

Sociedade em Tumulto

BIBLOS

REVISTA DA FACULDADE DE LETRAS
UNIVERSIDADE DE COIMBRA

IN MEMORIAM

DO MESTRE MICHAEL LIAM PATRICK CEMLYN-JONES
(1943-2009)

Michael Cemlyn-Jones, who died after a short illness in January of this year, taught English language, linguistics and translation at the Faculdade de Letras, Universidade de Coimbra, for more than 40 years.

Michael was born in Dublin on 30 September 1943, and he was always fiercely proud of his Irish citizenship although he spent much of his early life in Spain where his father, the distinguished journalist William (Bill) Cemlyn-Jones, was a correspondent for the BBC and the *Observer*. He attended the University of Dublin, Trinity College, where he studied Modern Languages and Literature, specialising in French and Spanish, and obtained the degree of Master of Arts. Trinity in the early 1960s was a colourful and lively place with a reputation for producing larger than life characters and Michael was in many ways one of its typical products. The life of the College, and of the city of Dublin, in that era has been vividly and hilariously captured and celebrated in the early novels of the Irish-American author J.P. Donleavy. Michael once told me that his older brother had provided Donleavy with a model for the character Sebastian Dangerfield, the scapegrace hero of *The Ginger Man*. I do not know if this was the case, many claim this distinction (if such it is), but I have read the book and met the brother and on that basis can assert that it is by no means impossible. It was also at Trinity that Michael met Carolyn Wodehouse and the two subsequently married in 1968.

Michael and Carolyn arrived in Coimbra in 1972 as teachers at the British Council. Three years later, in October 1975, Michael was appointed to the post of *leitor* in English at the Faculdade de Letras. Over the years he worked at Coimbra; the number of Michael's students must have run comfortably into the thousands. It is certainly the case that the majority of those who are currently professors of English at

Coimbra were at one time or another his students, and former students with fond memories of “Dr Michael” can also be found in many other walks of life (for example, in secondary schools, in the *função pública*, in businesses and banks and among the European Union linguists in Brussels and Luxemburg). His teaching methods were unorthodox but effective. One former student (now a senior professor of English literature at FLUC) can recall her delight as an undergraduate at seeing Michael – impeccably attired in a suit and tie – leap from the floor to the desk top and there imitate a gorilla in order to illustrate a point about the difference between human speech and the language of animals. He did not, it must said, keep abreast of the advances in educational technology (to his eternal credit he never gave a Power Point presentation or used an overhead projector in his life) but he brought to the classroom an enthusiasm and a love of language in all its vagaries that more than compensated for any perceived technical deficiencies. Michael’s two great intellectual passions, the music of Mozart and the novels of Evelyn Waugh (both which he lectured on at the Faculdade de Letras), should also be remembered here.

Michael was as well known in the city of Coimbra as he was in the Faculdade. He rarely missed a musical event at the TAGV or anywhere else – when he disapproved of what was offered he would let the world know often through the correspondence columns of the *Diário de Coimbra*. He was a remorselessly enthusiastic and fiercely competitive tennis player and when he was well over 50 years of age he swam the year round in the sea at Figueira. He could be seen cycling about the streets of the city and, a convivial soul, he was a familiar figure (often accompanied by his dog) in the cafés of Celas and Olivais.

Michael was survived by his wife Carolyn, who recently retired following a distinguished career as Director of the British Council Coimbra (and who was also for many years a colleague at the Faculdade), two daughters, of whom he was immensely proud, Tara and Jessica, and two grandchildren, Michael and Laura. Tara attended Wadham College Oxford and has subsequently enjoyed a highly successful career in banking and finance in London, Barcelona and now Lisbon. Jessica, who graduated from our Faculdade de Medicina, lives in Coimbra and has recently passed her specialization examinations.

Michael Cemlyn-Jones was my friend and colleague for over a quarter of a century and writing this brings it forcefully to my mind that this year, for the first time at Coimbra, I am beginning an academic year without him. I will miss him and the loss is not only a personal one. At

a time when the academic world is becoming increasingly bureaucratic, standardized and homogenized, Michael remained an individual, irreducibly (and at times, let it be said, infuriatingly) different and at Coimbra, and indeed elsewhere, now more than ever, we need such individuals. I can think of no more appropriate way of ending this recollection of and tribute to Michael Liam Patrick than by quoting the lines written by the Irish poet W.B. Yeats's on his friend and colleague Lady Gregory:

And I am in despair that time may bring
Approved patterns of women or of men
But not that selfsame excellence again.
(“The Municipal Gallery Revisited”)

STEPHEN WILSON