

# Obituary

ALAN ROWLAND CHISHOLM



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Alan Rowland Chisholm, a Foundation member of this Academy, who died on 9 September 1981 at the age of ninety-two years, was a graduate in Latin and French of the University of Sydney (1911), and pursued postgraduate linguistic studies at Berlin and Paris (1912-4). Apart, however, from military service in France in World War One, and a brief period at the Teachers' College in Sydney, he spent the whole of his academic life at the University of Melbourne, where he was appointed Independent Lecturer in French in 1921, and Professor in 1938, retiring in 1956 at the age of sixty-eight. He was honoured with the award of the OBE, with an Honorary D Litt (Monash, 1971), and was also made Officier de la Légion d'Honneur and Knight of the Italian Republic. He was a prime mover in the foundation in 1950 of what became the Australasian Universities Language and Literature Association.

He was an outstanding Latinist, and one of his 'distractions' (a demanding one) was translating the (already difficult) poetry of the French Symbolists into accentual rhyming Latin verse (after the mediaeval tradition). These translations were circulated only privately, as were also certain poems of his, in both rhyming and blank verse, written in his native English, and reflecting his quiet, wise philosophy of life, and his thoughts on the flux of phenomena.

Though a good European, he lent firm and discerning support to the growing corpus of his own country's literature, encouraged many younger writers, and in 1960 and 1962 published (in part with J. J. Quinn) the collected verse and much of the prose of the poet Christopher Brennan, whom he had known well at Sydney in the years around 1920.

It was his special achievement, however, to raise French studies here (until then barely tolerated, along with English and German, by hard-line classicists) to the status of a highly relevant and authentic academic discipline. The 1919-39 period in Australia, because of World War One loyalties, gave overwhelming preponderance to French as the basic modern foreign language in universities, and though his Chair did not come till 1938, long before that his Department had become known for its vitality and wide scholarly coverage. Basic to his approach was the conviction, on the one hand, that a foreign language was a living thing, to be both spoken and written by students, and on the other hand that literature was *par excellence* the highway to the study of man. Though he founded no 'school', as such, the 'Melbourne school', as it came to be known the world over, became a byword for outstanding published contributions to the study of XIXth and XXth century French poetry, especially Baudelaire, Mallarmé and Valéry. His own studies led the way, with *The Art of Arthur Rimbaud* (1930), *Towards Hérodiade* (1934), *An Approach to M. Valéry's Jeune Parque* (1937), *Mallarmé's L'Après-midi d'un faune* (1958),

*Mallarmé's Grand Oeuvre* (1962), apart from numerous contributions to academic periodicals. His intellectual vigour found expression in further published work almost up to the time of his death.

'Le Patron', as he was affectionately called by his staff and former students, was a man of vast learning, yet humble and modest with it, a man of questing mind perpetually looking out on new horizons of thought—a real humanist. As he put it himself, in 1953, in one of his occasional poems, echoing Brennan

I have been many minds of many men,  
And, moving through life's countless avatars,  
Have in me all its ancient adolescence.

*R. T. Sussex*