PREFACE

Much to my surprise an edition of some fifty of my orations as Trinity's Public Orator sold out some years ago,[1] and its good reception has encouraged me to offer this further volume to the public. The previous selection was culled from my output over the first twenty years of my tenure as Orator – I was first appointed in the academic year 1970–71. It did not therefore cover the important occasion of Trinity's Quatercentenary celebrations, an event that now receives due emphasis by the inclusion of all ten orations delivered in St Patrick's Cathedral on the College's 400th Birthday, March 13, 1992. The selection also includes items from the Summer Commencements of July 1990 down to and including those of July 2002.

In the period from 1971 to 1990, I had the honour of presenting 141 graduands *honoris causa.* Since then the pace has quickened, a fact reflected in the present selection of 85 names from a list of honorands totalling 175 over the last twelve years. Readers may wonder why there is occasionally a marked variation in the length of the orations, as for example in the cases of Mikhail Gorbachev and Václav Havel. This is because the candidate was the *sole* honorand at a *special* ceremony. Trinity's normal practice is to present five or six candidates for honorary degrees at the regular July and December Commencements at which many other degrees are also conferred.

I am often asked about the actual process of composition, and whether I begin with an English draft, and then translate it into Latin. The answer is a very definite "No". I reflect on the candidate's main achievements, and think how these may be expressed in Latin, and the first draft on my Macintosh screen is always in Latin. I then translate this into English, an exercise that effectively reveals any places where I feel I have not said exactly what I intended. The relevant phrases are then revised and re-translated, and this process of reflection from one language to the other continues as long as necessary.

It is not, I think, generally realised that the Trinity Orator, like his counterpart at Oxford[2] and, I am sure, at Cambridge also, has the task of

[1] *Orationes Dublinienses Selectae (1971–1990),* Dublin 1991. Published as No.5 in the Trinity College Dublin Quatercentenary Series, and produced by Town House, Dublin.

[2] See the pertinent remarks of Alison, wife of Godfrey Bond (both, incidentally, T.C.D. graduates), in the fine, but sadly posthumous, publication: *Oxford Orations: a selection of orations by Godfrey Bond, Public Orator 1980–1992,* Oxbow Books, Oxford 2000.

assembling and assessing all the information on which his pieces are based. He is never supplied with any formal draft of what he should or might say. At Trinity College his primary source is the information on file from the deliberations of the honorary degrees committee, of which he is an *ex officio* member. After that he is on his own, and has to rely on whatever written sources or contacts he can locate or approach. In this connection I should like to pay tribute to the reference library of The Irish Times, where the press clippings collected in personal files have often proved a most valuable resource, and I wish to thank its editor Mr. John Gibson for so readily granting me access.

Each candidate has a proposer, whom I will often know as a colleague, and I take this opportunity of thanking all such persons for their sympathetic assistance in answering questions and correcting drafts; and more particularly, where modern science or technology was concerned, for their patience and skill in expounding the mysteries of their subject to me in terms comprehensible by the layman.

The Public Orator 'primarily is the "Pen" and the "Voice" of his University'. So wrote Dr. C. B. Phipps in a valuable *Introduction* on the history of the office in Oxford, Cambridge, and Dublin.[3] In my time the custom of sending formal Latin letters of congratulation for presentation to the host university by Trinity delegates attending centenary celebrations elsewhere has virtually died out. But I am proud of the fact that the Voice of my University is still heard in Latin, and very conscious that my words must reflect as objectively as possible the reasons why Board and Senate have deemed the candidate worthy of our highest honours. In pursuit of this aim I have made a practice of submitting all my work in draft to a succession of Registrars and Secretaries of the College, and wish to express my gratitude to them for their always helpful suggestions and criticisms.

Style is indeed the man – and the woman too – and I am conscious that my better insights into the personality of candidates have come from their published writings, especially when autobiographical. This was particularly true in regard to Nelson Mandela and Mikhail Gorbachev, where my pen portraits were almost entirely based on their own self-portrayals.

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[3] In Sir R. W. Tate's *Orationes et Epistolae Dublinenses,* Dublin 1941, p.ix.

The similarity between a literary composition and a picture was an ancient commonplace that has been much in my mind since I had the experience of sitting for a portrait.[4] Watching the artist at work, I became aware of the fundamental significance of choices in regard to background and pose, and how the placing of a single highlight could make or mar the whole. But perhaps I can best compare a Latin citation with a cameo: the subject is a person, the frame is very restricted in size and shape, the texture is lapidary, the lines must be sharply incised, and more than half of the material must be cut away to accentuate the relief.

Finally let me express my sincere thanks to the previous Provost, Professor Tom Mitchell, who as a member of the Caput Senatus listened kindly to all my efforts, and who has so expertly and generously put them in their ancient context in his Introduction to the present volume. I also wish to put on record my appreciation of the work of my editor-cum-publisher Mr. Ross Hinds, who has tackled the job with the commitment and *pietas* of a most loyal son of the House.

J. V. LUCE September 2003

[4] See, *e.g.*, Horace, *Ars Poetica* 361: ut pictura poesis.

INTRODUCTION

The first volume of John Luce's *Selected Dublin Orations* was published just over ten years ago on the eve of Trinity's Quatercentenary. It was widely welcomed, and its historical significance attracted the interest of many. The parade of honorands encompassed a fascinating cross-section of leading figures from the previous twenty years — men and women who had achieved high distinction as statesmen, churchmen, public servants, scientists, scholars, artists, entertainers, leaders of business and the professions.

The book was also welcomed for its special literary interest and value as a rare and well-crafted example of an ancient genre — epideictic oratory — that can be traced back as far as the fifth century BC. Aristotle defined it as 'the ceremonial oratory of display in praise or in blame'. In Cicero we find its distinctive style described as 'sweet and free and flowing, alive with epigram, resonant in its diction, gently rhythmic with a controlled exuberance'. Cicero himself was a prime contributor to the development of the genre. An orator of unrivalled power in any mode, he combined his broad learning and rich imagination with an unsurpassed eloquence and sense of style that enabled him to mould the Latin tongue into an expressive, concise, and superbly graceful instrument of communication and persuasion. His talents were especially well-suited to the purposes of epideictic, and he has produced some of the genre's most memorable specimens.

Latin, with Cicero as the favourite model, remained the primary language of ceremony and eulogy and the lingua franca of the intelligentsia well into the post-Renaissance era. But it has gradually and regrettably lost its importance in modern education and in virtually all facets of modern intellectual life. The Latin encomium, however, still survives in the presentation of candidates for honorary degrees at some of Europe's older universities, but it is fast becoming an endangered species. Trinity remains one of the few universities that has resolutely preserved it, and it has been chiefly enabled to do so by a succession of eminent classical scholars who combined their learning with oratorical inspiration and linguistic brilliance.

John Luce holds a leading place in this company of orators. His exceptional intellectual talents were already in evidence during his undergraduate years at Trinity from 1938–42, when he graduated with gold medals in both Classics and Philosophy. He returned to the College in 1948

to a career that spanned more than forty years, during which he served as Vice-Provost, and won appointment to one of the College's most prestigious Chairs, the Erasmus Smith's Professorship of Oratory. His broad interests made him proficient in many aspects of classical civilisation, from literature and philosophy to history and archaeology, and in his scholarly writings he has made significant contributions in all these areas. His grasp of Latin and Greek is rare by any standard, and that clearly shows itself in his ability to compose Greek and Latin verse with consummate skill in a variety of ancient metres.

His scholarly range and literary abilities proved ideal qualifications for the job of Public Orator, a position he assumed in the academic year 1970–71, and holds to this day. One of his predecessors, Sir Robert Tate, served longer — from 1914 to 1952 — but John Luce's output has been substantially greater — 316 orations in all to date. The Muses have indeed smiled upon him, and year after year he has produced a series of polished encomia that preserve the best traits of epideictic. His vignettes are vivid portraits, rich in interesting human detail, well-rounded in their commendation, and memorably expressed in elegant Latin. His style is markedly Ciceronian in its learned allusions, epigrammatic wit, the balance and rhythm of its sentence structure, and the eloquence of the phrasing, even when the esoteric mysteries of molecular biology or computer hardware have to be expounded in Latin dress. And their impact was always enhanced on the day by a resonant voice and faultless delivery.

I am delighted that a second volume of these unique compositions is now appearing. It covers a fascinating period in Trinity's history, and includes the Special Commencements associated with the College's Quatercentenary and those that marked the new Millennium. Much of what was greatest in human achievement over the last generation is represented in these eighty-five orations. Great heroes of political change such as Nelson Mandela and Mikhail Gorbachev are here, as are the first women Presidents of Ireland. There are scientists whose discoveries have greatly enhanced the quality of human life; business leaders whose skill and initiative helped shape an unparalleled economic boom internationally and in Ireland; writers, artists, and thinkers whose creative genius and intellectual power have advanced the non-material aspects of our lives. And there are a great many more who have

contributed to Irish life and to Trinity College in vital and admirable ways.

These insightful portraits of such leading figures, products of John Luce's mature skills, provide memorable tableaux from one of the most eventful eras of our time. I am certain that they will be read with pleasure, whether in Latin or in his equally well-turned English versions.

Professor T. N. Mitchell
Provost 1991–2001