

Technique in the service of Humanism: A.B. Poynton's legacy to E.R. Dodds¹

Humanism and technique represent a polarity that can usefully define important aspects of the evolution of classical studies and classical education in Britain between the mid-nineteenth and mid-twentieth centuries². It was memorably enunciated at Oxford in 1936 in the inaugural lecture of the Regius Professor of Greek³, Eric Robertson Dodds (1893-1979)⁴, who is himself considered an outstanding example of a humanistic approach to classical scholarship. Yet during his career he produced exemplary editions of three Greek texts: Euripides' *Bacchae* (1944); Plato's *Gorgias* (1959); and Proclus' *Elements of Theology* (1933)⁵. In the case of the latter two he investigated in detail the manuscript tradition, an activity in the realm of technique that could be considered almost the complete antithesis to humanism⁶. Now, as is well known, Dodds's particular version of humanism involved an outreach into psychology, anthropology and psychical research, interests largely developed autodidactically, though they were inspired by his most celebrated teacher, Gilbert Murray (1866-1957). But less is known of the early influences that helped him become an outstanding technical scholar. In this paper I aim to identify them through an account of his relations with his tutor during the first phase of his classical

¹ Two manuscript collections in the Bodleian Library, Oxford are identified as *DP* (= E.R. Dodds Papers; cited by box and, where relevant, file numbers), and *MP* (= Gilbert Murray Papers; cited by the numbers of the microfilm reel and folios). Material from these collections is reproduced by kind permission of the literary executors of the estates. E.R. Dodds, *Missing Persons: An Autobiography*, Oxford 1979 (repr. 2000), will also be cited by an abbreviated title.

² See R.B. Todd, '*Humanism and Technique*': *aspects of classics in British higher education, 1850-1940*, «Eikasmós» IX (1998) 371-382.

³ *Humanism and Technique in Greek Studies*, Oxford 1936; reprinted at «Arion» s. 1, VII (1968) 5-20.

⁴ On Dodds see R.B. Todd, *E.R. Dodds: a bibliography of his publications*, «QS» 48 (1998) 175-194, and a review article on the recent reprint of *Missing Persons* at «QS» LIII (2001) 233-245.

⁵ For the full bibliographical details see Todd, *E.R. Dodds: a bibliography* 177-180, nos. 03, 04 and 06.

⁶ Thus H. Lloyd-Jones, *Blood for the Ghosts: Classical Influences in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, London 1982, 24 remarked (in 1961) of Dodds's edition of the *Gorgias* that its text was established with a minute care that «the superficial observer might find surprising in the scholar who twenty-five years ago [in the lecture cited in n. 3; see also n. 67 below] exalted humanism at the expense of technique».

studies at University College, Oxford between 1912 and 1914, Arthur Blackburne Poynton (1867-1944). In this way I hope to show how an innovative scholar can sometimes accommodate and adapt institutional traditions about which he may harbour reservations.

Poynton, then, exemplified the «Mods. Tutor», a type prevalent at Oxford well into the twentieth century, though its exemplars are now decried for their indifference to research and publication⁷. «Mods.», or Classical Moderations (the examinations in translation and composition, and on set texts, taken at the end of five terms study, and forming the first stage of the classical course at Oxford) created the need for someone who could develop in pupils requisite skills in accurate translation from Latin and Greek texts as well as in elegant «composition», the term used for the systematic transformation of these texts into credible pastiches of both prose and verse (subjects set for prizes frequently invited compositions «in the style of» a given author; cf. n. 43). Such skills did not require, though they might help develop, critical ability⁸; they called instead for an assimilative passivity before the specifics of language and metre. Dodds, as we shall see, learnt to excel in this exercise, and could later advise effectively on how to implement it⁹. But first let us introduce Poynton.

He was born 28 June 1867 at Kelston, near Bath, the son of an Anglican Rector (ecclesiastical parentage being a fertile ground for British classicists), and educated at Marlborough College, and at Balliol College, Oxford in Jowett's final years as its Master¹⁰. Here, in addition to winning two endowed scholarships (the Hertford and Craven), he obtained first-classes in both Classical Moderations (1887) and *Literae Humaniores* («Greats», 1889). A fellowship at Hertford College (1889-94) was followed by one at University College (1895-1937) where he remained for the bulk of his

⁷ See, for example, Lloyd-Jones, *Blood for the Ghosts* 197 on Oxford's classical education in the 1880s when Gilbert Murray was an undergraduate: «a grossly exaggerated emphasis on translation from English into Greek and Latin»; and at 295, where he describes two Mods. Tutors in the late 1920s as being able to teach the young Denys Page «little [...] except how to write elegant Latin». But at *Blood for the Ghosts* 287 Lloyd-Jones does single Poynton out, presumably on the basis of oral tradition, as «an excellent tutor [...] who published little but later impressed Eduard Fraenkel as a learned man».

⁸ The *Oxford Classical Texts*, inaugurated in the late 1890s, contained a minimal *apparatus criticus* which, whatever the intention, did not distract students unduly with issues of textual criticism. In 1936 Werner Jaeger was appalled to find Oxford classicists arguing about whether undergraduates should even pay attention to the *apparatus criticus*. See the letter quoted in A. Bierl, W.M. Calder III and R.L. Fowler (edd.), *The Prussian and the Poet: The Letters of Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorf to Gilbert Murray (1894-1930)*, Hildesheim 1991, 2f.

⁹ See the passage quoted at the end of this article from his 1937 lecture, *The Nature of University Studies in the Classics* (DP 27/12) for techniques of reading; cf. n. 82.

¹⁰ «He came up to Balliol in Jowett's day and had a lot to say of the great man»; so C.S. Lewis, in a letter of February 1919, at W. Hooper (ed.), *C.S. Lewis: Collected Letters, I. Family Letters 1905-1931*, London 2000 (New York 2004), 430.

career. In 1896 he married the daughter of a Fellow of Hertford College, John Young Sargent, and the marriage produced five children¹¹. At University College Poynton became a highly respected and gregarious tutor¹², who also served from 1900 to 1935 as Bursar (financial administrator; a post often delegated to a non-academic functionary) and briefly at the end of his career (1935-1937) as Master, *i.e.*, Head of the college. From 1925 to 1932 he was the Oxford Public Orator, a task requiring him to use his skills in Latin prose composition to present candidates for honorary degrees¹³.

Early in his career he published an edition for students of Cicero's *Pro Milone*¹⁴, and in the 1920s produced two volumes of selected texts, probably designed for use in preparing for «Mods.», while in 1928 he delivered at his college an oration in the manner of Isocrates, a *tour de force* in the style of one of his favourite authors¹⁵. But around the turn of the century he also wrote two brief papers on the Oxford manuscripts of the ancient literary scholar Dionysius of Halicarnassus for the «Journal of Philology»¹⁶, and in the inter-war years undertook research for an edition of the Byzantine scholia of John Siceliotes (ca. A.D. 1000) on the treatise *On Types (Peri Ideôn)* by Hermogenes (2nd cent. A.D.), which dealt with rhetorical style and its embodiment by Demosthenes¹⁷. Thus Poynton was acquainted first-hand with Greek

¹¹ Sargent, winner of the Ireland Scholarship (the premier award in classical studies) in 1851, was a prolific author of manuals for composition into Greek and Latin prose and verse, and tutored Gilbert Murray on the eve of the latter's entry at Oxford (see D. Wilson, *Gilbert Murray OM, 1866-1957*, Oxford 1987, 17). Poynton must have seemed an eminently suitable son-in-law. One of Poynton's sons, John Blackburne Poynton (1900-1995), an outstanding classical scholar (winner of the two Oxford prizes for composition referred to in n. 43 below), taught at Winchester College; another, Sir Arthur Hilton Poynton (1905-1996), took a degree in *Literae Humaniores* and became a distinguished civil servant in the Colonial Office.

¹² Warmer than any tribute paid him by Dodds is C.S. Lewis's description of him as «quite an exceptionally good tutor [...] my visits to him are enjoyable as well as useful», and as someone respected despite his idiosyncrasies («they all laugh at him, they all imitate his little mannerisms, but nobody who ever met him forgets to tell you so») (*Collected Letters* 429f.).

¹³ One such occasion from 1927 is recorded by his former colleague at Hertford College, Dean Inge, who referred to 'a very kind Latin speech'; see W.R. Inge, *Diary of A Dean*, London 1949, 121. See also W.L. Phelps, *Autobiography with Letters*, Oxford 1939, 582f. for a recollection of Poynton from 1926 when he presented J.M. Barrie.

¹⁴ *Cicero. Pro Milone*, Oxford 1892 (1902²).

¹⁵ *Flosculi Graeci vitam et mores antiquitatis redolentes*, Oxford 1920, and *Flosculi Latini*, Oxford 1922; *Isocrates: A Public Lecture Delivered by Request in University College, Oxford (25 January 1928)*, Oxford and London 1928. In a letter to the Master of the College (undated, but 1927-1928) Poynton warned that he would pronounce Greek in what he himself called a «barbarous» manner: «I shall call an ox [*scil. bous*] a *bows* not a *booss* etc., *Mousa* will be *Mowsa* not *Musa*». The letter is at Univ. Coll. Archives MA44/5/C/1, *Papers of Sir Michael Sadler*.

¹⁶ «JPh» XXVII (1900) 70-99 (with a brief supplement at «CR» XIV, 1900, 413f.), and XXVIII (1902) 161-185 respectively. Bodleian Library, Ms. Gr. class. d. 139 is Poynton's selective concordance to Dionysius' minor works.

¹⁷ This is preserved at the Bodleian Library, Oxford, at Ms. Gr. class. d. 160 (collations of

palaeography and with editorial method. The subject of his research was also a counterpart to his lectures for «Mods.» which were principally on the orations of Demosthenes and Cicero¹⁸.

We know from a notebook preserved in his college's archives that in 1908 he marked all the Greek and Latin prose compositions submitted for Classical Moderations, and enriched the Greek letters used to assign marks with brief and often trenchant comments. Not surprisingly J.D. Denniston, future author of *Greek Particles* (see n. 73 below), received an alpha for Greek prose with the comment «clever work; one of the best»; a less fortunate candidate's Latin was dubbed «inaccurate and doggy».

In 1924 Poynton failed to become Master of University College, when opinion was evenly divided between him and A.S.L. Farquharson (1871-1941), also a classical scholar, though one whose publications (notably his edition of Marcus Aurelius [1944]) have formed an enduring contribution to Greek philosophical studies. Poynton died on October 8, 1944 as the result of a traffic accident two days earlier in the High Street, Oxford¹⁹. The upper reading room of the library at University College bears his name.

In December 1911 E.R. Dodds, then a student at Campbell College, Belfast took scholarship examinations at Oxford. When he failed to obtain an adequate award at Balliol²⁰, he accepted a scholarship at University College where Poynton was by now a well-established figure, closely allied with the Master, the Herodotean scholar Reginald Walter Macan (1848-1941)²¹. Shortly afterwards Poynton wrote him a letter that is worth quoting in full in order to sustain Dodds' claim that Poynton «saw the task of scholarship not as the reinterpretation of ancient masterpieces or the rediscovery of ancient modes of thought, but simply as the transmission of the most exact knowledge possible of two ancient languages»²².

Oxford manuscripts) and c. 101 (notes for the edition). It generated the only paper that I know that Poynton delivered to the Oxford Philological Society, *A Neglected Commentator of Hermogenes*, 31 May 1935. He also privately produced *Gregory of Nazianzus and the Greek Rhetoricians (A Supplement to the Index of Walz, Rhetores Graeci, Vol. 9)*, The Academic Copying Office: 21, The Turl, Oxford; there are copies at the Bodleian Library (Ms. Gr. misc. d. 5; donated in 1933) and the British Library.

¹⁸ The lectures are listed in the «Oxford University Gazette». Dodds, *Missing Persons* 28 described them as «useful»: «by translating and explaining a judicious selection of difficult 'spot' passages [scil. Poynton] spared us the intolerable tedium of reading the orations themselves».

¹⁹ This event is recorded in *University College Record* 1946, 1.

²⁰ See *Missing Persons* 18. When Dodds won the Ireland Scholarship in 1914, Cyril Bailey of Balliol wrote to congratulate him and remarked, with reference to the 1911 examinations, «some years ago I made a bad mistake when I examined you»; letter at *DP* Box 1, dated 11 December 1914.

²¹ On Macan see Bierl et al. (edd.), *The Prussian and the Poet* (n. 8 above) 99 n. 434.

²² *Missing Persons* 27, where Dodds quotes from it selectively. In a lecture of 1937, *The*

Univ. Coll. Oxon.²³

15 January 1912

Dear Mr. Dodd (*sic*)

You have evidently read a good deal and far more than most people of your age. The advice that I should give you is to master Monro's *Homeric Grammar*²⁴ and Roby's large *Latin Syntax* (vol. ii)²⁵. It is a great thing to be sure of your Homer and with that I should join a careful study of Sophocles and Thucydides – say 3 plays and Bks I-iii. Isocrates is in some ways the most important person in the 4th. century Gk. Lit.²⁶ A mastery of Sandys' *Panegyricus*²⁷ and of the *Areopagiticus* you will find really helpful. Translate also some of the *de pace* of Isocrates against some of the *Olynthiacs*²⁸. The foundation of all Greek scholarship is the knowledge of Homer and you can hardly do too much work at it. If you can, read Lehrs' *Aristarchus*²⁹ and Wolf's *Prolegomena*³⁰ through. In Latin I attach great importance to a knowledge of Plautus and Cicero's letters to Atticus. Lucretius will I hope be one of your books for Moderations³¹. Don't exhaust him now. Plautus can be read best with brief annotations and I advise you to get hold of Lindsay's notes on his grammar and syntax³².

It is very important to have some subject of your own to work on hereafter. Thus Greek or Roman inscriptions. I think you would find the former very useful. Cauer³³ or Dittenberger's *Sylloge*³⁴, or the little Teubner vol. of extracts³⁵. Or in Roman literature a study of the relation of Virgil and Horace to the great masters of prose style. For my own part I think Wilkins' *de*

Nature of University Studies in the Classics (DP 27/12), 8 (quoted fully below), Dodds, with perhaps Poynton in mind, referred to «brilliant composers who knew almost nothing of ancient civilisation or ancient thought, and did not care to understand the literature they could mimic so skillfully».

²³ This letter is at DP, Box 1, Correspondence 1901-1929. In the bibliographical footnotes to this letter I have cited only the first editions of the works to which Poynton refers.

²⁴ D.B. Monro, *Grammar of the Homeric Language*, Oxford 1882.

²⁵ H.J. Roby, *Grammar of the Latin Language from Plautus to Suetonius*, I-II, London 1871-1874.

²⁶ See n. 15 above for Poynton's epideictic imitation of Isocrates.

²⁷ J.E. Sandys (ed.), *Isocrates. Ad Demeonum et Panegyricus*, Cambridge 1868.

²⁸ See item (1) in the last paragraph of this letter for this technique of juxtaposed translation. Poynton's emphasis on the orators reflected their role as set texts in «Mods». Dodds, however, a few years after graduating, spoke of «incurably tedious authors, such as [...] Cicero and Demosthenes in their political speeches»; see the article of 1920, reprinted in R.B. Todd, *E.R. Dodds: the Dublin years (1916-1919)*, «Classics Ireland» VI (1999) 80-105 at 92-98; the quotation is at 97.

²⁹ K. Lehrs, *De Aristarchi studiis Homericis*, Leipzig 1833.

³⁰ F.A. Wolf, *Prolegomena ad Homerum*, Halle 1795.

³¹ Dodds, *Missing Persons* 28 recalled finding Cyril Bailey's lectures on Lucretius both «useful» and «interesting». His notes for these survive at DP 26/1.

³² W.M. Lindsay, *Syntax of Plautus*, St. Andrews 1901.

³³ P. Cauer, *Delectus inscriptionum Graecarum propter dialectum memorabilium*, Leipzig 1887.

³⁴ W. Dittenberger, *Sylloge inscriptionum Graecarum*, I-II, Leipzig 1883.

³⁵ This must be F. Solmsen, *Inscriptiones Graecae ad illustrandas dialectos selectae*, Leipzig 1903 (1905²; 1910³).

*Oratore*³⁶ or Sandys' *Orator*³⁷ are simply admirable preparations for the Hertford Scholarship³⁸.

In composn. I recommend nothing but (1) translation from different styles side by side – e.g. Livy's III book and Cicero's *Catilines*, which from time to time put back³⁹; (2) a good deal of repetition⁴⁰; (3) try and visualize and make practical all you translate⁴¹; (4) never show up a copy without translating all through, taking the words as if you were 12 years old⁴².

Ever yours truly

A.B. Poynton

P.S. Write to me in June and ask me to send you the subject for the Gaisford Greek Prizes and Latin Essay⁴³.

The letter also confirms Dodds's account of Poynton as someone who «entered with zest» into the «intercollegiate competition» of obtaining scholarships and prizes⁴⁴. Under his guidance Dodds obtained in 1913 a Craven Scholarship, as Poynton had

³⁶ A.S. Wilkins (ed.), *M.T. Ciceronis De oratore libri tres*, I-II, Oxford 1879; III, Oxford 1892.

³⁷ J.E. Sandys (ed.), *M. Tulli Ciceronis ad M. Brutum Orator*, Cambridge 1885.

³⁸ This scholarship was specifically based on examinations in Latin translation and composition. Poynton had won it in 1886.

³⁹ «Putting back» meant that someone would translate back into Latin or Greek the English translation that they had themselves made, and then compare it with the original. This was a technique used for improving composition and was still being advocated in the early 1960s by one elderly Latin teacher the present author knew.

⁴⁰ Repetition, or learning by heart, was encouraged, at least in elite schools, though not everyone was convinced of its value. In 1899 E.M. Forster wrote to his mother of a conversation with his tutor at King's College, Cambridge, Nathaniel Wedd (1864-1940), in which Wedd agreed that Forster had been held back by «the time wasted on repetition», something his Headmaster at Tonbridge School, Joseph Wood (1842-1923), so favoured that he produced a collection of texts *Ediscenda: Passages for Repetition, Arranged for the Classical Forms in Public Schools*, London 1893. See M. Lago and P.N. Furbank (edd.), *Selected Letters of E.M. Forster*, I, 1879-1920, London 1983, 25f. I have traced two other such collections: F.S. Aldhouse, *Selections from Latin Poetry for Repetition in Classical Schools*, Dublin 1878, and *Passages for Greek and Latin Repetition: Selected by Masters at Uppingham School*, London 1919. On Dodds and repetition see n. 81 below.

⁴¹ This technique is better explicated in one of Dodds's exhortations to Oxford students in the passage quoted below; see n. 80.

⁴² Gilbert Murray praised Dodds's translations in the examination for Craven Scholarship in 1913, but added, in a letter to Poynton (*DP* Box 1; letter of 13 December 1913): «I think he is in danger of carrying too far a method which he possibly learnt from me – of wringing all the meaning he can out of each word». This method would seem to complement the kind of search for fundamental meaning to which Poynton is referring.

⁴³ The Gaisford Prizes were for Greek Verse and Prose; the other prize referred to is The Chancellor's Prize for a Latin Essay. In 1912-1913 the themes for the Gaisfords were a translation of Pope's *Elegy On the Death of an Infant Lady*, and a debate written in the style of Thucydides between a representative of the people and a general «after discord had arisen among the British». I have found no evidence that Dodds ever competed for any of these prizes.

⁴⁴ *Missing Persons* 27.

before him, and in 1914 had the major success of winning the Ireland Scholarship, thanks to Poynton's farming him out to the elderly Alfred Denis Godley (1856-1925)⁴⁵, then Oxford's Public Orator, for coaching in verse composition. Poynton also endeared himself to Dodds by engaging in a more free-lancing form of pedagogy, by having pupils translate at sight over port on a Friday evening passages from authors as challenging as Pindar – a procedure that Dodds recalled fondly some fifty years later⁴⁶.

Dodds's entry for the Craven and Ireland Scholarships (the examinations for each were identical) brought him to the attention of Gilbert Murray, the Regius Professor of Greek, whose classes he had previously attended in preparing for «Mods.»⁴⁷. As one of the scholarships' examiners, Murray wrote to Poynton in December 1913 to praise Dodds's translations into English, and deprecate his verse translations (into Latin and Greek) as «the laborious work of a man who knew the languages well, but had very little practice or knowledge of *technique*» (my italics)⁴⁸. Murray urged that Dodds «raise his verse composition very greatly» if he wanted to win the Ireland. This he accomplished with Godley's help, and in December 1914 Murray was able to send first a telegram and then a letter of congratulations to Dodds who was in Dublin for the Christmas vacation⁴⁹.

But in subsequent correspondence with Murray, Dodds indicated a wish to escape the kind of exact scholarship that had brought him success. In his studies for *Literae Humaniores* («Greats»), the second phase of classical study at Oxford, he wanted, he told Murray, «to relieve a little the monotony of Greek Historical Inscriptions and Aristotelian Logic» by perhaps doing a paper on «the Gnostics or the neo-Platonists or both». He wanted to explore «the bizarre blending of philosophy and mysticism and magic in these writers», and uncover «sidelights on morbid psychology and the aberrations of the religious consciousness» in late antiquity and the Middle Ages. Murray, while sympathetic, counseled against this unorthodox deviation from the standard curriculum⁵⁰. It would seem that Dodds took his advice and pursued Neoplatonism seriously only after his graduation⁵¹.

⁴⁵ *Missing Persons* 27f.; on Godley see P.G. Naiditch, *A.E. Housman at University College London*, Leiden et al. 1988, 161-163.

⁴⁶ See *Missing Persons* 27 and *Classical teaching in an altered climate*, «PCA» LXI (1964) 17; in the latter, and earlier, recollection, the evening of the week is not specified, and the sustenance is reported as «tea and cake».

⁴⁷ See *Missing Persons* 28f. on his attending Murray's lectures and seminar on Euripides, and his class on translation in the period 1912-1914.

⁴⁸ Letter of Murray to Poynton, 13 December 1913, *DP* Box 1. Poynton probably gave this letter to Dodds on his return to Oxford as Regius Professor in 1936.

⁴⁹ These are referred to in Dodds's letter to Murray, undated but presumably December 1914, at *MP* 114/27, from which the quotations in the next paragraph are taken.

⁵⁰ Letter to Dodds, 26 December 1914, *DP* Box 1 in response to the undated letter referred to in the preceding note.

⁵¹ He did take a «seminal» reading class on Plotinus in early 1915 with J.A. Stewart, where

Dodds's subsequent career at Oxford was coloured by political events⁵². After the outbreak of war in 1914 he took advantage of conscription laws that exempted him as a resident of Ireland from military service. Then following the Dublin Uprising of April 1916, he offended his college authorities by his outspoken support for its participants, several of whom were executed by the British, and was asked to leave. He spent 1916-1917 in Dublin, but was allowed to return to take his final examinations and degree in June 1917. A.B. Poynton may have played some role in disrupting his pupil's career. Dodds recalled that «Macan *and others* naturally felt it to be intolerable that a loyal college should in time of war continue to house a person who openly expressed sympathy if not actual support for a parcel of justly condemned traitors» (my italics)⁵³. That Poynton was one of these «others» is suggested by a letter from Dodds's Dean at the University of Birmingham, the English Literature scholar Ernest de Selincourt (1870-1943), to Gilbert Murray in 1936 when Dodds was being considered for the Regius Professorship of Greek. Presumably reflecting conversations with Dodds, whom he had by then known for twelve years, de Selincourt says «he was up during the war, and Univ. [*scil.* University College], with Macan and Poynton in command, was not too friendly to him, and he has not forgotten it»⁵⁴. In early 1919, however, Poynton encouraged Dodds to compete for a research fellowship at Oxford, when, after having spent 1917-1919 in Ireland, he was trying to obtain a position in England⁵⁵. So he was not permanently stigmatised by them, though his conduct during the war almost certainly prevented him from obtaining a fellowship at an Oxford college, and in 1936 would open him to the charge of pacifism when he was appointed Regius Professor of Greek⁵⁶.

In the years before he returned to Oxford Dodds developed his «technique» well beyond a generic facility in translation and composition⁵⁷. His critical edition

the only other student was T.S. Eliot; see *Missing Persons* 40, and R.B. Todd, *An identification in T.S. Eliot's letters*, «Notes and Queries» CCXLV (n.s. XLVII) (2000) 337f.

⁵² For further details on this period see my discussion at «QS» LIII (2001) 36f.

⁵³ *Missing Persons* 45.

⁵⁴ Letter to Murray, 28 April 1936, *MP* 76/230. For some indication of Macan's expectation that students at University College during the First World War would undertake military service, see *C.S. Lewis: Collected Letters* (n. 10 above) 264 (a summary of a letter from Macan to Lewis written in late 1916). Macan's sentiments undoubtedly reflected the fact that, like Dodds (and Lewis), he was an Irish Protestant, and thus especially loyal to the British war effort at a time when the semi-independence of a Catholic Ireland was imminent.

⁵⁵ Dodds, letter to Gilbert Murray, 22 January 1919, *MP* 38/142. This was specifically the Craven Travelling Fellowship.

⁵⁶ See my discussion at «QS» LIII (2001) 241f.

⁵⁷ Apart presumably from teaching composition, he also seems to have prepared official documents in Latin while at University College, Reading in the early 1920s. His mother reported to his friend Thomas MacGreevy that he was «writing letters in Latin for the authorities»; letter of 30 December 1922, at Trinity College Dublin Ms. 8112/49.

of Proclus's *Elements of Theology*, published in 1933 after nearly a decade of work, so far exceeded the requirements of the Oxford Classical Texts series for which it was originally designed that (like his later edition of Plato's *Gorgias*) it was published as a major edition with a commentary⁵⁸. His interest in textual criticism, and its palaeographical foundations, may well have begun through contact with Poynton at Oxford, but it also developed independently⁵⁹.

When in the spring of 1936 Gilbert Murray was, in effect, orchestrating the appointment of his successor⁶⁰, he solicited Poynton's advice, which was that the best candidate was the palaeographer and papyrologist Edgar Lobel (1889-1982)⁶¹. «Dodds», he added, «was my pupil: his line of study, if I may judge from his Proclus, is rather arid, but he is a very able man, and if he would lean his weight to the interpretation of the great philosophers, he would bring to the University what seems to be needed for the school of Litt. [*sic*] Hum.»⁶². After Dodds's appointment, Poynton revealed to his former pupil that he was «consulted privately about the selection of a Regius Professor, and expressed the opinion that if your inclinations carried you towards lecturing on Aristotle and Plato, it would be most valuable to the Greats School to have that part of the work strengthened»⁶³. He went on: «I remember so well the effect of Bywater's lectures on the *de anima* – its [*sic*] fidelity to the text and great lucidity».

Now Ingram Bywater (1840-1914)⁶⁴, Murray's predecessor as Regius Professor, was also mentioned by Dodds's superior at the University of Birmingham, Sir Charles Grant Robertson (1869-1948), in a letter of support written to Murray in

⁵⁸ This was on the recommendation of Sir David Ross (*Missing Persons* 91). Ross's postcard of 27 March 1926 is extant in the Oxford University Press Archives, in the file on Dodds's edition. Ross wrote: «The apparatus is too long for the O.C.T., being to the text in the ratio of about 2:3». Dodds' two other editions were revisions of Oxford Classical Texts. His edition of the *Bacchae* used Gilbert Murray's «too often faulty or fanciful text» and he criticised it in his commentary (*Missing Persons* 169), while his edition of the *Gorgias* was a major revision of John Burnet's Oxford text (*Missing Persons* 171f.).

⁵⁹ It can first be detected in his *Plotiniana*, «CQ» XVI (1922) 93-97. At *Humanism and Technique* (n. 3 above) 12 he recalled that «a short apprenticeship to an expert palaeographer would in the sequel have spared me much blundering self-tuition and many errors». He is referring to Greek palaeography; see *Missing Persons* 74.

⁶⁰ See the evidence gathered at «QS» LIII (2001) 241f.

⁶¹ Lobel, like Dodds, had won a Craven Scholarship (1909), but, unlike Dodds in 1914, had not advanced to the Ireland Scholarship on competing for it the following year. On Lobel see H. Lloyd-Jones, *Dictionary of National Biography 1981-1985*, Oxford 1990, 247f.

⁶² Poynton to Murray, 24 April 1936, *MP* 76/209.

⁶³ Poynton to Dodds, 24 June 1936, *DP* Box 12. This letter concludes rather sadly with an appeal to new Regius Professor to remember his old Tutor if any work for examinations became available. Poynton mentioned «the rather exiguous dimensions of my College Pension».

⁶⁴ On Bywater the standard work remains W.W. Jackson, *Ingram Bywater: The Memoir of an Oxford Scholar 1840-1914*, Oxford 1917.

April 1936, but in rather different terms: «You need not fear that, if [Dodds] were appointed, he would be a Professor of the type of Bywater, whom I knew well»⁶⁵. So, while Poynton urged Dodds to emulate an austere scholar, who in his palaeographical and editorial work was close in spirit to Edgar Lobel, Grant Robertson urged Murray (who in his inaugural lecture at Oxford in 1908 had perhaps slighted Bywater⁶⁶) to support Dodds just because he would *not* emulate Bywater, but instead be «a real dynamic element in the University».

Dodds's own views about the study of Greek philosophy and literature were far removed, at least in principle, from those of Bywater⁶⁷. In lectures delivered shortly after his arrival at Oxford, he advocated studying Greek philosophy (and Greek literature generally) in relation to social and political history, and was particularly attracted to Plato's *Gorgias* as a document that could be interpreted in this way⁶⁸. Again, as he progressed during the late 1930s and after World War II towards his most famous book, *The Greeks and the Irrational*, he was engaged in that «rediscovery of ancient modes of thought» which in his autobiography he would identify as the antithesis to A.B. Poynton's vision of scholarship⁶⁹.

Poynton's goal of «the most exact possible knowledge» of the ancient languages nonetheless left its mark on Dodds's editions, and was even advocated by him in a qualified form shortly after his return to Oxford in a lecture, *The Nature of University Studies in the Classics*, given on 13 October 1937 to entering «Mods.» students. Here he revisited some of the issues raised in his inaugural lecture of the previous year⁷⁰. He again introduced the term «technique» to apply primarily to the specialised disciplines of classical scholarship, created by what he termed «Method», his label for the research culture established in nineteenth-century in Germany that

⁶⁵ Grant Robertson to Murray, 30 April 1936, *MP* 76/245-6.

⁶⁶ At *The Interpretation of Ancient Greek Literature: An Inaugural Lecture Delivered Before the University of Oxford January 27 1909*, Oxford 1909, 3f. Murray praised his predecessor for his attention to detail in his editions, implying perhaps that he would not have agreed that «in dealing with Greek literature [...] in order to understand we must also feel» (lecture cited, p. 21).

⁶⁷ Dodds mentioned Bywater's edition of Aristotle's *Poetics* in his inaugural lecture; see *Humanism and Technique* (n. 3 above) 14 where he contrasted such specialised work with the task of «expounding Greek literature to England at large». Yet at least in the case of his edition of Plato's *Gorgias*, as he himself acknowledged (*Missing Persons* 171f.), he too failed to link the issues of this dialogue to his own times; see further my *Plato as public intellectual: E.R. Dodds' edition of the 'Gorgias' and its 'primary purpose'*, «*Polis: The Journal of the Society for Greek Political Thought*» XIX (2002) 45-60.

⁶⁸ See *The Nature of University Studies in the Classics* (above n. 9), 9f., and *The Social Background of Athenian Philosophy* (DP 27/13), 1-3.

⁶⁹ *Missing Persons* 27. On *The Greeks and the Irrational*, Berkeley 1951, see Todd, *A bibliography* (n. 4 above) 178-180, and Todd, *A note on the genesis of E.R. Dodds's 'The Greeks and the Irrational'*, «EMC/CV» XLII n.s. XVII (1998) 663-676.

⁷⁰ The lecture is announced at «*Oxford University Gazette*», suppl. (1) to no. 2176 (25 June 1937) 866.

was then beginning to affect British education and scholarship⁷¹. Dodds had experienced this culture in the provincial universities (or «modern» universities, as they were then called) of Reading and Birmingham where he had taught between 1919 and 1936. He had come to regard it as a threat to humanism, in the sense of a more synoptic and wide-ranging approach to antiquity⁷². The culture represented by his early training in «Mods.» – the discipline of translation and composition – he now labeled «the ‘craft’ view of scholarship»⁷³. Yet he did not decry its benefits, and the following passage from this lecture stands in a revealing relationship to Poynton's letter of 1912 quoted above⁷⁴.

In this country, the traditional instrument of higher linguistic training is composition. As the name shows, the tradition goes back to a time when Latin was still a living vehicle of communication; when not only was it the international language of scholarship, but philosophers like Spinoza and poets like Milton still composed original works in Latin. Greek was never a living vehicle of communication in western Europe; “Greek composition”

⁷¹ See *Humanism and Technique* (n. 3 above) 5f. where «linguistic studies» are the «central hearth» surrounded by «collateral techniques – palaeography, epigraphy, papyrology, numismatics, and most important of all, archaeology», all of which should be «part of the service of humanism», although there is a risk that they will acquire an atomised autonomy. Their ancillary status was reinforced by an earlier definition (*Humanism and Technique* 4) of technique as «the study of what may roughly be called ‘brute fact’». In *The Nature of University Studies in the Classics* 14-16, there is a more expansive version of this analysis, in which «Method» is seen as generating «techniques» that involve an «atomisation of knowledge», and it concludes with the advice that «those who will eventually become specialists [...] should become humanists first». For a related critique of German textual scholarship as «methodisch» see A.E. Housman, *The Confines of Criticism: The Cambridge Inaugural 1911*, Cambridge 1969 [the date of its first publication], 37.

⁷² At *Missing Persons* 127 he admits that he had overestimated the extent to which this culture was a threat at Oxford. For his suggestions on how to counter such an academic culture elsewhere see his article *What is wrong with the modern universities?*, «The Universities Review» IV (October 1931) 9-20 at 17-19.

⁷³ When John Dewar Denniston (1887-1949), author of *Greek Particles*, Oxford 1934, was Dodds's principal opponent for the Regius Professorship of Greek in 1936, Gilbert Murray said of him «in actual knowledge of Greek language I doubt that he has his equal in Oxford and Cambridge» (letter to Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin, 2 June 1936, *MP* 77/138-140). He certainly tried to turn the «craft» of composition into a science. As Maurice Bowra (Dodds's other opponent in 1936), who had been a fellow member of the dons' «Composition Club» at Oxford in the inter-war years, put it: «[Denniston] believed that the first duty of anyone who translates from English into Latin or Greek is to reproduce as exactly as possible the meaning of the English as a Roman or a Greek would have expressed it. His first aim was scientific. Once this demand was met, he was more than ready to give a place to elegance, but he would never allow it to be a substitute for exactness»; see his memoir, *John Dewar Denniston 1887-1949*, «Proceedings of the British Academy» XXXV (1949) 219-232 at 221; cf. 222 on the «Composition Club».

⁷⁴ It is at pp. 467f.

was introduced into the schools and universities at a relatively late stage⁷⁵, as an academic exercise, and it has not taken deep root in any universities outside this country. The English emphasis on composition is one of the things that most sharply distinguish our way of teaching the classics from the continental one; and the influence of the English training comes out in the special characteristics of English scholarship.

The practice of composition aims at developing, and does at its best develop, that intuitive mastery of a literary medium, that sure sense of what is or is not possible within the limits of a particular style, which we call taste⁷⁶. And broadly speaking it is just this quality of taste, this intuitive flair, that distinguishes the work of the great English textual critics. On the other hand, I suspect that a too exclusive insistence on composition has had in the past a narrowing effect on the outlook of English scholarship; speaking very generally, I should say that English scholars and teachers had tended in the past, and sometimes still tend, to concentrate too narrowly on the manner of ancient literature and neglect its matter, to study the word in abstraction from the thought⁷⁷. Composition is a craft: it trains the craftsman's eye, the intuitive eye for detail. It does not train the synoptic eye, the eye that takes in the design and meaning of a complete work of art or a complete system of living⁷⁸. Ideally, the scholar should have both sorts of eye.

Nowadays, there is a growing reaction against the "craft" view of scholarship, which is reflected in an attack on the prestige of composition, especially of verse composition. My personal [8] opinion is that composition is a good servant but a foolish master. It is an admirable exercise, a first-rate training and testing ground in the use of linguistic instruments of precision; prose composition at least ought to form a necessary part of any advanced test of general scholarship. But composition is a means to an end; if it is treated as an end in itself, I fear it must fall into the class of elegant but useless accomplishments that once filled the too abundant leisure of the unemployed rich – its place on the scale of human values is perhaps – shall we say a little higher than crochet work and a little lower than chess playing? "A good composer" and "a good scholar" are not convertible terms. I have encountered brilliant composers who knew almost nothing of ancient civilisation or ancient thought, and did not care to understand the literature they could mimic so skillfully. Conversely, there have been great continental scholars who never composed a copy of verses in their lives⁷⁹.

⁷⁵ It may be datable to ca. 1780; see C.A. Stray, *Culture and discipline: classics and society in Victorian England*, «International Journal of the Classical Tradition» III (1996) 77-85 at 79.

⁷⁶ In an unpublished lecture, *The Transmission of Greek Texts and Modern Developments in Textual Criticism* (DP 28/4; delivered in China in 1943; cf. *Missing Persons* 152), Dodds distinguished three periods in the history of textual studies: those of taste, scientific method, and historical study (*i.e.*, the situation of texts in their original setting, and with reference to their evolution). «Taste» he implicitly associated with eighteenth-century British scholarship.

⁷⁷ Dodds's lecture *Some Neglected Continuities in Greek Thought* (DP 27/10) (May 1937), 1-3, presses this distinction in connection with the dichotomy between «Mods.» and «Greats» at Oxford, the one studying authors for «form», the other for «matter».

⁷⁸ Synoptic thinking is advocated in *Some Neglected Continuities in Greek Thought* (previous note). Though particularly concerned there with the study of the history of philosophy, he rails (pp. 1f.) more generally against the «bittiness» of the English educational system.

⁷⁹ A.E. Housman, *The Confines of Criticism* (n. 71 above) 18 notes that despite the nineteenth-century fetish for verse composition among classical scholars, «the most important

To those of you, then, who are good composers and enjoy composing I would say "Continue by all means in the enjoyment and perfecting of your craft; only, do not imagine that the mastery of this craft is the whole or even the most important part of scholarship". To those of you who are poor composers and anxious to improve, I would say "Don't neglect other parts of your work in order to give more time to composition. For facility in composition largely depends, once you can manage the grammatical structure, on filling the background of your mind with the rhythms of ancient prose and verse – and on learning to think in Greek and Latin. Therefore the cure for weak composition is not as a rule more composition, but more reading – preferably reading aloud, or at any rate forming the words silently as you read, and where possible taking in the sense without translating, grasping the stuff in the original, so that words and meaning will remain associated in your mind"⁸⁰.

To this I would add one other piece of advice: learn by heart some of your favourite passages [9] of prose and verse, and keep on repeating them to yourself at odd times until they are securely anchored in your memory. I have a strong belief in the virtue of what used to be called "Rep." as an instrument of habituation, a way of making the mind feel at home in the ancient languages⁸¹. If you do these things systematically, there is a good chance that the rest will be added unto you, that you will wake up one morning to find that your composition has improved. For the composer is dependent on the cooperation of the back of his mind; and although the back of the mind can be led, it won't be driven; it responds to suggestion, not to the direct demands of the will⁸². That is why you will often get more improvement by the methods I have described than by a frontal attack.

In his autobiography Dodds may have gently mocked A.B. Poynton (cf. n. 22 above), but in the qualified proreptic to composition that we have quoted here he

additions of the nineteenth century to our knowledge of Greek and Latin metre were made, not in England, but in Germany». (The word «metre» is omitted from editions of this lecture, but, in addition to being obviously required for sense, it is in the original typescript, Mr. P.G. Naiditch assures me). In this regard, there is a revealing letter from Eduard Fraenkel to Dodds (*DP* Box 2, 19 July 1936) in which Fraenkel is concerned that a refugee scholar whose appointment to a position in England he is advocating is not «a good composer»; Fraenkel goes on to reassure Dodds of his ability to compose, but without, he acknowledges, «your easiness and speed [...]». To us, this kind of thing is not natural, because we have been brought up in an entirely different, and, in my view, inferior way».

⁸⁰ This is probably the first stage of the process leading to what Poynton (letter cited above) intended by the precept, «try and visualize and make practical all you translate». It is what British Classics teachers have traditionally called «thinking in Greek and Latin».

⁸¹ On «Rep.», *i.e.*, repetition, as advocated by Poynton, see n. 40 above. Dodds once benefited from this technique in his psychical research, when he recited a chorus from the *Agamemnon* to convince a farmer and his wife that he had successfully carried out an exorcism. See *Missing Persons* 101.

⁸² This sentence may reflect the psychological theory of instincts, which Dodds discusses in a philosophical lecture, *The Ordinary Man's Ethics* (*DP* 31/1), datable to 1930-1931. There he wrote (p. 12) that «all volition has an instinctive basis»; applied to composition, this could mean developing an instinctive feel for the languages, the «back of the mind» probably being, for someone as familiar with Freud as Dodds was, the unconscious.

showed that, when confronted as Regius Professor of Greek with Oxford's traditions, he could also retain the fundamental values of his onetime Mods. tutor⁸³, even as he was trying to direct the Oxford classical curriculum in the direction of his own more humanistic vision of scholarship and education⁸⁴, and even as he was himself continuing to develop his early training into more sophisticated forms of technical scholarship⁸⁵.

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⁸³ A younger Dodds was rather less sympathetic to composition: «the teaching of Latin and Greek grammar and composition should be reduced to the bare minimum requisite for an intelligent understanding of the literature» (article of 1920 cited at n. 28 above, 97). As Regius Professor at Oxford he did not himself teach composition, but, like Gilbert Murray before him (*Missing Persons* 29), held a class in literary translation (records at *DP* Box 24b).

⁸⁴ At Oxford this specifically meant the reform of «Greats» so that it could include literary studies; see *Missing Persons* 177f.

⁸⁵ I am grateful to Dr. Robin Darwall-Smith for allowing me access to the material on Poynton in the Archives of University College, Oxford, and to Professor William M. Calder III for valuable comments on a draft of this paper.