of course we didn't have the word then, but I've been doing it all my life'. That is true of other things too. All along he was concerned with what is now called 'osmotic knowledge',<sup>15</sup> what R. P. Blackmur once described as putting in the explanations the author left out because they were not then needed.

During his Cambridge years Bruford lived at Bottisham but soon after his retirement he moved north, as the Cambridge climate did not suit Mrs Bruford. They settled in the country cottage they had long had at Abbey St Bathans in Berwickshire, where they had recently wisely installed central heating. The remoteness and the peace and quiet suited them both. It was good for Bruford's work as well as his practical turn of mind. Visitors remember seeing him in the village doing the shopping in his shirtsleeves and braces. In the winter they were often snowed up. After his wife's death in 1976 he moved to a flat in Edinburgh, where he did much of the decorating himself. Seeing him at an Academy section meeting I asked him how it was going. He said he was laying the lino. I said that was pretty good for a man of eighty. He said: 'When you get to the fireplace and the window embrasures it gets really interesting'.<sup>16</sup> He also did much of his own cooking and visitors spoke warmly of the fruit cake he used to serve at tea time, made by himself. I once asked him how he was spending his time. He replied that he was reading a lot of Greek in the original; when I asked what, he said: 'What there is. I have finished Demosthenes and am starting on Thucydides'. He brushed up his Celtic to keep track of the activities of his son Alan who had become a Celticist and was teaching at the School of Scottish Studies at Edinburgh; he read the proofs of his dissertation on Gaelic folk tales, which was dedicated to him.<sup>17</sup> In his last years, which he spent first with his daughter in Somerset and then in sheltered housing in Edinburgh near his son, he gradually lost his sight and by the time of his death he was quite blind. But though his short-term memory became

<sup>15</sup> Margaret Loftus Ranald, *Shakespeare and his Social Context: Essays in Osmotic Knowledge and Literary Interpretation* (New York, 1987).

<sup>16</sup> Some years later I visited him in Edinburgh and reminded him of this. He said: 'I never laid any lino'. But I have independent corroboration from Professor N. Furness of Edinburgh, to whom he made the same remark. It is so characteristic that it is worth recording.

<sup>17</sup> Alan Bruford, *Gaelic Folk Tales and Medieval Romances, Béaloideas*, 34 (Dublin, 1966).

confused he retained a good long-term memory and so the works of literature to which he had devoted his life were with him to the end.

In the last paragraph of his little book on Chekhov in 1957 he wrote of that kindred spirit what applies equally to himself. He spoke of the 'personal modesty and absolute honesty which endeared him to his friends and which those who know him well through his works and letters still find irresistible'.

While I was preparing this memoir a large number of colleagues and former students wrote to me about Bruford and I have made grateful use in the foregoing of what they said. All speak of his kindness and thoughtfulness; he was 'invariably friendly and unstuffy'. One student thought of Stifter's 'sanftes Gesetz' in connection with him. What emerges too is respect and affection for him as a teacher. This is in a way surprising, for he was not an interesting lecturer: his voice was not flexible and his delivery was monotonous. What came across was his engagement, the fascination which he early felt and was able to convey to others. His written work will probably be seen to increase in stature as the years go on.

Bruford received a Festschrift (*German Studies presented to Walter Horace Bruford on his retirement by his Pupils, Colleagues and Friends*, London, 1962). The Biographical Note at the beginning (unsigned, but by F. J. Stopp) contains useful information and is followed by a list of his publications to date. This can be supplemented from successive editions of *Who's Who*. I have also used his reminiscences 'Words, Books, People: a Modern Linguist's Interests', the Presidential Address to the Modern Language Association, in: *Modern Languages*, 40 (1959), *First Steps in German Fifty Years Ago* (1965) and *Some German Memories 1911-1961, the Bithell Memorial Lecture for 1979* (London, 1980). This last is the abridgment of a fuller typescript, lodged with the Institute of Germanic Studies in the University of London, which I have also used thanks to the kindness of John Flood, its Deputy Director.

Obituary notices appeared in *The Times*, *Guardian*, *Independent*, *Daily Telegraph*, *Scotsman*, *Edinburgh University Bulletin* and the *Jahrbuch 1988* of the Deutsche Akademie für Sprache und Dichtung. J. P. Stern's obituary in the *Independent* was reprinted in *The Eagle*, the magazine of St John's College, Cambridge.

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