



Alexander Norman (Derry) Jeffares
(1920–2005)

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Derry Jeffares, as he was always known, died on 1 June at his home in Scotland. Another of the steadily diminishing group of Foundation Fellows, Derry was particularly active in fostering the establishment of our Academy while serving as Secretary of its predecessor, the Australian Humanities Research Council, during his tenure of the Jury professorship of English at Adelaide University. After he returned to Britain in 1957 to be professor of English Literature at Leeds, he became an Honorary Fellow of the Academy, happily keeping in touch with his Australian friends and colleagues, not least in his capacity as a member of the Executive Committee of the Scots Australian Council. He was especially pleased when in 1988 he was awarded Honorary Membership of the Order of Australia.

Born in Dublin, educated at High School and Trinity College, Dublin, before moving to Oriel College, Oxford, Derry Jeffares remained devoted to things Irish throughout his life, especially its literature, a devotion rewarded by becoming Honorary Life President of the International Association for the Study of Anglo-Irish Literature in 1973.

After a short spell as Lecturer in Classics at the University of Dublin from 1943 to 1944, Derry turned to English, lecturing first at Groningen, then at Edinburgh, whence he moved to Adelaide as Jury Professor in 1951, and promptly became a member of the fledgling International Association of University Professors of English, which honoured him as a Jubilee Member fifty years later.

After nearly twenty highly productive years at Leeds, Derry joined Professors Dunn and Horden in English Studies at the recently founded University of Stirling, which in 2002 bestowed on him his third honorary doctorate, following upon Lille in 1977 and Ulster in 1990.

Derry Jeffares was a keen and often very active supporter of cultural societies such as the Film and Television Council of South Australia, of which he was Vice-President during his residence in Adelaide, or the International PEN Scottish Centre, of which he was President, 1986–89. Other societies to which he belonged include the Scottish Arts Council, the Arts Council of Great Britain, the Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies, of which he was Chairman, 1966–68, and the National Book League. He was also a Fellow of three Royal Societies, those of Edinburgh, of Literature, and of Arts.

As a literary scholar and editor, Derry's name is largely associated with the work of William Butler Yeats, but he also edited or wrote monographs on several other writers, including such Anglo-Irish writers as Swift, Farquhar, Goldsmith, Sheridan, George Moore and Oliver Gogarty. His work on Yeats began with his 1949 biography, *W B Yeats: Man and Poet*, revised in 1996, hailed by one critic as 'the best guide to the poet's reading and source material'. From 1962 to 1964, Derry edited for the St. Martin's Library Series four volumes of Yeats's poetry, plays, prose and selected criticism, followed in 1965 by the Centenary Tribute to Yeats, *In Excited Reverie, W B Yeats 1865– 1939*, edited by A Norman Jeffares and K G W Cross. The latter was 'an honorary Dubliner, a wonderful Bohemian and very gifted', in Derry's words, who had migrated to Sydney 'since Adelaide didn't appreciate his scholarship'. Cross later became professor at Newcastle University NSW, but died at the early age of 39.

In Excited Reverie offers contributions on Yeats from scholars around the world, including Derry's own exemplary essay as well as poems by our late Foundation Fellow A D Hope and the well-known Australian writer Randolph Stow. Ten more books on Yeats appeared from Derry's pen during the next thirty years from 1968 to 1998, including editions, commentaries and a new biography (1988, revised edition 2001).

There were books on other writers and subjects as well as Derry's responsibilities as editor of series such as 'Writers and Critics', the 'New Oxford English Series', Macmillan's 'History of Literature' and the 'Fountainwell Drama Texts'. For eight years, he was editor of 'The Review of English Literature', a task which he carried out with the same close attention to detail that he displayed in all his other work, as I well remember. On one occasion, he wrote to me from Leeds apropos of one of my own contributions to this journal: 'Can I get you to alter 'meaningful' to 'significant': it's rather a cliché word at the moment', a polite injunction that I remember to this day.

If this was typical of Derry Jeffares as scholarly editor, so was his invariably courteous and encouraging attitude to his many friends across the globe. Among his Adelaide colleagues was the unforgettable Bryn Davies, with whom he collaborated in *The Scientific Background*, published in 1958, and whom he once described as 'the best read man I've known and a delightful friend'. Among other members of the Adelaide English Department were Geoffrey Dutton, 'a wonderful friend too', and Tim Mares, a Fellow of the Academy who died in an accident in 2001. Both of these were welcome visitors to the Jeffares cottage near Crail in Fife, 'a delightful fishing village', a mere twelve miles, as Derry reminded me, from my own revered alma mater at St. Andrews.

Our thoughts go out to Derry's wife of almost sixty years, Jeanne, and to their daughter who inherited her father's love of painting and drawing, and while we mourn his passing, we cannot but rejoice and be grateful for having had in our Fellowship a man of such genius, generosity and humanity as Derry Jeffares.

Ralph Elliott