

David Buchan (1939-1994)

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OBITUARY / NÉCROLOGIE : DAVID BUCHAN (1939-1994)

Pat BYRNE

More than a year has passed since David Buchan died at his home in St. John's, Newfoundland, on 22 October 1994, at the end of a three-year, see-saw battle with cancer. Memorial services were held at St. Andrew's Church in St. John's on 26 October 1994, and on 13 May 1995 at King's College Chapel, University of Aberdeen, at which time his ashes were brought home to his beloved Scotland.

David Buchan was born in Aberdeen on 7 January 1939. He was educated at Robert Gordon's College, took an M.A. from the University of Aberdeen in 1960, and completed his Ph.D. there in 1965. He began his transatlantic scholarly and teaching career in 1961 when he was appointed instructor in the Department of English at the University of Victoria in British Columbia. From 1965-68 he held an assistant professorship in English at the University of Massachusetts. In 1968 he returned to Scotland to take up the position of lecturer in English at the University of Stirling, becoming senior lecturer in 1971, a position which he held until 1979. In that year he came back to Canada to become head of the Department of Folklore at Memorial University of Newfoundland. He served in that position until 1985. In 1987 he was appointed Memorial's first University Research Professor. In addition, David held visiting professorships and honorary visiting professorships at the State University of New York at Binghamton (Fall 1975), at the University of Guelph (October 1982), at the University of Aberdeen (in 1985-86 and 1992-93), and the University of Sheffield (1993). He also undertook a number of lecture tours to Romania and Denmark (1977), to Norway (1978), to France (1979) and to Norway, Sweden, Denmark, and Finland (1989). He was made an Honorary Member of the English Folklore Society in 1985, and was elected Vice-President of the Kommission für Volksdichtung in that year as well ; he was named a Fellow of the American Folklore Society in 1986, and a Fellow of the Finnish Academy of Science and Letters in 1990.

As a scholar David will be remembered by most for *The Ballad and the Folk* (1972), a study which applied the theories of Milman Parry and Albert Lord to an analysis of ballads and the ballad tradition in the Northeast of Scotland. This landmark study received both the Chicago Folklore Prize and the Blackwell Prize. He also published *A Scottish Ballad Book* (1973), *Scottish Tradition* (1984), and *Folk Tradition and Folk Medicine in Scotland: The Writings of David Rorie* (1994). In addition to numerous book reviews and scholarly conference papers, he published over fifty journal articles on balladry, folktales, riddles,

lyrics, comic songs, rhymes, occupational songs, legends, and other topics folkloric and literary.

I was privileged to know David Buchan well only during the last ten years of his life. I first met him shortly after he took up the headship of the Folklore Department at Memorial. At that time I had just resigned from a ten-year stint in various administrative positions at Memorial to return to full-time teaching in the English Department. It was later, however, after he had completed his headship and I had decided to pursue doctoral studies in folklore that we became colleagues and friends. David taught a number of my graduate courses and was the supervisor of my doctoral thesis. It was during this time that I became aware of his love of literature in particular and language in general, the breadth and depth of his knowledge, and the joy he found in scholarship. More importantly, for me at least, it was during this period that I became aware of David's brilliance as a teacher. His enthusiasm for learning and scholarship was infectious, and the exacting standards which he applied himself became the benchmark for his students as well. Over time I borrowed innumerable books and articles from his library. David's comments, found on slips of paper strategically placed throughout these texts or neatly pencilled in the margins, were often more provocative and informative than the texts themselves. His comments on one's work were rendered quickly and with surgical precision, but always with an honesty and an effort to encourage that forced one to rise above one's limitations and meet his expectations. A tribute to his role as valued mentor is the exceptionally large number of published studies which include his name in the acknowledgements. It is fitting, therefore, that the David Buchan Graduate Research Scholarship in Folklore has been established by the Department of Folklore at Memorial University. Donations in his memory can be made to this scholarship fund.

Had he won his battle against cancer, David would now be occupying the Chair of Scottish Ethnology at Aberdeen University, which he had been offered early in 1994, despite his illness. This would have fulfilled a special dream he had to return to his alma mater and to further research in the Northeast. At the time, those of us on this side of the Atlantic were torn between the selfish need to keep him with us and the more magnanimous instinct to wish him well in his new post. In retrospect, we would have been happy indeed to share him with his native Aberdeenshire had we known that the alternative was losing him from our company so permanently. David returned home to Scotland under circumstances that his family and friends devoutly wish could have been very different. The home he has in the hearts of these same people, however, is forever.