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Don Fowler

He brought a feminist view to the classics and promoted women's issues at Oxford

Alison Sharrock
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Don Fowler, who has died of cancer at the age of 46, was fellow and tutor in classics at Jesus College, Oxford. A scholar of Latin literature, especially the poetry of Lucretius and Virgil, he was particularly concerned to promote the work of women scholars and change the male thought-patterns of Oxford and the classical world.

Whether it was a feminist reading of Lucretius, a theoretical insight into how gender affects the nature of reading, enabling the feminist research of his own graduate students, or promoting feminist and women's issues in academe, Don was at the forefront of change. He was instrumental in the inauguration of the Oxford master's degree in women's studies, and developed a course on Roman women for the master's degree in classics.

From working-class beginnings, Don was educated at King Edward VI School, Birmingham, and Christ Church, Oxford, where he took a double first in classics. His doctoral thesis, for which he shared the Conington prize, was on Lucretius. After short spells at Magdalen and Balliol colleges, he was appointed to a fellowship at Jesus College in 1981, and held college posts, such as librarian and dean, in addition to his work at the faculty of Literae Humaniores. With his wife Peta, also a classicist, he was area adviser for Latin literature for the third edition of the Oxford Classical Dictionary.

The list of journals of whose editorial boards Don was a member neatly maps his range: high scholarship (the respectable old *Journal Of Roman Studies*), communication with young people (the entertaining and accessible *Omnibus*), international collaboration (the dynamic *Italiani e Discussioni Per L'analisi Dei Testi Classici*), and the new technologies (the electronic journal *Arachnion*). A member of the advisory board of the computer teaching initiative centre for textual studies at Oxford, and deviser of a graduate course in classics and computing, he also actually knew what he was doing with machines.

During the last summer, when he knew he was dying, Don completed a book of some of his published and unpublished essays. His major project, *Unrolling The Text: Books And Readers In Classical Latin Poetry* remains unfinished. His name is associated especially with the literary theories of closure, of irony, and of intertextuality. On the last of these, he co-edited a special issue of *Materiali e Discussioni*, in which his own contribution makes a powerful link between literary intertextuality and feminism.

A great party-giver and communicator, in print and on radio - in 1997 he presented his series on *The History Of Reading In Five Volumes* - he managed to always make people feel important. Himself the product of a traditional classical education, Don was keen to preserve and enhance the best of that tradition, but also to modernise it. As such, he was a great supporter of the innovative and intensive course which enables students to read classics at Oxford without having A-levels in Latin or Greek, thus offering wider opportunities of access for pupils at state schools. Although he was an internationally

renowned Latinist, much in demand especially in Italy and America, he was passionately devoted to his students, wearing himself out in the care of each of them.

Despite his sophistication, and sometimes caustic wit and devastating irony, there was a kind of innocence about Don which allowed him, as a privileged man, to engage in the discourse of feminism, where many such people would feel themselves compromised. It is my belief that this was because Don was totally at peace with himself.

He is survived by Peta and his daughter Sophia.

Don Paul Fowler, classical scholar, born May 21 1953; died October 15 1999

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