# KEMP MALONE

Kemp Malone, a Foundation Member of the Linguistic Society of America and its president in 1944, an Associate Editor of LANGUAGE in 1942 and 1943 and a frequent contributor to its pages, died at his summer home in Eastport, Maine, on 13 October 1971, aged eighty-two. He had worked busily and happily throughout the summer and was looking forward to returning to his book-filled house in Baltimore. A photograph taken in his study on 6 October shows him seated at his writing table, apparently in full health and vigor, and as keen-eyed and alert as ever he was. A slight stroke shortly thereafter marked the onset of a mercifully brief illness, and within a week a life of remarkable scholarly achievement had come to its end.

Malone spent his early years in the American Deep South. He was born in Mississippi in 1889, the oldest of eight children of a clergyman who was president of a number of women's colleges in Mississippi and Georgia. The intellectual caliber of the Malone home was high, the atmosphere bookish. All seven of the children who reached adulthood went to college, and the three sons were all to achieve distinction of some sort. Kemp's brother Dumas, a freshman at Emory when Kemp was a senior, went on to achieve the highest eminence as a historian and biographer; Miles was for many years a teacher of history at Phillips Academy in Andover and is now, in his retirement in Florida, a part-time teacher at Daytona Beach Community College.

Graduating from Emory at eighteen, Kemp Malone was a high-school teacher for the next four years; then, for two years, an exchange teacher to Prussia, where he took the opportunity to perfect his already fluent German. After some graduate study at the University of Copenhagen and a brief stint of teaching German at Cornell, he proceeded to the University of Chicago, where he received the Ph.D. in 1919, his master having been John Matthews Manly. Thereafter came study at the University of Iceland and at Princeton. In 1921 he went to the University of Minnesota as Frederick Klaeber's junior, and in 1924 to the Johns Hopkins, where in 1926 he succeeded James Wilson Bright as professor. He retired in 1956, but remained about as busy and as productive thereafter as he had ever been. Various posts which he held included a visiting professorship at Georgetown University, directing the Georgetown English language program in Ankara for two years, and the Berg professorship at New York University.

Malone thrived in the life of 'the Hopkins', as true Baltimoreans called it. In his earlier days there, the university had an intellectual atmosphere which was liberal in the now almost-forgotten etymological sense of the word. By present-day standards it was somewhat easy-going, with few rules and an absolute minimum of red tape. Its Faculty of Philosophy—what was elsewhere called the graduate school—did not even need a dean, and indeed did not acquire one until rather recently. It was a milieu in which scholars were free to go about their intellectual pursuits as they wished. But the scholarly disciplines they followed and instilled in their students were none the less rigorous for all that.



https://doi.org/10.1017/S0097850772012524 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Malone also found life in Baltimore very congenial. Though he traveled widely and frequently, he was always gently impatient to return to the house on Maryland Avenue where he had lived ever since his marriage. He and his wife, the former Inez René Chatain, daughter of a distinguished Richmond family, enjoyed their role in the urbane social life of the city. Malone's great learning never sat so heavily upon his shoulders as to make a recluse of him. He was really not austere or aloof at all, though he may at times have seemed so to those students who stood in awe of his scholarly distinction. This distinction, though always evident in his entire bearing, was not in the least awesome in his social life, for he was not so egoistic or so lacking in judgment as to suppose that non-academic people would have any concern with his scholarly interests. He was always able to put things in their proper places, and this ability was probably responsible for the well-balanced life he led.

Though Malone took much in his scope—so much that he has been quite accurately referred to as a polymath—practically all his scholarly work is concerned in one way or another with linguistic study. He went far beyond the bounds of the European tradition in which he was trained, a tradition which in its 19th-century beginnings regarded the knowledge of early languages mainly as an indispensable tool for the study of Indo-European antiquity—early literature, history, and culture. As he pointed out in 'The rise of modern philology', his 1958 presidential address to the Modern Humanities Research Association, 'The differentiation of linguistics from philology is not old ... and it is still possible for the same man to work in both fields'; his own career is a highly successful demonstration of the fact. For himself he preferred the now somewhat outmoded term PHILOLOGIST and somehow managed to get it accepted as his professional designation in *Who's who in America*, the publishers of which prefer to impose the pretentious and insipid EDUCATOR on practically all other scholar-teachers.

Malone did important and highly original work in linguistics, his originality frequently extending to matters of terminology. His own nomenclature, though as a rule more apt than either the traditional terms or those favored by modern linguistic science when these differed from the traditional terms, was mildly irritating to some of his readers. His articles 'Phonemes and phonemic correlations in current English' and 'The phonemic structure of English monosyllables' (1936) and his 'The phonemes of current English' (1940) are rigorous structural analyses of the English sound system.[1] The 1940 article appears in a considerably revised form in his 1959 jubilee volume, *Studies in heroic legend and in current speech*, 226–67. Though hewing to the phonemic line, this article was almost too unorthodox in its approach and too daring in its interpretations of the data presented to gain wide acceptance among younger structuralists. Time may bear him out. In a posthumous publication, 'A system of English phonemes' (1972), he returns once again to the subject.

Malone was advisory editor in charge of etymologies for the *American college dictionary* (1947) and for the *Random House dictionary of the English language* (1966). His publications dealing with etymology include studies of *Lingfield*

[1] For complete bibliographical citations of items published before 1959, see the references cited in the 'Note' to the appended Bibliography.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0097850772012524 Published online by Cambridge University Press

(1936), *runt* (1944), OE *gar* (1947), *wich* (1950), *filch* (1955), *bonnyclabber* (1960), *mahogany* (1965), *scarf* (1967), and nine others dealt with in a 1949 article in *Studier i modern språkvetenskap*. His carefulness in such matters is amusingly illustrated by the following gentle epistolary rapping of my own knuckles, after I had declared that ME *spere* 'sphere' was taken from OF *espere*: 'I find no evidence that the ME word was taken from OF, since in the NED entry no forms with initial *e* are given. Since the word is learned it presumably goes back to medieval Latin *spera* (see Du Cange). The NED offers alternative etymologies, both wrong. Onions does no better.' The last two sentences are typical of him, and are endearing in their forthrightness when one remembers that there was no malice in his nature and that he was always willing and anxious to correct his own errors. To employ a phrase which he often used of himself, 'I mended my ways' in a subsequent printing.

Malone's interest in Icelandic, in which he was particularly expert, began early in his career. His 1923 monograph, *The phonology of modern Icelandic*, was long regarded as standard; in 'The phonemes of modern Icelandic', first published in 1952 and reprinted in considerably revised form in his 1959 *Studies*, 268–82, he presents the sound-system of Icelandic in phonemic terms. His 1953 'Long and short in Icelandic phonemics' was published in LANGUAGE.

Malone was one of the founders of *American speech* in 1925, along with H. L. Mencken, Louise Pound, and Arthur Garfield Kennedy. The idea was Mencken's, but Malone, though he would not have claimed at the time to be a specialist in American English, was enthusiastic about it, and served as managing editor of the journal (originally a monthly) until 1932; he contributed papers on Noah Webster and Benjamin Franklin to its first volume, and two notes and a 'filler' poem to its second. He remained thereafter a fairly steady contributor to this liveliest of linguistic journals, which is happily soon to resume publication under the aegis of the American Dialect Society (of which Malone was president from 1944 to 1946).

But, although he was a profound student of language per se, he was also, and perhaps primarily, a student (and a lover) of old texts, particularly when these were literary or imaginatively provocative of old, unhappy, far-off things and battles long ago, or when they threw light on early Germanic history and culture. It is likely that he will be remembered best and longest for his brilliant studies of early Scandinavian and English literature and legend, which depended in large part upon his expert knowledge of the languages in which these earliest documents of Germanic (and hence English) culture have come down to us.

Malone first became internationally recognized as a star of the first magnitude in 1923 with the publication of *The literary history of Hamlet*, originally intended as the first part of a three-part work. But only the first part, which gets no farther than Saxo, was ever completed, for Malone had become so fascinated with 'the origin of hero and tale and their development in early tradition' that he spent the rest of his life, off and on, elucidating in brilliant specialized articles the stories of the heroes mentioned in *Beowulf*; he never got around to dealing with the period from Saxo to Shakespeare and the post-Shakespearean period. The difficulties presented by this earliest period, which he treated with such daring,

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imagination, and erudition, were indeed formidable; as he says in his Preface, 'the facts definitely ascertainable are few in number and hard to put together', and 'our sources of information are often defective and untrustworthy'. Among a good many other things, he identifies Hamlet (Amlóþi) with the Onela (interpreted as 'mad Ole') of *Beowulf*. This is not the place to go into the knowledge of Germanic (specifically Scandinavian) and Celtic sound-changes necessary in making this and similar identifications; it must suffice to say here that Malone always knew perfectly well what he was doing, as well as what he was unable to do, the evidence being sketchy as it is. And he must also have known that no one could have been better equipped to deal with it than he.

In any case, though often labeled a Chaucerian (as he indeed was), he was first and foremost a Beowulfian. His warm love for Chaucer, who had awakened in childhood his love for story and legend and whose poetry he read so beautifully, was, as far as his scholarly production is concerned, subordinated to his love for the Old English period. His 1951 *Chapters on Chaucer* came late in his career and, excellent though it is, is considerably less seminal than the Old English and Scandinavian studies upon which his reputation had rested for many years. The present status of his variorum edition of *Beowulf* is impossible to determine; he had continued to work on it, but had come to realize a number of years ago that he would not finish it before he died. His 1936 encyclopedic edition of *Widsith* (revised in 1962) gives us some idea, if only on a small scale, of what the variorum *Beowulf* might have been. A similar edition of *Deor* also appeared in 1936, with a revision in 1966.

The artistic side of Malone's nature was strongly developed. All through his life he wrote verse, preferring the discipline imposed by the sestina and the sonnet forms; many of his poems have been published. His renderings of Old English poetry into Modern English alliterative verse, as in his 1941 *Ten Old English poems*, are notable not only for their felicity of diction but also for their recapturing of the poetic flavor of the old poets. His printed Christmas sonnets sent out to friends each year, illuminated in water colors by Inez Malone, show all the technical skill which we should expect to find from him, as well as being imbued by deep religious feeling. He was an accomplished musician as well as a poet, though few outside his family, perhaps, ever heard him play since the days when he was first violinist in the Emory orchestra.

As a reader of poetry, Malone's fine, flexible voice is happily preserved for us in his recordings of the *Nun's Priest's Tale* and of *Beowulf*. As the editors of his first jubilee volume, the 1949 *Philologica*, put it, 'No student of our earlier literature has any conception of the power and the beauty of Old English poetry until he has heard Kemp Malone read it'; this is equally true of his reading of Chaucer.

Many honors came Malone's way, including honorary doctorates from Emory, Chicago, Yale, North Carolina, Johns Hopkins, and Kenyon. In addition to the presidencies already mentioned, he was president of the American Name Society in 1956 and of the Modern Language Association in 1962. Since so much of his work deals with Scandinavian matters—fully a third of the 1959 *Studies*, which is a representative selection of his articles—he was fittingly recognized by being

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0097850772012524 Published online by Cambridge University Press

decorated with the King Christian X Freedom Medal and by knighthoods in the Order of the Dannebrog and the Order of the Falcon.

The Baltimore *Sun* ended its eulogizing editorial on Malone thus: 'An ornament of the Hopkins faculty for many years, he stood for permanences which were old in Chaucer's time, have survived the erosion of subsequent centuries, and will survive ours'—true enough, we hope, though it should be noted that 'Alfred's time' might have been more appropriate than 'Chaucer's'. Those of us who knew Malone, who saw in him a beau ideal of scholarship, and who were always personally fond of him, will find more comfort in the simple words of the one who was closest to him, Inez Malone, as reported in the same newspaper: 'He has been busy and happy. He had a happy and interesting life.' In his own words, taken from his final Christmas sonnet, written in the summer of 1971: 'The blessing lingers / Till darkness blackens dusk and brightens starlight. / ... The feast is ended.'

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