



Obituary: Don Fowler

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DON FOWLER was a brilliant and influential member of the international Classics community. His promise had been evident from the start.

He was born in 1958 in Birmingham, and educated there at King Edward VI Camp Hill School for Boys. A dazzling undergraduate and graduate career at Oxford was capped with his election at the age of 28 to the Fellowship at Jesus College that he held until his death. From that base he built an international reputation as a Latinist of outstanding originality and importance.

He led from the front, showing his more cautious colleagues what could be learnt from engagement with modern theory and information technology, and building bridges with classicists in North America and Europe. His fluency in Italian made him a vital conduit between British Classics and the Eighties boom in Italian Latin studies. He lectured successfully in Italian, once having his topic for the next day's talk ("la donna nella letteratura latina") announced to him on a paper aeroplane floated at him after dinner from an upstairs window by his host, Alessandro Barchiesi.

His humour and restless energy kept him independent and self-sufficient, so that his views were evolving and unpredictable. His bibliographical command and range of reading were extraordinary, and experts in various areas would regularly be confounded to discover in conversation that he was completely at home in their own fields even though he had never published in them.

He was equally at home in Greek as Latin, and combined powerful philological skills with his interest in contemporary theory: he could debate the nuance of a particle with an editor of Euripides as expertly and zestfully as he could discuss Irigaray or Lacan with a feminist scholar. His main passion, however, remained where he began his research, in the philosophy of Epicurus and its Romanising in Lucretius. In the last months of his life, he showed how it was possible to live his Epicurean philosophy to the end, for his courage, humour and dignity in the face of his cancer commanded the admiration of all who saw him.

His immense influence was generated by his articles, by the inspirational "Subject Reviews in Latin Literature" that he did for Greece and Rome between 1986 and 1993, and by his personal encouragement of anyone who shared his love of Classics. The fact that he had such an impact without publishing a monograph is a standing reproach to the bibliometric delusions of the current masters of British universities.

He and his wife, Peta Fowler, herself a brilliant classicist, oversaw the Latin literature side of the third edition of the Oxford Classical Dictionary, so that his influence will continue to reach out to the general educated public through such articles as "Lucretius", "Virgil", and "Literary Theory and the Classics".

He was a charismatic teacher and communicator who worked in a demanding system and devoted himself selflessly to it. Such dedication meant that the world of scholarship now keenly misses the important book on Lucretius, and the provisionally titled *Unrolling the Text: books and readers in classical Latin poetry* that he never brought to completion (although a major section of this long-awaited "Book on the Book" will in due course be published). Yet he never complained about his burdens, and communicated an aura of optimism and resourcefulness even when he was most overstretched.

Like his master, Epicurus, he had a gift for friendship. His death leaves a great hole in his college, university and subject. It is difficult for his peers to imagine Latin studies without him. For a long time to come many of us will instinctively react to a new idea or possibility with the thought, "What would Don make of that?"

Don Paul Fowler, classicist: born Birmingham 21 May 1953; Lecturer in Classics, Magdalen College, Oxford 1976-77; Dyson Junior Research Fellow in Greek Culture, Balliol College, Oxford 1978-80; Fellow and Tutor in Classics, Jesus College, Oxford 1981-99; University Lecturer in Greek and Latin Literature, Oxford University 1981-99; married 1977 Peta Moon (one daughter); died Oxford 15 October 1999.