

CAMBRIDGE ORATIONS, 1993–2007

As Orator of the University of Cambridge, Anthony Bowen delivered 121 Latin speeches in the Senate House in praise of a variety of distinguished people on the occasion of their receiving Honorary Degrees. Of these speeches, 52 are presented here, with facing translations. The fifty-first Orator in an unbroken sequence going back to 1521, Mr Bowen addresses admirably the challenge of speaking even of modern phenomena in the language and cadences of antiquity, although words such as ‘transistor’ (gen. *transistoris*, m.) occasionally need to be invented. The honorands include Nelson Mandela, Rowan Williams, Betty Boothroyd, Cleo Laine, Kiri Te Kanawa, Anthony Gormley and a host of others, among them many scientists of international distinction.

ANTHONY BOWEN is an Emeritus Fellow of Jesus College, Cambridge, and was Orator of the University of Cambridge from 1993 to 2007.

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ANTHONY BOWEN

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A SELECTION

Anthony Bowen
Fellow Emeritus of Jesus College



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INTRODUCTION

Sir John Edwin Sandys, who served as Orator from 1876 to 1919, published (in two goes¹) all the speeches and addresses that he composed. Subsequent Orators, if they have published, have selected, and I follow them. In my fourteen years as Orator, from 1993 to 2007, I presented 116 people (86 men and 30 women) for an honorary doctorate of the University and 5 (3 and 2 respectively) for an honorary MA; I also made a speech in honour of Aung San Suu Kyi, who could not risk leaving Burma to receive the doctorate she was offered.² From those 122 speeches, I have selected 52 (37 addressed to men and 15 to women). I have had three criteria in selecting them: variety, individuality and repeatability. If any for whom I spoke look here and are disappointed to find that speech omitted, I can say only that the omission had nothing to do with them personally; at least they are in the majority.

The office of Orator goes back to 1521, and there are traces of the job being done earlier than that. Those interested in its creation, use and development should read the excellent account given by my immediate predecessor, James Diggle, in the preface to his *Cambridge Orations 1982–1993: A Selection* (Cambridge, 1994). On the composition of speeches he rightly quotes W. K. C. Guthrie, Orator from 1939 to 1957:

To produce a good speech of the length customary nowadays³ calls for a kind of gem-cutting in words, a complete picture, not lacking in detail, within the bezel of a ring. This in itself, incidentally, is an all-sufficient reason for retaining Latin as the medium, since it provides a material of unexampled hardness and brilliance in which to execute this lapidary work.

¹ *Orationes et Epistulae Cantabrigienses (1876–1909)* (London, 1910); *Orationes et Epistulae Cantabrigienses (1909–1919)* (Cambridge, 1921).

² Other degrees may be taken *in absentia*, but not honorary degrees. Exceptionally, Nelson Mandela received his at a ceremony in the gardens of Buckingham Palace, seven other universities sharing the occasion. Hence the slightly shorter length of the speech for him.

³ I found it to be from 220 to 230 words of Latin, a speaking time of three and a half to four minutes.

Introduction

The ceremony in the Senate House is a remarkable opportunity for demonstrating the nature and quality of spoken Latin, and the advantages of the language were confirmed for me in Buckingham Palace gardens in 1996, when six of the eight orators presenting Nelson Mandela spoke in English. ‘A complete picture’, yes; a biography, no. One good anecdote will sometimes give much of the portrait; beyond that, the deeds must speak.

Somewhere in *Punch* (I think: I have failed to find it), there was a cartoon of an actor taking the applause for a one-man performance. The cartoonist had viewed him from the wings, however, in which he had drawn in addition all those others, stage-manager, lighting men, scene-shifters, without whom the performance would not have been possible. For every speech, I had at least one, sometimes two or three major consultants who read what I drafted and advised further. They are too many to name. One, however, read everything I wrote both in the Latin and in the English, and never failed in improvement of both and in encouragement of me: Neil Hopkinson of Trinity College; very occasionally I stuck to my text, but I doubt I was wise to do so. When I began, the University Draftsman, responsible for getting the texts printed, was John Easterling, also of Trinity College; he too made shrewd comments, allowing amendment in proof. I treasure also letters after the event from the late Guy Lee of St John’s College, my sometime supervisor, noting things that he had liked. The three Vice-Chancellors for whom I worked, Sir David Williams, Lord Broers and Alison Richard, were all strongly supportive. Very differently supportive, but just as valuably, were Constantine and Sibylle Mano, at whose dining-room table in Crete I composed my first drafts for many a spring; their interest and hospitality were perfect.

My thanks are also due to Cambridge University Press for agreeing to print this volume, and in particular to Michael Sharp for getting it into shape. ‘The text of the compositions here printed [I quote from Sandys’ preface of 1910] has been, to some slight extent, revised. Small matters of spelling have been made more uniform.’ I have exercised the same liberty, and have benefited also from suggestions made by James Diggle, who kindly looked through all the speeches here printed with a true care and thoroughness. When I began as Orator, it was the custom to latinize as far as possible all forenames but to leave surnames alone; from 2000 on, I left all names in their original form. I am comforted in my decision by the increasing number of forenames not apt for Latin.