

Alan Deyermond: a tribute by Professor David Hook

To do justice to Alan Deyermond's academic achievement in ten minutes? Fortunately my task in this brief appreciation is greatly facilitated by the assessment of his attainments by the Universities of Oxford, Salamanca, and Valencia, which, by their higher doctorate, Nebrija Prize, and honorary doctorate respectively, awarded Alan three of the most significant accolades available. My allotted time would not suffice even to read the bibliographical details of those of his publications which will enjoy an intellectual shelf-life rather longer than that of the paper on which they were first printed. Happily, the project to create a section devoted to his most significant works on the Biblioteca Cervantes Virtual, the Spanish state's literary webworld, will, should it come to fruition, ensure their survival in digital form, as well as constituting eloquent evidence of the enormous extent of his impact in the Spanish-speaking world.

Alan's rigorous timing at conferences (including the 20-minute slots allocated at the successful Colloquia he organised at Westfield and later at QMW) is remembered with awe and trepidation in Spain. Ten minutes is also about half the time taken by a fast train from St Albans to West Hampstead in the pre-privatisation days when I first became a fellow-traveller of Alan's on my arrival at King's College in 1974, and began to attend the welcoming Friday Research Seminar at Westfield, which had no equivalent in my own institution. It is also approximately the time that it took me to calm Alan down en route on the day when his name appeared as "Diamond" in the *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies*. This error, by one who should have known better, left him so greatly exercised (at the implications for the bibliographical accuracy of the perpetrator rather than at the insult) that I did not feel it an opportune moment to point out to him that it could constitute a compliment in the medieval system of hierarchies, which in any other circumstances would surely have come at once to his mind. For his own work, Alan was the first to admit to an error when one was pointed out to him, saying that this was of course inevitable despite his best efforts in what was to him, given his sincere Christian faith, an imperfect, post-lapsarian world; but in matters of bibliography and attribution he was punctilious, and expected everyone else to be the same. He was a firm believer in the view that accuracy is a duty not a virtue, and expected research to be carried out to the absolute limits of what was feasible, so that he could, as he once put it to me, look the St Albans dustmen in the eye and justify the use to which their taxes were being put.

Such observations were not uncommon, for off campus Alan had an impressive capacity for self-mockery which kept his feet firmly based in everyday reality. He told, for example, an anecdote concerning the wife of the *bedel* at Palencia Cathedral Archive in which the (entirely proper) punchline involved the lady's firm impression that this foreigner was addressing her in English. This sense of humour was an essential part of his character to those who knew him well; and though in other contexts Alan could be a formidable opponent on a committee, and on matters of academic policy or probity was utterly implacable, he was also humane and courteous. His deep warmth and generosity, both scholarly and personal, were inherent to his character.

The latter quality, in particular, accounts for the current worldwide sense of loss expressed in Hispanism, and in medieval studies, for Alan had supported so many young scholars at the start of their careers, encouraged their explorations, and assisted them as they advanced, that the gratitude felt towards him as a guide was as genuine as was the admiration for his own academic accomplishment. His generosity was also, of course, a weakness, in so far as it rendered him incapable, until very late in life, of declining an invitation to attend an academic gathering or to contribute to a Festschrift, often at very short notice and despite still having no topic in mind at the moment of acceptance. He again told an anecdote against himself concerning the breakfast-time lament of a senior Hispanist at a conference in the United States that someone in an adjacent room had kept him awake all night by typing – unbeknown to the complainant, it was of course Alan himself, belatedly preparing his paper

for delivery the next morning. Where his inability to refuse had not landed him with an impossible deadline, where neither topic nor timetable was externally dictated, his work could scale the heights of scholarly significance and provide both a lasting and impeccable model and what would rapidly become, and often remain, the standard statement concerning the question addressed, from which all subsequent work had to begin anew. Every Hispanist working on medieval matters will have his or her own mental catalogue of the most important contributions of Alan Deyermond to the field in question. These form an A to Z from Arthuriana, balladry, *cancionero* verse, drama, epic, Fernando de Rojas, and *figura*, through *Libro de buen amor*, lost literature, and lyric, to Santillana and Teresa de Cartagena, and finishing with the zoological element represented by the Bestiary. In some cases an article authored by Alan could have more significance than a book by somebody else – in some instances indeed ironically a book in a series which Alan had himself, as editor, seen through to publication because, again, his generosity had overcome his caution. I will not inflict my individual selection of his best works on you because it would have no greater validity than that of any other Hispanic medievalist, but I would hazard that *Petrarchan Sources* and *Epic Poetry and the Clergy* will appear on many such personal lists. A different order of magnitude was attained by his medieval volume in *A Literary History of Spain*, and its avatars, which gave a fresh vision at precisely the moment that the demise of Franco began to open new possibilities within Spain, and which as a result was at once eagerly seized upon in its Spanish version. Alan was always open to new ideas, and his early advocacy for medieval Spanish female writers is but one example of this. For the further reaches of literary theory, of course, he had no time, perhaps because the breadth of his own reading and the depth of his rich cultural and intellectual hinterland meant that he had no need to embrace such dogmas. Those seeking explanations of his predominantly historicist approach will probably point to his early graduate training with Peter Russell; but influences from Oxford history nearer to home may well have played an important part, given Ann's professional specialism.

Alan Deyermond's publications are but part of the picture, however, for he was also a significant contributor to the collective activity and professional development of his discipline, as journal and series editor, member and officer of learned societies national and international, Fellow of the British Academy, and much more. His contributions here included a major revision of the MHRA style sheet (an unglamorous but essential underpinning for scholarly publication), and, within his own institution, terms of office as Head of Department and Dean, since he viewed such service as an obligation of his profession. He was, however, a firm believer in the primacy of the academic over the administrative, the purpose of the latter, to him, being merely to facilitate and to support the activity and agendas of the former. With this in mind, it is as instructive to consider what Alan did not undertake as much as what he did. Despite his eminence, he did not act as an assessor in any of the schemes imposed on the universities by government from the 1980s to the present. In this, as in much else in his professional life, Alan Deyermond presented us with an ethical example informed by both his civic conscience and his faith and with a scholarly model which should give us pause for reflection as we remember him into future years.