In Memoriam: Bryan Loughrey 1952–2021

Graham Holderness

It is my sad duty to announce that my dear friend Bryan Loughrey, co-editor of the journal, recently passed away after a short illness. It was Bryan who relaunched *Critical Survey* in 1987, serving as Editor, General Editor and lately Editor Emeritus. The journal was originally founded by C.B. Cox and A.E. Dyson in 1962 as a sister journal to *Critical Quarterly* (1958–), which also changed hands in 1987, but went in a different, more theoretical direction, under the editorship of Colin McCabe. Together with *Critical Survey*, Bryan also assumed responsibility from Cox and Dyson for the ‘Critical Quarterly Conferences’, a long-running series of conferences for UK sixth form students who might be contemplating studying English Literature or related studies at university. This historical background shows Bryan operating in three capacities in which he excelled: as independent scholar, editor and academic manager.

For Bryan, culture – literature, theatre, film, music, especially poetry – was not a professional interest, or pastime, or career obsession, but a passion he felt compelled to share with others. As a teacher and research collaborator he was, and always remained, an enthusiast, a promotor, a showman – even (in the French sense) an *amateur*. He had an unconventional education, proud of having been expelled from school, and having failed English Language ‘O’-level. In academia he was something of an outsider, an adult student, an autodidact. He brought real-life interests into scholarship: he would visit a library not to master a subject, or advance a career, but to answer his own urgent and compelling questions. He was a distinguished competitive chess player, a skill he applied in a series of articles on chess in Thomas Middleton and Shakespeare. He was an accomplished angler, and stalked that particular quarry in an edition of Izaak Walton’s *The Complete Angler*. We spent far too much time drinking together, an interest transferred to an article ‘Shakesbeer’, on Shakespeare and the brewing industry, for which Bryan did the fieldwork. He was a formidable bridge player, and boasted of having played with, and beaten, Omar Sharif. But his true home was not in the library, or the games room, but outdoors: he loved walking, fishing, cycling. His remedy for a painful shoulder injury was to cycle from Land’s End to John o’ Groats. He was also something of a petrolhead, with a love for the open road: over the years I saw him riding a big BMW motorbike, a huge Land Rover Defender, and towing an Airstream caravan. He was an inexhaustible source of information on vehicles,

camping equipment, military history, fishing gear – you name it. He knew more than anyone I've ever known about the geography of rivers.

I first met Bryan in 1987, at Roehampton Institute, when I assumed headship of the Drama Department. He already had plans for how we might work together. Our partnership, which lasted for the rest of his life, was a synthesis of complementary skills: broadly speaking, he was the ideas man, I was the writer; he was the entrepreneur with the new project, I had the background knowledge to apply it; he would go out and find something for me to sit at a desk and write about. In practice these skillsets overlapped. At Roehampton we hatched the idea of the *Shakespearean Originals* series, to disseminate and popularise 'unedited' versions of variant Shakespeare texts such as the so-called 'Bad Quartos', and Bryan – who had unrivalled contacts with publishers, serving as a commissioning editor of Penguin, Longman and the British Council – persuaded Harvester Press to publish it. The series initially generated great controversy, though it certainly influenced the field of study, as witnessed by our recent special issue of *Critical Survey* on Q1 *Hamlet*. Both Bryan and I then moved into academic management, Bryan becoming Director of Research, in which capacity he led a highly successful Research Assessment Exercise, and the successful submission for degree-awarding powers that turned Roehampton Institute into a university. Later he left Roehampton and moved to work in educational consultancy in the Middle East, dividing his time between the UK and Oman. From there Bryan collaborated in our work on the cultural impact of 9/11, and on Arab Shakespeare, work that was published by Shakespeare's Globe, Edwin Mellen Press, and journals such as the *European Journal of English Studies*, as well as *Critical Survey*, and is retrospectively reflected in this issue. When an Al-Qaeda terrorist bombed a production of *Twelfth Night* in Doha, Bryan was quickly on the scene, talking to survivors, photographing the ruined building. Our cover picture is his photograph of the blown-off doors of the Doha Players Theatre. The result was our seminal paper, published in *Critical Survey*, "Rudely Interrupted": Shakespeare and Terrorism', which again reflects the complementary skillsets of our partnership. He was out there, I was back here; he was wandering round the charred ruins of a bombed theatre, I was sitting at a desk in London; he supplied the real-life detail, I tried to find the right words.

Bryan was Marmite: he inspired among other people love and antipathy in equal measure. He could be difficult, disorganised, unpredictable, unreliable, or just absent. He was also loving, caring, supportive, fiercely loyal, strongly committed to justice, a formidably intelligent colleague, and a good friend. Our partnership yoked together two people with very different personalities, who often needed to go in different directions, but would always think it right at some point to regroup and pull together to get something done. Creative people often leave in their wake what seems to observers a trail of devastation: false starts, uncompleted projects, missed deadlines, promises broken, people let down. But these are like the chips of stone left behind once the sculptor has extracted his form: they are part of the process that brings into being

something that was not there before, a body of work. However small and insignificant this may be, in the greater scheme of things, it stands as something made; something beyond the individual, that can be shared with others; something of value that will last, at least for a little while. These are the traces left by Bryan on our world: Roehampton Institute, now Roehampton University; *Shakespearean Originals*; Arab Shakespeare; *Critical Survey*.

Bryan was a mover and shaker. He rattled cages, fluttered dove-cotes and set cats among pigeons. He was a true radical, in that he questioned everything, right down to the roots of his own assumptions. A lifelong sceptic, he was fascinated by faith, having studied oriental religions at Sussex University. He had been baptised as both Anglican and Roman Catholic, though some of his mental habits seemed to me very much like those of Zen Buddhism, and he thought very deeply about Islam. But like Tennyson, he found it difficult to 'believe where we cannot prove'.

He drew comfort from my Christian faith, and I am glad to have given him that. But he was an adventurer, an explorer, restless, always searching. Often content with where he was, though never quite fully arrived. He would delight in walking a pilgrimage route without believing in the miracle at the end. Like the Seafarer in the Old English poem, his 'heart heaved' to 'wander the waves':

... the unplumbed oceans, and taste of the tang
Of the salt-sea's spray: to seek the deep streams
And their restless tolling. There I might seek
Friendship in foreign lands, there I might find
Homeless, a home on an alien shore.
Again and again an impulse invites me
A peregrine urge to fare far forth,
A mood of migration irks me to travel
The pilgrim's passage, the wanderer's way.¹

For Christianity, Bryan's pilgrimage is past, and he has already arrived. For the Anglo-Saxon Seafarer, with whom we both felt a strong affinity, there is only the way of the wanderer, the path of fatalism, fortitude, suffering and hope. I don't think Bryan found God. But I have a sure and certain hope that God has found him. He made a difference, and life will be very different without him. May he rest in peace: I shall not look upon his like again.

Notes

1. Graham Holderness, 'The Seafarer', in *Craeft: Poems from the Anglo-Saxon* (Nottingham: Shoestring Press, 2002), 36–37.