



George Henry Gellie

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1918 - 1988

M.A. 1940, B.Ed. 1942, F.A.H.A. 1976

Lecturer Melb. Uni. 1946-54; Senior Lecturer 1954-60;

Reader 1960-76; Personal Chair 1976-81; Emeritus Prof. 1982-88.

Carnegie Fellow 1956; Commonwealth Fellow, Institute of Class.

Studies, London 1963; Visiting Prof., Ohio State Univ.

1960-61, Univ. College London 1970, 1977, 1981.

Such is the *cursus honorum*. But its cold phrases tell nothing of the warmth of the filial affection which George Gellie engendered among all those many generations of students who knew him as a fatherly teacher. George loved teaching, and he went on teaching voluntarily well into his retirement after professing Classics for thirty-five years in the University of Melbourne. He had the patience of a Job with anyone who wanted to learn, just as he had a deep love of patient learning himself. That gentle patience as a teacher drew students out and made them feel they had discovered great truths for themselves. Not that George would allow the slipshod and the inaccurate to pass. "I don't think it's quite that" he would say mildly to the voicing of a particularly outstanding piece of arrant nonsense: he was much too honest as a man and as a scholar, much too careful a thinker, to allow error to slip by. But he made sure the student in the end got it right, but gently. The learning was there—and it was both profound and extensive—but it was there just to get it right, not for any parade or self-gratification. That sort of thing wasn't on George's agenda.

And what George knew most about was Greek Tragedy. He not only appreciated how Greek tragedies functioned as plays; he was a master at unravelling the rich texture of their words—he had a great way with words himself. But above all his special skill was in drawing out, with disarming simplicity, the large issues of human values and ambiguities which they were exploring. George was a man of deep (but not obvious) feelings and a strong moral sense: Greek Tragedy enabled him to articulate those deep feelings, those strong moral concerns but kept, characteristically, an ironic distance, without self-reference or self-display. His one big book, *Sophocles. A Reading* (Melbourne, 1972), elegantly drew together his work on the plays of Sophocles—it now finds its rightful place among the standard works on Sophocles: and he produced a further series of essays, especially on Euripides, some of which were gathered together as *Greek Tragedy. Lectures and Essays for Students* (*Iris*, Special Number 1). One could only wish he had committed more to print—everything he wrote was always beautifully crafted, in stylish and supple prose.

George was very Melbournian and his life was spent in and around Melbourne, apart from periods of academic leave and the war-years passed in navigating Catalina flying-boats and mastering the Japanese language with characteristic skill and speed. Airey's Inlet, Essendon Football Club, the Saturday Crossword, the deathless prose of the *Sporting Globe*, family, friends, Ormond College, University House—George loved having his life shaped by

familiar rituals, familiar places and familiar routines. That was his preference—not to be mobile, rich or famous: indeed George was rather embarrassed by the title Professor and by his Fellowship of the Academy in case it might indicate a pretentiousness that he instinctively abhorred. He need not have worried—he was just loved for what he was. The sharp pangs of absence felt by his many friends can only give some faint sense of what must be endured by his wife Thelma to whom he was wholeheartedly devoted.

An epigram of Leonidas of Tarentum reads:

What a good man he was, this man
Whose body death's night has hidden from us.
The Graces delighted in him,
And we all delight in remembering him
He spoke so genially, never with the frown of malice.
When the wine was poured he would sweeten the conversation.
He knew how to be kind to friends and to strangers.
This is the man we have lost.

Such was George Gellie.

Graeme Clarke