

Robert B. Tate (1921-2011). In memoriam*



Robert Brian Tate, a Hispanist and philologist and a corresponding member of the History-Archaeology Department of the Institut d'Estudis Catalans, died in Nottingham on the 21st of February 2011.

Robert Brian Tate was born in Belfast (Northern Ireland) on the 27th of December 1921, where he spent his childhood and adolescence. While pursuing his baccalaureate, he studied French, German and Spanish. When he entered Queen's University in Belfast in 1939, he decided to study Romance Philology. Doctor Ignasi González Llubera, a corresponding member of the Institut d'Estudis Catalans since 1951, had just been appointed a Spanish language and literature teacher at that university. Tate liked to reminisce about the teachings and influence on his dedication to research exerted by the first Catalan in his life. He said that González taught him a love of the classics, especially Virgil, the value of books and the fact that the Iberian Peninsula was made up of many cultures and languages. All three factors would prove to be decisive and fundamental in Professor Tate's academic career.

After two years of classes, Tate joined the British army in India as a university cadet. He travelled by convoy as far as South Africa with a group of soldiers and cadets. In Durbin, the soldiers were told that Japan had entered the war. The convoy was divided into two, half heading to

Singapore and the other half with Tate to Bombay. The former were made prisoners of war. Tate was able to enter a *gurkha* regiment from Nepal as a lieutenant. Later, as a captain, he witnessed the Japanese forces surrender in Rangoon.

Four years later, full of adventures through India and Burma, he retired from the army and returned from Rangoon to Belfast. He then resumed his interrupted degree and earned his Bachelor's degree two years later. In his final exams he met the second Catalan of his life, Professor Josep Maria Batista i Roca from Cambridge University. Llubera and Batista persuaded him to focus his research on the Renaissance and to study the 15th century figure of the Cardinal and Bishop of Girona, Joan Margarit i Pau.

With his Bachelor's in hand, Tate travelled to Barcelona to conduct this research under the tutelage of Jordi Rubió i Balaguer, who charged his scholarship student, Josep Valverdú, a member of the Philology Department, with accompanying Tate on the first few days of his sojourn. Valverdú asked me to mention his recollections of friendship in this talk. At the same time, Tate also studied Catalan at the Ateneu Barcelonès with Ramon Aramon and developed friendships with Martí de Riquer, Pere Bohigas, Anscari Mundó, Miquel Batllori and Jaume Vicens Vives. Tate spent six months in the archives of Girona searching for firsthand documentation on Margarit. In this city, he befriended Girona-based historians Lluís Batlle i Prats, Miquel Oliva and especially Santiago Sobrequés. This year marks the celebrations commemorating the centennial of the latter's birth, so perhaps fate meant for the institutional event to be held at Girona Town Hall.

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His study entitled *The Life, Works and Ideas of Cardinal Margarit*, the first major biography of this Girona native, earned Tate his Master's from the University of Belfast in October 1949. The study was rewritten in 1952 and 1953 and published in 1955 by the University of Manchester Press, the first university where Professor Tate taught. In 1954, he won the Francesc Cambó Prize from the Institut d'Estudis Catalans for his study on Margarit entitled *El manuscrit i les fonts del Paralipomenon Hispaniae*, which was published in *Estudis Romànics*. In 1955, he earned his doctorate from the University of Belfast with a study on the impact of humanism on 15th century Spanish historiography.

After teaching at the University of Manchester and the University of Belfast, in 1956 Professor Tate began to work as a Professor at the University of Nottingham, and in 1958 he secured the first Chair in Spanish Language and Literature at this university. There, he created the Department of Spanish Philology, which he ran until his retirement in 1983. He was regarded by his colleagues as "one of the great eminences at the university".

During these years, he continued his research into humanistic historiography as well as into the ties between diverse personalities in the history of Catalan literature and Great Britain, including Vicent Climent and Joanot Martorell, in his studies published in specialised journals. His bonds with Catalonia were further strengthened when he was elected a corresponding member of the Institut d'Estudis Catalans in 1966 and when his translation into English of Pierre Vilar's *Spain: A Brief History* appeared in Oxford the following year.

The proposal that Professor Tate received from Curial publishing house in 1972 to translate his biography of Margarit into Catalan proved to be "the stimulus needed" to revise his story, particularly in light of the new historiography which had emerged in the previous 20 years, especially that of Jaume Vicens Vives, which he had been unable to use in the first version. Revising and updating the study was no easy task; still, he got down to work and the result was clearly worth the effort. The 1976 Catalan-language publication of *Joan Margarit i Pau, cardenal i bisbe de Girona* in Barcelona signalled a major milestone in the resumption of studies on humanistic historiography in our country. Tate contributed to strengthening the image of Catalan humanism through one of its most illustrious representatives, and his book on Margarit would itself become a milestone and model to be emulated in studies on humanism and historiography.

Professor Tate's name now deserved to be written in golden letters in the history of Catalan culture not only for having written this extensive, lucid and authoritative biography of the Cardinal and Bishop of Girona, Joan Margarit i Pau, but also because Tate innovated in how Spanish culture was taught at the university, in Hispanism in general and, in short, in the sense that he expanded its horizons by including the Catalan, Galician, Portuguese and Andalusian cultures. As noted by his colleague Rich-

ard A. Cardwell in the obituary he wrote for *The Times*, "his contributions in books and articles have given rise to a new assessment of the late Middle Ages in Spain, an endeavour marked by his revelation that the history of the Middle Ages and the early Renaissance in Spain entailed complex processes of transition and a comprehension of the ideologies, politics and narrative strategies of their historians and historiographers. These perceptions shape his extraordinary study on the mediaeval kingdoms in the Iberian Peninsula in *Spain. A Companion to Spanish Studies* dating from 1973."

He wrote studies on Virgil and Camões and on mediæval pilgrimages, and his fervour for the Way of Saint James led him to publish a volume on his own pilgrimages with luxurious photographic illustrations by his photographer son, Marcus, in 1987. Throughout his career, he devoted many studies to 15th century historian Alfonso de Palencia, whose monumental *Gesta Hispanensia*, the third volume of which is still at press, he edited along with Jeremy Lawrence.

Tate was a visiting professor at Harvard, Cornell, the State University of New York in Buffalo, Austin and Charlottesville, Virginia in the United States. He was a corresponding member of the Royal Academy of History of Madrid since 1974 and of the Royal Academy of Belles-Lettres of Barcelona since 1980, the same year he became a full member of the British Academy. He was a founding member and president of the Association of Hispanists of Great Britain and Ireland and of the Anglo-Catalan Society, honorary president of the Association of Teachers of Spanish and Portuguese (East Midlands Branch) and a member of the International Association of Hispanists. In 1984, the volume *Essays in Honour of Robert Brian Tate from his Colleagues and Pupils* appeared, edited by Richard A. Cardwell and published by the University of Nottingham. Tate was an emeritus professor at the University of Nottingham, which held the "Tate Lecture" every year in his honour. In 1995, he received the International Catalonia Prize from the Institut d'Estudis Catalans "for his contribution to knowledge on Catalan humanism and for having promoted relations between Catalan and British scholars in the field of cultural history".

In view of the consolidation of the *Studia Humanitatis* line of research in Catalan humanism at the University of Girona, in 1995 he donated all the documents and materials he had used in his research into the Girona-born Cardinal Joan Margarit i Pau to this university. Robert Brian Tate returned to Girona several more times to effect new donations to the University of Girona: more than 1,000 volumes from his library along with personal documentation like letters, lecture notes, class notes, talks and offprints. Thereafter, the Tate Collection was organised and catalogued and is now available to researchers and scholars in the Reserve Department at the library of the Faculty of Humanities. On the 21st of October 2004, the University of Girona awarded Tate

an honorary doctorate, a distinction that Tate regarded as the most prized among all his distinctions. At the doctoral investiture ceremony he said, "Here in Girona I began my work, and here I end it". He delivered his speech in Catalan, his first love, he used to say. Robert Brian Tate returned to Girona one final time in 2006 to participate in what we called the "Margaritian Autumn", which featured an exhibition and congress devoted to the figure of Cardinal Margarit.

With his open spirit and insatiable intellectual curiosity, as a great reader of poetry and a precise, meticulous scholar, Robert Brian Tate had a long life rich in events and knowledge, lasting friendships and acclaim. Tate used to cite verses by T.S. Eliot to support his claim that history is always contemporary. And he used these words by Cardinal Margarit to praise the Catalonia that he loved and knew so well: "Gloriosa sunt de te Catalonia." May he rest in peace in the quiet hills of the Peak District.