CALVERT WARD WATKINS

Calvert Watkins, a towering figure in historical and Indo-European linguistics and president of the LSA in 1988, died unexpectedly in Los Angeles on March 20, 2013, a week after his eightieth birthday. At the time of his death he was Distinguished Professor in Residence of the Department of Classics and the Program in Indo-European Studies at UCLA. He had moved to UCLA after a long career at Harvard, where he retired as Victor S. Thomas Professor of Linguistics and the Classics in 2003.

Though born in Pittsburgh and raised more in New York than anywhere else, Cal (as he was to all who knew him) did not feel himself an unhyphenated East Coaster. His parents, Ralph James Watkins and Willye Ward Watkins, were both from San Marcos, Texas; Ralph was an economist and government advisor whose career brought him north. Cal was intensely proud of his Texas roots, and cultivated a faintly detectable Texas drawl to the end of his days. But he was hardly ever more than a visitor to his ancestral home state. After graduating from Friends Seminary in Manhattan, he entered Harvard with the class of 1954. He stayed there, apart from leaves and fellowships, until the last decade of his life.

Cal began as a prodigy and never stopped being one. Exposure to Latin and Greek in school made him hungry for more, and by the time he was fifteen he had decided to be an Indo-Europeanist. He had already shown himself to be a remarkable practical language learner. Once, when he changed schools and was found to be behind the class in French, the problem was solved by his father taking him to see French movies, making sure he always got seated behind a lady in a fancy hat so that he would be unable to see the subtitles. In later years it was rumored, no doubt apocryphally, that he could get into a train at one end of a European country whose language he did not know and come out at the other end a fluent speaker. As he always emphasized, however, being a 'linguist' in this sense had nothing to do with being a linguist in the other. He would illustrate the point by relating how, when the famous Indo-Europeanists Carl Darling Buck (American) and Antoine Meillet (French) met face to face, they had no common language and had to use an interpreter.

Cal's arrival in Cambridge, Massachusetts, coincided with a significant name change at Harvard. The Department of Comparative Philology had been founded in 1941; it now became the Department of Linguistics, just in time for Cal's major to be recorded as Linguistics and the Classics. He graduated *summa cum laude* with a thesis entitled 'A descriptive phonology of the Gaulish dialect of Narbonensis'. The topic reflected the Celtic interests of one of his Harvard teachers, Joshua Whatmough; the acknowledgments thanked another teacher who was to prove more influential, Roman Jakobson. Part of the thesis was published a year later as an article in *Language* (Watkins 1955). It is a characteristically structuralist piece, replete with the phonemic charts so beloved of post-Bloomfieldian phonologists. Flashes of the mature Cal Watkins are more easily seen in an earlier undergraduate contribution to *Language*, a learned and precociously authoritative review of Kenneth Jackson's *Language and history in Early Britain* that appeared in the preceding issue (Watkins 1954).

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The academic affiliation of the author of the 1955 article is given as the University of Paris. Whether or not his early experience with French movies had anything to do with it, Cal liked almost everything about France, especially its distinctive tradition in the study of historical linguistics and Indo-European. That tradition, reaching back through Meillet to Ferdinand de Saussure, was preeminently represented in the 1950s by Meillet's successor, Émile Benveniste, with whom Cal had gone to study at the École Pratique des Hautes Études after his graduation from Harvard. Indo-European (IE) linguistics was then in the throes of the controversy over the laryngeal theory. This interpretation of P(roto-)IE phonology, first formulated on structural grounds by de Saussure in 1878, aimed at simplifying the description of PIE ablaut by positing a small number of consonants, later known as laryngeals, which disappeared in the IE daughter languages with various lengthening and other effects. After a half century of semi-oblivion, the theory got a new lease on life in 1927, when a young Polish scholar with Paris connections, Jerzy Kuryłowicz, demonstrated the partial survival of de Saussure's hypothetical consonants in Hittite, then recently deciphered. Unsurprisingly, given the academic and nonacademic politics of the period between the two world wars, a major revision of the traditional model of PIE found relatively quick acceptance in some countries, including France and the United States, and was resisted in others, including Germany. The divide persisted for decades and reached its peak in Cal's student years. The choice of Paris as Cal's first destination after Harvard, and Benveniste as his first European mentor, reflected an already firm set of academic preferences. Then and throughout his career he had a marked dislike for the kind of historical linguistics that began and ended with sound laws. He never rejected or questioned the principle of regularity of sound change. But he found modern 'Neogrammarianism', as he called it, limiting and sterile—limiting because it marginalized the nonphonological aspects of language change, and sterile because, by ignoring the larger linguistic context in which individual sound changes took place, it consistently missed system-level insights of the type achieved by the giants of the French school.

From 1956 to 1959, Cal was a Junior Fellow in Harvard's Society of Fellows. The Junior Fellowship enabled him to make a second extended trip to Europe, during which he studied not only with Benveniste in Paris, but also with Kuryłowicz in Poland and with the early medieval Irish legal historian and philologist D. A. Binchy in Dublin. Years later he would dedicate his book on the IE verb (Watkins 1969a) to these three and to Jakobson, whom he singled out from among many others as 'my teachers'. The influence of all four is apparent in his 1959 doctoral thesis, published a few years later as *Indo-European origins of the Celtic verb* (Watkins 1962). With this book Cal gained almost instant recognition as one of America's leading Indo-Europeanists, and his future at Harvard was assured. From Instructor in 1959, he was promoted to Associate Professor of Linguistics and the Classics in 1962. When Whatmough retired in 1963, Cal became, at the age of thirty, Chairman and the only tenured core member of the Department of Linguistics.

The Department of Linguistics grew rapidly under Cal's leadership, which lasted virtually uninterrupted for a decade. But administration was never a pursuit that engaged him. The 1960s and 1970s were the period of his greatest linguistic productivity. The book on the Celtic verb—the 'red book', as it came to be called—offered a brilliantly interwoven historical account of some of the most notoriously problematic formations in Old Irish. One of these was the famously opaque '*s*-subjunctive', in which the verbal root could be reduced to a single distinctive feature in a sea of preverbs and other formatives (e.g. *tair* [tar^{j}] 'come (3SG.SUBJ)', where the palatalization of the *-r* is the only

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trace of the historical root **ink-*). Cal's approach to morphological reconstruction was marked by deft shifts between the normal comparative method and what he called 'forward reconstruction'—starting from securely established preforms and working forward in time, experimenting with various analogical strategies, to explain the attested forms.[1] The book also contained the classic exposition of what became known as 'Watkins's law'—the principle that an inflected third singular form, being functionally unmarked, is liable to be misparsed as a bare stem and analogically extended to the rest of the paradigm. The 'law', which Cal never referred to as such,[2] was introduced in connection with the Old Irish '*t*-preterite', where the *-t-* that runs through the whole paradigm (1SG *biurt* 'I bore' < **bertū*, 2SG *birt* < **bertī*, 3SG *bert*, 1PL *bertammar*, etc.) could be shown to be the ending of the third singular, reinterpreted as a tense sign. Other Old Irish problems were dealt with in two long and pioneering articles from the same period. In one (Watkins 1963a), a classic of historical syntax, Cal showed how some of the peculiarities of the Old Irish verb phrase, including the puzzling preference for VSO word order, had developed from the more familiar SOV and SVO patterns of Greek, Latin, and Vedic Sanskrit. In the other (Watkins 1963b), an early manifestation of his lifelong interest in poetics, he argued for a link between the metrical conventions of Old Irish verse and the ancestral verse forms established for Indo-Iranian and Greek by Meillet.

The standard Neogrammarian handbook of IE comparative grammar, mostly written by Karl Brugmann, had been rendered obsolete by the discovery of new languages, especially Hittite, and the triumph of the laryngeal theory. Accordingly, in the mid-1960s, Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, the leading IE publisher in Germany, formed a plan to replace Brugmann with a multiauthored *Indogermanische Grammatik* under the general editorship of Kuryłowicz. In the planned collaboration, Cal was to be responsible for the morphology volume, while the introduction and phonology volume would be written by his Yale colleague and friendly rival, Warren Cowgill. Cal approached the task with gusto, spending the 1966–67 academic year at the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences at Stanford and returning to Cambridge with a 400-page publication-ready typescript of 'Part one: A history of Indo-European verb inflection'. Translated into German, it came out two years later as Watkins 1969a. The 'blue book', as it would be known, was anything but a sedate, handbook-style presentation of a standard body of knowledge. Very much the work of a young man, it was an erudite but spirited survey of the individual IE branches with a specific and highly original end in view—to show, more on the basis of Hittite than anything else, that the stem-final vowel **-e- ~ *-o-* of 'thematic' verbal stems in the daughter languages was historically the personal ending of the third singular middle, reinterpreted as a suffix like the *-t* of the Old Irish *t*-preterite. Many scholars found this idea, or some version of it, appealing; others did not. Today, nearly a half century later, opinions are still divided, in part along lines traceable to the divisions of the 1950s. What no one disputes is that by bringing Hittite to the center of the discussion, Cal fundamentally changed the terms in which the character of the PIE verbal system was debated.

It was not the blue book, but another publishing venture of 1969 that made Cal's name something of a household word. When the first edition of the *American Heritage*

[1] This formulation is paraphrased from Goddard 1979:93.

[2] The phrase 'Watkins's law' first appears in Arlotto 1972:156; for its subsequent use see Collinge 1985: 239–40.

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Dictionary appeared that year, it contained a novel, Watkins-edited 'Appendix of Indo-European roots' (Watkins 1969b). A user of the appendix could instantly view all of the English words derived from a reconstructed PIE lemma; the entry **bhrāter-* 'brother', for example, listed (inter alia) *brother*, *friar*, *fraternal*, *confrere*, *phratry*, and *pal*. To orient the reader, there were two essays on the Indo-Europeans (Watkins 1969c) and the IE heritage of English (1969d). The blend of clarity, authority, and elegance in these little pieces epitomizes what made Cal's scholarship so compelling. The IE appendix was dropped from the second edition of the dictionary but restored by popular demand in the third. It was also printed separately as *The American Heritage dictionary of Indo-European roots*, now in its third edition (2011). Anyone who has ever taught a course in historical linguistics or the history of English knows its value as a pedagogical tool.

The book on the IE verb was intended to be followed by a companion volume on the noun. But the noun book never came. The *Indogermanische Grammatik* project was beginning to run out of steam; other contributions remained undelivered, including Cowgill's phonology volume, which was never finished. Cal started work on the IE noun by focusing on particular lexical items that promised to yield historically interesting morphological insights. But these were mostly basic, culturally embedded words for notions like 'god', 'wheeled vehicle', and various agricultural terms—words that engaged him on more than a purely linguistic level. Cal's range was extraordinarily wide, wider than could be captured by any traditional disciplinary label. While he obviously met the definition of an Indo-Europeanist as the term was usually understood—a historical linguist who specialized in the historical linguistics of the IE family—he was also an Indo-Europeanist in a more expansive sense—a scholar of IE antiquity in its entirety. Just as a classicist looks beyond the Greek and Latin languages to Greco-Roman civilization as a whole, Cal was fascinated by the prospect of recovering fragments of the oral poetry, mythology, law, and religion of the Indo-Europeans. He made unique contributions in all of these areas. The post-blue book period was particularly rich in contributions showing how cognate nominal expressions were often accompanied by cognate beliefs and cultural practices. A good example is the remarkable paper on IE cereal names (Watkins 1978). Starting from the observation that the phrase 'wheat and barley' (*puroì kaì krithaí*) is a formula in Homer, Cal pursued these words through a mass of texts and languages until, a scant five pages later, he had shown, inter alia, how Circe's recipe for turning Odysseus's men into swine, which contains barley, can be matched point for point with the ritual instructions for the ancient Indian soma sacrifice.

A second memorable syntax publication (Watkins 1976) resulted from Cal's participation in the 1976 Chicago Linguistic Society parasession on diachronic syntax. The purpose of the paper was to combat the growing fad of reconstructing PIE syntax on the basis of the typological semi-universals established by Joseph Greenberg, which linked head-finality in the verb phrase (e.g. SOV word order) to various preferred ordering configurations elsewhere. Like many critics before and since, Cal did not dispute the statistical validity of Greenberg's observations. He simply doubted, and with good reason, their usefulness for purposes of syntactic reconstruction. The best way to recover older syntactic patterns, he held, was to build on synchronically anomalous structures of the type *God save the king* in English, which had to be old because they could not be new. To underscore the point, he quoted one of his favorite aphorisms: 'The first law of comparative grammar is that you've got to know what to compare'. A few pages later, expatiating on the near-identity of the Hittite, Vedic, and Greek versions of a single quasi-attested sentence ('The one who wins gets a prize'), he had occasion to drop another *mot* of which he was fond: 'If we want to know how the Indo-Europeans talked, it

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can be useful to consider what they talked about'. Rapid shifts of 'focal length', zooming in from a general discussion to a brilliantly selected specific case and then back out again, occur again and again in his writings.

In addition to his immense learning, Cal had the gift of seeming never to forget anything he had ever read in any language. Thus, when he looked at, say, a newly published text in Hittite, it was not unlikely that he would find a passage that reminded him of something he had seen in Greek, Vedic Sanskrit, or Old Irish decades earlier. The parallel might be in some detail of phrasing, or some twist in a narrative, or some seemingly meaningless step in the description of a ritual. Of all his discoveries, the one he was proudest of dated from 1984,[3] when he was reading a broken text in Luvian, one of the imperfectly known Anatolian languages related to Hittite. The fragment mentioned a city called Wilusa, which previous scholarship had tentatively identified with the historical city of Troy. A detail of word order showed Cal that it was poetry, and that the phrase *ālati ... wilusati*, evidently meaning '(from) high/steep Wilusa' in the ablative case, was the Luvian formula corresponding to Homer's *Ílios aipeinḗ* 'lofty Troy'. From this he inferred the existence of a poetic tradition centering on Troy in the language of the Trojans themselves. The Luvian 'Wilusiad', as he half-jokingly called it, was recognized as a piece of brilliant detective work and earned its discoverer featured coverage, complete with picture, in the *New York Times*.[4]

Cal's almost limitless ability to make connections from one text to another was the engine that fueled his astonishing creativity. Starting in the mid-1980s, his work focused increasingly on poetics and the reconstruction of poetic language. His paper at the 1985 East Coast IE Conference bore the title 'How to kill a dragon in Indo-European'. The published article (Watkins 1987) developed the idea that the well-known Vedic motif of the slaying of the demon Vr̥tra by the hero-god Indra was a PIE theme, accompanied in whatever form it appeared by syntactic and stylistic features that marked it as the output of a distinctive IE 'poetic grammar'. The concept of a poetic grammar, complete with a poetic phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics, was pursued further in his 1988 Presidential Address to the LSA (Watkins 1989). Then, after a decade of preparation, came the magisterial *How to kill a dragon: Aspects of Indo-European poetics* (Watkins 1995). In fact, the two parts of the title might have been reversed, since only the second and shorter part of the book dealt in any way with the ramifications of monster-slaying. The work was actually conceived as an introduction to IE poetics—a term Cal defined, paraphrasing Jakobson, as 'the study of what makes a verbal message a work of art'. The poet for Cal played an essential role in IE society, since it was the poet who conferred the kind of immortality that the early Indo-Aryans knew as *śrávaḥ ... ákṣitam* and the Homeric Greeks as *kléos áphthiton* 'imperishable fame'. Individual chapters in part I set forth and illustrated the methodology, with case studies chosen from almost every IE tradition. Part II was an extended exemplification, organized around the theme of epic combat. The book was the recipient of the 1998 Charles J. Goodwin Order of Merit, the highest award conferred by the American Philological Association (now the Society for Classical Studies). It stands as a unique achievement; no one else could have written it.

Cal's post-*Dragon* career continued apace. A strong theme in his late work is the full participation of Hittite and Anatolian in all aspects of IE linguistic and cultural history.

[3] As his 'most rewarding professional activity' in his Harvard Class of 1954 Fiftieth Report (2004), Cal listed 'figuring out that Luvian was the language of the Trojans, and having it confirmed a decade and a half later'.

[4] *NYT*, January 28, 1985. The scholarly publication was Watkins 1986.

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Several publications, beginning with Watkins 2001, develop the idea of ancient Anatolia as a SPRACHBUND with significant spillover effects into Greek across the Aegean. There was no interruption in productivity when he retired from Harvard in 2003 and moved to UCLA, where his wife, the distinguished Sanskritist Stephanie Jamison, had accepted a professorship the year before. At UCLA, besides continuing his scholarly activities, he did part-time teaching and mentoring in the Program in Indo-European Studies, surrounded by colleagues and friends who were in large part his own students. Only in 2012 did health problems get in the way of work, and these seemed to be subsiding in the last few weeks of his life. On the evening of March 19, 2013, he enjoyed an informal Anatolian gathering at the home of a colleague, only to die in his sleep early the next morning. His survivors include Stephanie, four children by previous marriages, and eight grandchildren.

Over a career of nearly sixty years, Cal accumulated many honors. Besides serving as President of the LSA in 1988, he was an Honorary Member of the Royal Irish Academy (1968), a Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences (1973), a Member of the American Philosophical Society (1975), a Corresponding Fellow of the British Academy (1987), and a Correspondant Étranger (1990) and then Associé Étranger (1999) of the Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres. He held fellowships from the National Endowment for the Humanities (1984–85) and the Guggenheim Foundation (1992). He taught at the 1964, 1972, and 1979 Linguistic Institutes, at the last of which he was the Hermann and Klara H. Collitz Professor. Other visiting appointments were at the Dublin Institute for Advanced Study, School of Celtic Studies (1961–62 and 1981), the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences, Stanford (1966–67), Churchill College, Cambridge (1970–71), and the École Normale Supérieure and Université de la Sorbonne Nouvelle (1983). In addition to the 1998 Goodwin award from the American Philological Association (cf. above), he gave the 2000 Gaisford Lecture by invitation of the Faculty of Classics at the University of Oxford. In 1998 he was presented with a Festschrift with sixty-three contributors (Jasanoff et al. 1998). Two volumes of his selected writings appeared around his sixtieth birthday and a third at his seventy-fifth (Watkins 1994, 2008).[5]

Cal was a charismatic personality and an inspirational teacher. He had no use for the kind of teaching he disapprovingly referred to as 'indogermanisch **a* ergibt *a*' ('IE **a* gives *a*')—recycling cut and dried factual knowledge in the classroom. Books could do that after hours. Classes for Cal were an occasion for object lessons in how knowledge could be used to generate more knowledge. He was never happier than when he could stand before a roomful of students and demonstrate, with immense flair, how a word, phrase, or motif in one IE language was historically the same, after secondary developments were stripped away, as a word, phrase, or motif in another. There was no unseemly haste in his courses; he took seriously Jakobson's definition of philology as 'the art of reading slowly', and fully savored every construction, formula, and metrical unit before moving on to the next. He taught by example. His lectures were carefully crafted masterpieces, sometimes ending with a return to the theme with which he had begun, in the manner of an IE-style ring composition. A student who followed his model not only learned how to construct an argument—a skill surprisingly rare in philology-heavy fields—but also acquired an almost esthetic sense of what kinds of problems were worth working on and what kinds of solutions were worth looking for. While always in-

[5] A full listing of his nearly 200 publications, spanning a sixty-year scholarly career from 1954 to 2014, can be found in Melchert 2013:512–25.

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sisting on the highest standards of scholarly knowledge and accuracy, he believed that bold and elegant ideas deserved to be sought out and nurtured, even if they sometimes failed to bear fruit. Not the least of the lessons he taught was the need to be wrong some of the time. 'Was ich da geschrieben habe, ist Quatsch' ('What I wrote there is nonsense') he liked to say, quoting a favorite remark of the great Celticist Rudolf Thurneysen (who, like Cal, was usually right). Today his very numerous students, and the students of his students, are to be found in linguistics, classics, and other philological departments all over America and the world, and are conspicuous in every branch of historical linguistics and Indo-European studies.

Outside of the classroom, too, Cal was a larger-than-life figure. He had favorite ways of dressing and talking, and, in his younger years, of smoking (Gauloises and Gitanes, of course), that inspired emulation and imitation. His love of good times—good food, good drink, good friends—was legendary. So were his unaffected informality and sense of humor: one of the ways a student or junior colleague got to feel at ease with the redoubtable Professor Watkins was by being taken to see the progress of his runner beans in the garden, or by making a remark that got him to laugh or crack up, as happened rather often. His personal life was blessed by a long and happy marriage to Stephanie. Together they were expansive hosts, often presiding over entertainments at which a huge circle of friends, relatives, colleagues, and students joined in conviviality around a table that, in addition to other refreshments, invariably included a large pot of Texas-inflected black-eyed peas, prepared by the master's own hand. The loss of so huge a presence leaves a void that for the many whose lives he touched can never be filled. [Jay H. Jasanoff, *Harvard University*, jasanoff@fas.harvard.edu; and Brian D. Joseph, *The Ohio State University*, joseph.1@osu.edu.*]

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