

Elder Emeritus Professor David Bradley (1925-2016)

The Constant Plagiarist

Professor David Bradley gave the Crabtree Oration in 1980: *Something Borrowed, Something Blue or Crabtree Plagiarised or Plagiarist*. By then, he was well into his tenure as Professor of English at Monash University. His was the 5th Crabtree Oration, succeeding Don Charwood (1976), Keith Bennetts (1977), Pat Kilbride (1978) and Leonard Dommett (1979). This oration also served as a tribute to Professor Arthur Brown, who died suddenly on the 29 July 1979 at the age of 58. As Bradley began in his Oration: “If I must begin like the title-page of one of those Elizabethan plays which describe their contents as *a lamentable tragedy mixed full of pleasant mirth* it is because I must also speak of our dear friend and colleague Arthur Brown, the Living Memory by whose genial influence we are gathered here.” David Bradley was an ideal choice as Orator on this occasion, and his election would have been made with careful deliberation.

In many ways Arthur Brown and David Bradley had very similar histories albeit very different personalities. Both were Professors of English at Monash University, and both were members of the academic Committee for the Alexander Theatre. Both encouraged and supported regular English Department theatre productions involving staff and students. In his Oration, Bradley references his and Brown’s shared love of the Elizabethans while, in a most erudite and beguiling way, he satirises contemporary academic scholarship. His delivery would have been a thespian tour de force, exploiting to its fullest his sonorous voice with his fully rounded elocutionary vowels – Received Pronunciation at its best (or worst).

David was one of the four foundation academics in the English Department when Monash opened its doors to students in March 1961, having been appointed to the University as Senior lecturer the year before. He remained at Monash until his retirement in 1989, and for much of his tenure he steered the Department as Chair of English (1972 – 1989), with an interval of 3 years (1974-1976) when Professor Arthur Brown held the chair.

David was born in Hobart, educated at Melbourne High School, and graduated from Melbourne University in 1946. He worked in the English Department at the University of Western Australia and studied English at Pembroke College Cambridge before joining Monash.

In his early years at Monash he developed a scholarly interest in Elizabethan drama and especially its theatre practices and companies. His was a hands-on approach and he directed several productions of Shakespeare’s plays with staff and students. In 1992 he published *From Text to Performance in the Elizabethan Theatre*. When the Alexander Theatre opened in 1967, it became one of his responsibilities until Phil A’Vard was appointed as Theatre Manager in 1969.

English Department colleague David Steele wrote in David’s obituary for *The Sydney Morning Herald* (9 August 2016) that David’s fine acting skills and his naturally strong voice, augmented by his love of the Elizabethans, provided a platform for his lecturing prowess; students praised his lectures as “magnificent”. He often read works aloud during his lectures, poetry, extracts from plays and especially Shakespeare. Steele also wrote that “he was a man of impulse. For the most part in matters of character and policy he proved sound even though others might see them as rash.” I can confirm that assessment. My own first meeting with him related to my application to become a doctoral candidate. My subject – left wing theatre in Australia - had already been soundly rejected by Melbourne University but Professor Bradley didn’t err. On the spot he approved my topic and appointed a supervisor (who hadn’t done a PhD – but then one can’t have everything!). This was perhaps not surprising. Despite his conservative presentation, he had been a ‘fellow traveller’ since

his time as undergraduate and a lifelong friend of leftist playwright Dorothy Hewitt whom he met in WA.

He wrote little during his academic life, yet his Crabtree Oration is a brilliant composition, relying on a broad knowledge, sophisticated referencing, and a clever satirical take on academic research and textual analysis, which is at the very heart of Crabtree scholarship. He sees one problem facing the Crabtree researcher as (fear of) plagiarism leading the witless scholar to clutter his work with inverted commas, rendering his books unprintable with footnotes or parentheses, for example, “(*Grillblazer and Blague, 1942, Bloomfontein. Levitski, Fondbrow, Idlewit and others, 1908; Li Wu, Chenh Mau Fong, Sandrachattopadya and Potter, 1979*)”. He sees the second as the challenge of dealing with the creative mind, which continually builds on or ‘plagiarises’ past works to the extent that the result is an ongoing palimpsest. Crabtree of course, he argues, is a potent exemplar.

There is little memory or evidence as to when David Bradley began his involvement in the Crabtree Foundation, though he is listed as in attendance at the 1978 dinner. It is surprising that he was not at the first meeting given his shared interests with Arthur Brown, their shared seniority in the English Department, their love of theatre, and their skills as raconteurs. He clearly attended at least two of the earlier Orations which he references in his own. But perhaps our records are not accurate.

David Bradley is most often described as urbane, charming, a good listener and having spontaneous generosity. But he does not seem to have frequented the Monash Club as frequently as fellow Crabtree scholars Arthur Brown, Keith Bennett, or Patrick Kilbride, all of whom were involved in the Club Committee at some time. Elders whom I asked about Bradley, did not remember his connection to Crabtree and one elder was amazed to learn of it, even though he came across him in the Monash book shop. After Bradley’s Oration it seemed he just drifted away, possibly because of his ongoing commitment to the theatre but more because the demands of being Chair of the English Department were consuming, as he was the only Professor for some time after Professor Brown’s passing.

After he retired from Monash in 1989, he bought a strawberry farm at Rhyll on Philip Island, and his interests became focussed on the local community.

Elder O’Brien (the Younger)