

# C. M. Bowra on W. S. Barrett: An Unpublished Testimonium

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## *Introduction*

W. S. Barrett, *Euripides Hippolytus, Edited with Introduction and Commentary* (Oxford 1964), remains one of the most lasting English contributions to the study of Greek tragedy. Barrett (1914–2001), outside of Keble College, Oxford, is little more than a name on a titlepage. He rarely travelled. I know of no lectures he delivered in foreign countries. Further, after his book he published only some three articles, two largely forgotten in *Festschriften*. No complete bibliography of his writings is known to me. There is a brief life by his student and successor at Keble, A. S. Hollis.<sup>1</sup> Among much else the names of his parents and the profession of his father are omitted. We are told that students enjoyed his lectures. I wonder. Dr John Taylor informs me (*per litt.* 18 January 2005): “In my experience Barrett was an extremely boring lecturer. He once looked up from his prepared script to offer what promised to be a Housmanish admission of feeling but it turned out to be simply the observation that he had reached the same point in his notes (on Pindar) by the end of fourth week every year since 1958 (vel sim.)” And we are told little of the man.

I reviewed *Hippolytus* at *CP* 60 (1965) 277–282. The review is critical but in a precise manner. I note numerous errors and omissions. Revealingly Hollis cites only the panegyric by Hugh Lloyd-Jones, *JHS* 85 (1965) 164–171. I do think that when

<sup>1</sup>A. S. Hollis, “Barrett, William Spencer (1914–2001),” *The Dictionary of British Classicists I*, edited by Robert B. Todd (Bristol 2004) 54–55 (henceforth *DBC*).

writing lives of the dead for posterity both sides should be presented and the reader allowed to decide. I sent an offprint of my review to Sir Maurice Bowra (1898–1971), Warden of Wadham,<sup>2</sup> to whom W. G. Forrest had introduced me several years before. I edit his kind reply to a colleague 34 years his junior here. The typed letter is in my possession.

*The text*

From the Warden  
Telephone No. 44045

Wadham College  
Oxford  
17th September 1966

Dear Mr Calder,

Thank you very much for three most interesting and enjoyable offprints. The German piece is [*sic*] very fine, and full of good stuff.<sup>3</sup> I met H. Weir Smyth<sup>4</sup> in his old age and found him charming.<sup>5</sup> He took down his Aeschylus and said: "That was written by a man who still had blood in his veins." He was not too gentlemanly. Not elaborate, or southern colonel, or anything like that. Joshua Whatmough<sup>6</sup> left me flabbergasted. I thought him mad

<sup>2</sup> See my article in *DBC I* 100–102.

<sup>3</sup> "Die Geschichte der klassischen Philologie in den Vereinigten Staaten," *Jahrbuch für Amerikastudien* 11 (1966) 213–240, reprinted with addenda/corrigenda in "Studies in the Modern History of Classical Scholarship," *Antiqua* 27 (Naples 1984) 15–42, 301–304. The other German piece could only have been "Senecas 'Troerinnen': Eine Untersuchung über die Kompositionsweise der Sekundär-Tragödie," *Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift der Universität Rostock* 15 (1966) 551–559.

<sup>4</sup> For the authoritative life of Herbert Weir Smyth (1857–1937), certainly one of America's most distinguished Hellenists, American born and with a German doctorate, see Ward W. Briggs, Jr., *Biographical Dictionary of North American Classicists* (Westport/London 1994) 602–604.

<sup>5</sup> This would have been during Bowra's guest professorship at Harvard September 1936–February 1937: see C. M. Bowra, *Memories 1898–1939* (London 1966) 309–330. He mentions neither Smyth nor Whatmough there. Smyth would have been in his eightieth year.

<sup>6</sup> For the authoritative life of Joshua Whatmough (1897–1964) see William F. Wyatt, Jr., in *Biographical Dictionary* 688–691. Wyatt tactfully catches his eccentricity to which as a former student I may also testify: see my recollections of the man at *Men in their Books* (*Spudasmata* 67 [Hildesheim

and offensive, but [t]he may have had other and better qualities.

You treat Barrett with exemplary fairness. He is Fraenkel's<sup>7</sup> best (and only) pupil and has all the marks of the beast.<sup>8</sup> A total Philistine to the point of illiteracy outside his immediate subject. Extremely conceited and proud of having done so well. Maddening at all meetings and committees. But in the end childlike and rather touching. The rudeness comes from thinking that other people don't exist.

yours [*sic*] sincerely

C. M. Bowra

*What have we learned?*

The letter, because from so well informed a source, is further and important evidence for the Oxbridge struggle between *Wissenschaft* and *Dilettantismus*. A binding decision is impossible but surely Bowra and Fraenkel for many epitomize the division. The Oxbridge tradition was gentlemen teaching the sons of gentlemen to become gentlemen by translating selected texts precisely, with little attention to content, and by composing essays or better still poems in Greek or Latin.<sup>9</sup> There was small

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1998]) 290. I may add here his remark at the first meeting of a graduate class in Greek dialectal inscriptions: "Forgive me if I do not remember your names. To remember them would cause me to forget something more important."

<sup>7</sup> The standard life of Eduard Fraenkel (1888–1970), with portrait, remains Nicholas Horsfall, "Eduard Fraenkel," *Classical Scholarship: A Biographical Encyclopedia*, edited by Ward W. Briggs, Jr., and William M. Calder III (New York/London 1990) 61–67. He has compiled a full bibliography of Fraenkel's publications at *JRS* 66 (1976) 200–205. Only recently the evidence for the way in which Fraenkel sexually abused the female students in his famous *Agamemnon* seminar has been published: Peter J. Conradi, *Iris Murdoch: A Life* (New York/London 2001) 114–122, 495–496, 614–616 (notes). One wonders whether a man so well informed as Bowra had heard rumors. Marcus Deufert's most recent life of Fraenkel at *DBC* I 334–337 conceals his sexual abuse of female students and his suicide. That is a pity.

<sup>8</sup> Revelation 13:17.

<sup>9</sup> Fundamental is A. J. Engel, *From Clergyman to Don: The Rise of the Academic Profession in Nineteenth-Century England* (Oxford 1984). Because Engel is an American, he is able to treat a controversial matter dispassionately. For classics see Christopher Stray, *Classics Transformed: Schools, Universities, and*

interest in von Ranke's ideal of recreating a lost world "as it actually was."<sup>10</sup> The struggle between old and new reached a boiling point with the appointment of Eduard Fraenkel, a refugee from Nazi antisemitism, fired from his *Ordinariat* at Freiburg, to the Corpus Professorship of Latin at Oxford in 1935. He was successor to A. C. Clark over the objections of the Establishment and in part because of a public letter supporting the appointment by A. E. Housman.<sup>11</sup> Because Housman was little loved and his legacy often despised, this only aggravated matters. So fine a scholar as K. J. Dover has dismissed Housman's work as "a disastrous influence on the classical scholarship of our time."<sup>12</sup> That Fraenkel was a Jew did not ease matters.<sup>13</sup> And he was not the most amiable of men. His student Lloyd-Jones attests that he "at first and for long after alienated many well-wishers by his tactlessness and insensitivity."<sup>14</sup> His brutal review of the Harvard Servius permanently ended any American invitations.<sup>15</sup> "From whatever point of view we look at the new Servius, we see serious deficiencies.

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*Society in England, 1830–1960* (Oxford 1998), with my review at *CW* 93 (1999) 78–80. Stray includes a most valuable bibliography for further reading at 298–329.

<sup>10</sup> I seek to clarify the differences in "How did Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff Read a Text?" *CJ* 86 (1990/91) 344–352 = *Men in their Books* 167–176.

<sup>11</sup> See A. E. Housman, "Dr Fraenkel's Appointment," *The Sunday Times* 23 December 1934 = *The Classical Papers of A. E. Housman* III, ed. J. Diggle and F. R. D. Goodyear (Cambridge 1972) 1277.

<sup>12</sup> K. J. Dover in "Expurgation of Greek Literature," in *Les Etudes Classiques aux XIX<sup>e</sup> et XX<sup>e</sup> siècles: Leur place dans l'histoire des idées* (Entretiens Fondation Hardt 26 [Geneva 1980]) 123–124.

<sup>13</sup> See my history of an unpopular matter, "Racism in Anglo-American Classics," *Antike und Altertumswissenschaft in der Zeit von Faschismus und Nationalsozialismus: Kolloquium Universität Zürich 14.–17. Oktober 1998*, ed. B. Näf with T. Kammasch, *Texts and Studies in the History of Humanities* 1 (Cambridge/Mandelbachtal 2001) 165–179.

<sup>14</sup> See Hugh Lloyd-Jones, "Fraenkel, Eduard David Mortier (1888–1970)," rev., *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford 2004) (<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/33241>, accessed 17 January 2005).

<sup>15</sup> See conveniently E. Fraenkel, *Kleine Beiträge zur klassischen Philologie II Zur römischen Literatur, zu juristischen Texten, Verschiedenes* (Rome 1964) 339–390.

The dullness of this edition, though unnecessary, is, perhaps, forgivable; its inaccuracy and haphazardness are not.”<sup>16</sup>

Bowra’s detestation of Fraenkel is attested elsewhere. In a published letter to Noel Annan he reveals that Fraenkel, along with Denys Page, refused to congratulate him on the occasion of his knighthood in 1951.<sup>17</sup> K. J. Dover in 1953 seeking to reform the Classics syllabus at Oxford won the support of Fraenkel and Barrett. The reform failed. Dover writes:<sup>18</sup> “Fraenkel’s support was the kiss of death, because so many of the older members of the Subfaculty (notably Maurice Bowra) resented any criticisms that came from him ...” The dislike was mutual. I have argued that Fraenkel’s damnation of Gilbert Highet (1906–1978) written on 24 December 1951 was motivated in part by Highet’s friendship with Bowra.<sup>19</sup> Just as Fraenkel disliked Highet because he was a student of Bowra, so Bowra did Barrett because he was a student of Fraenkel. *Odium philologicum omnia vincit!*<sup>20</sup>

January, 2005

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<sup>16</sup> Fraenkel, *Kleine Beiträge* 389. The origin of this famous review has never been elucidated. Sir Ronald Syme informed me on 24 January 1975 that he had learned “from Arthur Darby Nock in his cups” that Nock had urged Hugh Last to assign and publish the review, although *JRS* normally avoided such purely philological matters. Did Nock for some reason wish a *damnatio memoriae* for E. K. Rand? The review successfully delayed publication of further volumes for decades.

<sup>17</sup> See Noel Annan, *The Dons: Mentors, Eccentrics and Geniuses* (London 1999) 163.

<sup>18</sup> Kenneth Dover, *Marginal Comment: A Memoir* (London 1994) 83.

<sup>19</sup> See my “Eduard Fraenkel on Ernst Robert Curtius and Gilbert Highet: An Unpublished Testimonium,” *Daís Phileisstephanos: Studies in Honour of Professor Staffan Fogelmark*, edited by Pär Sandin and Marianne Wifstrand Schiebe (Uppsala 2004) 435–441.

<sup>20</sup> I am grateful to four learned friends who have much improved an earlier version: James Morwood (Wadham College, Oxford), Paul Naiditch (UCLA), W. J. Slater (McMaster University), and John Taylor (Tonbridge School).