

Christ's Hospital: Tradition with Vision – Humanities Addendum

by Graham Fawcett

Sponsored by BCOB

Available online on the CHOBA website

Introduction

The book, "Christ's Hospital: Tradition with Vision" (CHTWV) was sponsored by BCOB, the British Columbia Old Blues, an overseas branch of CHOBA, the Christ's Hospital Old Blues Association & published by GHP, Grosvenor House Publishing, UK in March 2020. The official CH launch will take place at Old Blues Day May 21, 2022.

This book was published just as the Global Pandemic "Covid-19" began overwhelming the planet - with today some 242 million cases worldwide so far - and to date approaching 5 million deaths. **Medical Science** via worldwide collaborations has responded magnificently with now many very effective new vaccines and appropriate new guidelines and laws.

As well the Global Climate Emergency has been burgeoning calamitously with wildfire and flooding disasters in 2020 & 2021 - so that COP26 in Glasgow UK in November 2021 is viewed by authorities such as the United Nations as "the last chance to save the planet". **Climate Science** is guiding the way ahead comprehensively.

Christ's Hospital has responded robustly to these great challenges - in addition to the challenges arising from the Global Financial Crash of 2007-2008 and the adjustments associated with Brexit 2018-2021. Meanwhile CHTWV has catalyzed debate and discussion in the CHOBA community, and I believe the CHTWV book project has had a beneficial impact regarding CH senior management/council strategies in furthering the 1552 charitable mission in the progressive new era of Headteacher Simon Reid.

Presented now in this online CHTWV Addendum is an additional chapter on the teaching of the Humanities at CH by Graham Fawcett (CH 1956-1964). This new chapter is designed to complement the Science and Engineering, Chapter IV by Sinclair Wynchank (CH 1948-1957). Above all Christ's Hospital in these massively changing circumstances is still very much "the best school in the world" (William Hamilton Fyfe CH1953) – balancing the "Two Cultures" - as also well explored in the Senior Grecian's traditional Oration to the Lord Mayor on Speech Day 2021.

In particular the book CHTWV emphasized the uniquely imaginative teaching of the Sciences at CH over the past 120 years, effectively since the move of the boys school from London to Horsham and the "Armstrong-Heuristics" initiative – still ongoing today in 2021 at CH. Graham Fawcett's online chapter emphasizes the high quality Humanities teaching at CH dating back to what might be termed the "Boyer-Classics" initiative in the later 18th century – also still ongoing in 2021 CH.

Accordingly, it can be cogently argued that there has been an unusually strong, unified and very effective “balance” in the Sciences/Humanities teaching at CH for over 120 years. This should be surely nurtured in this exciting and challenging 21st century new CH era - through to the Great Quincentenary and beyond.

One metric for success, amongst many possible metrics on notable Old Blues, is perhaps the number of Fellows of the Royal Society (Sciences – recently Keith Bowen & Phil Evans) & Fellows of the British Academy (Humanities - recently Jasper Griffin & Alan Ryan) Old Blues.

Another metric for success is the list of “Old Blue Notables” - especially the ~160 Old Blues in the DNB (Dictionary of National Biography) - explored in the published research of Ken Mansell (CH 1953-1961) in the CH Museum. Also, through the personal career stories of Old Blues as in the book CHTWV – to be encouraged via the internet on the CHOA website – as indeed for this imaginative online Humanities CHTWV Addendum by Graham Fawcett.

David Taplin (CH 1950-1957) BCOB President

October 31, 2021, Vancouver, Canada

“How oft, how oft, at school”

(S T Coleridge, ‘Frost at Midnight’)

Living with the Humanities at Christ’s Hospital, 1956-1964, and ever since
Graham Fawcett

Whenever, as happened this morning, I wake at five to seven without an alarm clock (let alone the Big School rising bell that used to ring then), I feel, more than half a century later, back on course. Living by bells instead of the hour reawakens those first times when the day was scanned by them, their calls-to-action like stressed syllables in a day-long line of verse.

It is the same with that old timetable’s months of the year too: our September a threshold into a new school year, and July the Way Out at the other end; like Bede’s image of a whole life, in words introduced to me in a CH English class as spoken, fourteen hundred years ago, by a counsellor advising the King on how to respond to the new doctrine of Christianity:

Your majesty, when we compare the present life of man on earth with that time of which we have no knowledge, it seems to me like the swift flight of a single sparrow through the banqueting-hall where you are sitting at dinner on a winter's day with your thegns and counsellors. In the midst there is a comforting fire to warm the hall; outside, the storms of winter rain or snow are raging. This sparrow flies swiftly in through one door of the hall, and out through another. While he is inside, he is safe from the winter storms; but after a few moments of comfort, he vanishes from sight into the wintry world from which he came. Even so, man appears on earth for a little while;

but of what went before this life or of what follows, we know nothing. Therefore, if this new teaching has brought any more certain knowledge, it seems only right that we should follow it." ¹

Below that extract in the book was a pen-and-ink drawing of the inside of that banqueting-hall with the King sitting at dinner and a bird in mid-flight. It made an oddly deep impression on me. Perhaps I felt reassured that my own flight would be this simple, and that life would not be a *cul-de-sac*. At thirteen, it was easy to imagine the scene as the picture of not a life but every *day*.

But I want now to borrow Bede's bird and turn it into this fledgling reader of Humanities at Christ's Hospital. The banqueting-hall is CH, our flight through the hall eight years. But that hall is also a text. The King is the text's original ancient writer presiding over his text and my progress through it from end to end. As I fly down the hall, I am breathing the same air as the King, get glimpses of him and how his work is decorated, and can emerge to tell my readers, in bird-speak, what I have seen inside.

There were several Nevers attached to one particular day when, not a bird, I was sitting on a low dais in front of the 'rear stalls' in Big School: I had never been there alone, nor when the clock had just struck twelve; nor had I been there not expected, nor on a non-occasion, nor when the floor had been left unswept after recent energetic use; and I had never before seen the sunlight stream through a high window down onto that floor, creating lit spots and penumbras around them, in August.

What I had certainly seen was that same space cleared for *our* energies. Now, in this midday brightness, came words spoken, that time, after dusk:

"If we shadows have offended,
Think but this, and all is mended,
That you have but slumber'd here
While these visions did appear.
And this weak and idle theme,
No more yielding but a dream,
Gentles, do not reprehend:
if you pardon, we will mend:
And, as I am an honest Puck,
If we have unearned luck
Now to 'scape the serpent's tongue,
We will make amends ere long;
Else the Puck a liar call;
So, good night unto you all.
Give me your hands, if we be friends,
And Robin shall restore amends". ²

Shakespeare asking the audience to put their hands together on that last line of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* - and they did, each night in 1961 for our performances on the Big School floor, in a production by David Jesson-Dibley, gentle hero of the

English department, who had given his actors a freer rein than ever by clearing that floor of chairs, except for these rear stalls where I was sitting now. In 2013.

He wasn't only Robin Goodfellow, that Puck. He was also Tony Coombs of Middleton A, who became a lifelong friend. My Thornton B good friend, Roland Jaquarello, in that curtainless curtain-call, was half of a future coincidence: the two actors who played the skirt roles went on to become two of the most distinguished theatre directors of the next half-century: Roland (Hippolyta, Queen of the Amazons) at Dublin's Abbey Theatre, Belfast's Lyric Theatre and BBC Radio Drama, and Howard Davies (Thisbe) at the RSC and the National.

Weeks later, we were all on the train from Hook of Holland to Amsterdam on a three-city tour of our *Dream*. It was my first time abroad, thanks to CH. Thanks to them too was the next time, a year later, when the Classical Grecians returned to their second candleflame, Rome, guided by the gentle hero of the Classics department, Patrick Daunt. Holland and Italy were vivid early lessons in the simple truth, revealed to us on location, that the Humanities were everywhere the keystone of education since at least the foundation of our first candleflame, Athens, where the great Greek plays we translated were premiered, and where (in the strange way that connections make themselves) *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is set.

Tony Coombs, with whom I had an astonishingly past-salvaging lunch last year (astonishing because he has almost total recall) remembered that production and its director again, and put it all in a letter afterwards:

"In an era and an educational culture that tended towards the authoritarian, David Jesson-Dibley was a welcome contrast. He was an enabler and an inspirer, not a pedagogue. This approach was to the fore in his leadership of the school Dramatic Society and in his direction of the yearly Shakespeare play. These gave us an invaluable opportunity for creative activity and expression – a liberating alternative and challenge to the academic and sporting consensus. David's productions were notable for their friendly camaraderie, their spoken vitality, and their flexible use of the theatrical space.

For "A Midsummer Night's Dream he squeezed the audience into the back of Big School". This opened up two performance spaces – an earthly one on the floor directly in front of the audience, and an otherworldly one on the distant stage (with a flexibly lit sky cyclorama), made all the more distant by the corridors of darkness that divided the two stages. This created a wonderfully energising terrain for teenage boys to move and to speak, and to grasp the play in our physical imagination. One could "put a girdle round the earth" in twenty seconds. Voices came alive through the highly contrasted resonances in different parts of the theatre. David encouraged us to experiment with our voices, and to relish the dramatic and sonic possibilities of projecting Shakespeare's language, which is so variably pitched in "The Dream". This all made for a thrilling creative experience.

Another innovative aspect of this production was the casting, which was remarkably democratic. For most school plays the customary process would be lengthy auditions, followed by the director's considered choice. For "The Dream", the group of about 20 boys who were keen to act read through the play. David made sure that everyone got a chance to read a variety of parts. After the

reading he asked everyone, on their own, to think about and write down their individual ideas about the casting. He took all the papers away and cast the play from them. This contributed notably to the group ethos and energy that developed during the production".³

The group ethos created by that democracy-in-action was like a pool filled from the school's main reservoir of it. The Old Blue philosopher and Oxford professor Alan Ryan (a veteran of the CH Debating Society I heard him speak at) breathed its air again decades later:

"For an anxious lower-middle-class child, conscious of the tight budgeting that went on at home and the sacrifice of the present to the future that defines English middle-class life, it was an unspeakable luxury to find this rich and vivid world to which the price of admission was only the desire to join. My brave new world was peopled with writers and my Ellis Island was the school library".⁴

It has always been a pleasure for me to delight in the surprise others feel when told that CH is like a public school upside-down (or, rather, the right way up), because its sane means-testing meant that if your parents earned more than a certain amount, you couldn't go there. This gave us freedom from comparisons between us about financial status *until* we left school and only then felt the shock we had been spared before.

Unlike for most families who sent their children in the 1950s to schools where you stayed the night for months on end, such boarding or public schools were largely unknown to our families. It was a comfort to me that this should have been so for the boys around me at CH, and especially my friends, except when their parent had been an Old Blue, and then that was reassuring too.

This literal unfamiliarity definitely fed the CH ethos. It was the same with doing Classics. If I had ever told my incredulous uncle (I had already told him I was studying Greek and Latin) that Zeus had lain with Mnemosyne for nine nights in a row and nine months later she had given birth to nine daughters on the trot, he might well have good-humouredly harrumphed (as he had the first time): "blimey, the things they teach you at that school of yours!"

So,

The wider family were dubious:
how could a language that was dead
be any use?⁵

was how I started a poem, thirty years later, set in what was for me CH's most hallowed space: the Classical Grecians' room two doors down the ground floor corridor of what was then the Classics Block, and just across from me that August midday; a room where the question of Greek and Latin usefulness was answered daily, every time we opened a lexicon, a classic poem, a book of ancient history:

inspirational performances-on-the-page of classical languages playing at home as effortlessly as they flower on the etymological tree of English and in the repertoires of our public literary culture of library, theatre and public speech. I felt grateful, in and beyond those classrooms, that

the memories

of long-departed people, widely known
or unknown, cluster round the folk we are.
That we have not forgotten what they said,

and how they said it, is a legacy
we go on spending, and it still remains,
pervasive and sustaining, daily bread

taken for granted, as it has to be.
It is no different with the ancient words,
cells of our speech-blood, seeds of making sense.⁶

I already felt then that we were heading back to the Classical World as we did to the Bible. Studying that World was like inter-railing, a time-travel to retrieve links the present world had lost or never known, commuting across bridges built in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance: Dante and Milton had made the journey to generate their masterpieces; Freud to fetch Oedipus; Goethe, Shelley and Ted Hughes all after Prometheus; T.S. Eliot the Furies. We came back again having been personally guided on each 'trip' by the very same mentors – Socrates and Sophocles, Homer and Thucydides, Virgil and Ovid, Plato and Boethius, Demosthenes and Cicero - who had showed our literary ancestors the way.

Fourteen periods each of Greek and Latin a week out of thirty-four made our inheritance the more dynamic: when we took Aeschylus to pieces with a lexicon and then saw Joss Ackland do Agamemnon in the *Oresteia* in London, dug into Sophocles' *Women of Trachis* line by line and acted in his *Antigone* on Big School's floor with Pat Daunt, and took it in turns to voice our versions of Euripides' *Helen* in class, we could really hear how these first Western literate voices had invented drama. We saw Ancient Greeks as archetypes, in the Greek sense of 'primitive models', of dramatist, poet, orator and historian. "The father of history" was the name given by Cicero (and it stuck) to Herodotus, whose *Histories* we did with Tom Keeley, and whose stock shot up when his book survived the eponymous Almásy's parachute drop in the film of Michael Ondaatje's 1992 novel *The English Patient*, Almásy even interleaving Herodotus's pages with his own, handwritten, personal history. As though the bird is gifting Bede's King dictation of its song in flight.

But it was like they were all on film, these old Greek and Latin guys, playing the king as we flew through their pages. They had us rapt.

Something practical in that romance

got through to us along with all the dead,
unreal, outdated, somehow laughable

old photographs developed from the prose
of men in togas forming sentences
so brilliant they could take our breath away.

We stared at runes two thousand years old,
ransacked our dictionaries and cooked a stew
resembling the recipe of gold. ⁷

That cooking was our labouring over a hot stove of translation, out of Greek or Latin into English, or into either *from* English. What daughters those nine were that Mnemosyne had: the nine Muses, patron guardians of epic poetry, history, flutes and lyric poetry, comedy and pastoral poetry, tragedy, dance, love poetry, sacred poetry and astronomy, infusing them all with their goddess mother's memory genes. They also kitted out the earliest poet in the Western world with powers of vision and recollection:

"one day they taught Hesiod glorious song while he was shepherding his lambs under holy Helicon . . . They plucked and gave me a rod, a shoot of sturdy laurel, a marvellous thing, and breathed into me a divine voice to celebrate things that shall be and things that were aforetime." ⁸

So art is given memory and vision. Epic poetry, history and drama flex those same muscles. Greek tragedy is a grippingly modern manual of human conduct. And here is the start-line for all new comedy since Aristophanes and pastoral since Hesiod and the vantage to look back earlier to dance from ancient India and love poetry since ancient Mesopotamia and sacred poetry since the Upanishads. In the same way that Egyptian tombs are come upon by chance, Housey students of the Humanities landed in a museum of western civilisation at the end of the cloisters every day and got to say what they found there.

Coleridge's repeating of 'How Oft', from his remembrance of CH at Newgate Street, would not leave me alone: *first*, that poem pictures him there; *second*, because learning is based on the repetition of a discipline, knowing language's pitfalls and perspectives as they come round again like a whirligig, and we repeat our response to the opportunity that repeats itself, and so a solution is more likely, a technique shaped; and *third*, because, for the rest of our lives, *how often* we find it, that once-learned discipline, still plugged into those lives of ours to help us discern challenge or epiphany, and all because those future realisation-seeds were planted at CH and keep on budding. Study is what we did, and what we studied goes on doing to us what it did then. Often.

Humanities cross-pollinate: the great Old Blue conductor Sir Colin Davis (at CH 1939-45), in interview with John Bridcut for BBC Four in 2013, said that hearing the Bible read every day and twice on Sundays in Chapel at CH rubbed off on him for when it came to conducting the great religious works like Beethoven's *Missa Solemnis* or

literary biblical ones like Saint-Saëns' opera about Samson and Delilah.^{9a} Sir Colin remembered two musical teachers: Edward Malins (still there in the late 1950s to teach me English) and Arthur Humphreys who taught Maths:

Mr Malins played the piano really quite well. He played Brahms sonatas with me. The maths teacher couldn't wait for the bell to go for the end of the morning session. He would get out his cello and we would play Beethoven through lunchtime. It was that enthusiasm that really got me".^{9b}

Malins could also play the piano part in *The Rio Grande* by Constant Lambert (at CH during WW1), one of the works Davis conducted at the Barbican for CH's 450th celebrations in 2002.

For that versatile Old Blue actor Roger Allam, speaking on Radio 3's *Private Passions* in 2021 with Michael Berkeley, singing and music at CH led him to drama later. Allam's 'take' on repetition at CH related to reading and singing from a score in Chapel: "I guess that singing was what I was best at", he said, not mentioning English or drama. "I think I always very much appreciate the rhythm in language and the sound of it", Allam said. "And often in learning it, I'll need to do something that's quite musical with it, in which sense and rhythm and sound come together. . . Repetition, the French word for rehearsal".¹⁰

The music of language's syllables and cadences is centre-stage in translation. The Classicist verse translator-composer is always in rehearsal, the metrical rhythm pounding in the head like a clock in a film dream-sequence. Counting syllables, long or short, was so like honouring note-values on a stave. Singing a *Magnificat* setting in Chapel, something we all got to do, however well we could sing, was all part of the same opening of our eye and ear.

Mnemosyne's memory lane paved every visit by an Old Blue then. (My moment that mid-August in 2013 was no different). We used to wonder at how these apparently ancient figures seemed more enraptured by what hadn't changed since their time, but then marvelled at what had, as Roland Jaquarollo did in 1977 when he brought an Irish company to CH to perform a play, which he was directing on tour, in the school's admirable new theatre by then upstaging our old board-treading ground in Big School.

Reading Roland's tender and vital 2016 book *Memories of Development* about his fifty years in Irish theatre made me think of how we all began. His time at CH, he writes, "consolidated my love of drama"¹¹. His father had been an actor, his mother a pianist and teacher. Expression as performance was already natural to him. Roland's 'consolidate' spoke to Tony Coombs, too, because his own then-and-later fulfilment in drama and art had been seeded younger by his father, "a fine draughtsman and painter as a young man and a passionate actor in quality amateur drama from 30+ till 60".¹²

CH consolidated my love of poetry. My schoolmaster father relished the poets. My mother's family had pianos in the house. Expression as performance-on-the-page was natural to me. My great-grandmother's sheet music of Brahms *Intermezzi*, propped up as she played it and my eyes blurred and ears danced, was my first sight and hearing of another language being translated. Thus, our inclinations were set in motion before we came to Horsham. CH helped us to take the clay our early years had made us of and knead it into what we could make of our selves by what we were working *on*. Later I read Yeats's wonderful lines about revision,

“Those friends that have it I do wrong
Whenever I remake a song
Should know what issue is at stake:
It is myself that I remake”,¹³

and remembered the Classics department's insistence on our making a 'fair copy' of our work after correction. In the fair copy, our newly curated lines could glisten as though unscathed. But the work had been clinched in the scathing.

Sometimes a staring into the fire sets the past alight, or the birth of a child that takes us back to schooldays as past as the child's are future. Memory steels Coleridge's purpose as he remembers his sense of abandonment at CH Newgate Street. Here he is, staring into his dying fire in Devon with his infant son to ponder beside him, in the opening lines of 'Frost at Midnight':

The Frost performs its secret ministry,
Unhelped by any wind. The owlet's cry
Came loud—and hark, again! loud as before.
The inmates of my cottage, all at rest,
Have left me to that solitude, which suits
Abstruser musings: save that at my side
My cradled infant slumbers peacefully.
'Tis calm indeed! so calm, that it disturbs
And vexes meditation with its strange
And extreme silentness. Sea, hill, and wood,
This populous village! Sea, and hill, and wood,
With all the numberless goings-on of life,
Inaudible as dreams! the thin blue flame
Lies on my low-burnt fire, and quivers not ;
Only that film, which fluttered on the grate,
Still flutters there, the sole unquiet thing.
Methinks, its motion in this hush of nature
Gives it dim sympathies with me who live,
Making it a companionable form,
Whose puny flaps and freaks the idling Spirit
By its own moods interprets, every where
Echo or mirror seeking of itself,
And makes a toy of Thought.

But O ! how oft,
How oft, at school, with most believing mind,
Presageful, have I gazed upon the bars,
To watch that fluttering stranger ! and as oft
With unclosed lids, already had I dreamt
Of my sweet birth-place, and the old church-tower,
Whose bells, the poor man's only music, rang
From morn to evening, all the hot Fair-day,
So sweetly, that they stirred and haunted me
With a wild pleasure, falling on mine ear
Most like articulate sounds of things to come !
So gazed I, till the soothing things, I dreamt,
Lulled me to sleep, and sleep prolonged my dreams !
And so I brooded all the following morn,
Awed by the stern preceptor's face, mine eye
Fixed with mock study on my swimming book :
Save if the door half opened, and I snatched
A hasty glance, and still my heart leaped up,
For still I hoped to see the stranger's face,
Townsmen, or aunt, or sister more beloved,
My play-mate when we both were clothed alike ! ¹⁴

The poem continues. That 'swimming book' could have been Latin. At the British Library, I found a copy of *A Latin Grammar for the Use of Christ's Hospital* published in 1785, so it would have been the 13-year-old Sam's text-book. I imagined him pausing for thought at its examples of First Declension nouns: *Musa*, a song, and *Poeta*, a poet.

My initiation into Coleridge felt sensational. As I got older, he kicked in all the more, he and the Mariner magicians of the narrative word. I was productively woken up by Coleridge's rampant love of life (as I was by D H Lawrence's), dividing his time between the West Country, the Lakes, London and Germany, drinking deeply of all of them. To meet the Ancient Mariner, old man and poem, at school is never to forget either. It goes on exploding like a repeater depth-charge. He suddenly reappears in the opera house or on a train: he is the Flying Dutchman, the storyteller in the railway carriage, the reminiscer whom we may at first mistrust but who makes his buttonholing-of-us a benediction. We can be re-rooted to the spot by him at any age. With any luck.

Coleridge was at Newgate Street from 1782 to 1791, and made a Grecian in 1788, perhaps on his sixteenth birthday, 21st October, when he may have read the Dining Hall grace from that same pulpit which later travelled to Horsham along with the Verrio, the Grecians' Arch and the Wren Arch, all of which he lived in sight of. 'Frost at Midnight' lets his mind's eye travel out through that Devon front door, up the hill to the wood behind the cottage, as far as the sea, and back to focus on the fluttering piece of burnt paper in the grate, the film, whose importance he explains:

“in all parts of the kingdom these films are called *strangers* and supposed to portend the arrival of some absent friend.”¹⁵

And then they didn't come to visit him in Newgate Street. Because they couldn't anymore.

Through Coleridge's tender years there had been a litany of somethings: every time the boy recovered from *one*, there was the next; and invariably it was the partial safety of dependency on those closest to him which would be cancelled by their going, by their dying: older brothers left home, tragedies happened.

The absence which hurt Sam most was that of his father, who had seen Sam's brother Frank off to India from Plymouth convinced he would never see the boy again, returned home that evening, and died of a heart attack during the night. It seems beyond doubt that Sam Coleridge boy and man never got over the double shock-loss of his father dying, and as though 'dying of love', of *preference*, for Frank.

Within months, Sam started boarding at CH Newgate Street, where he was taught Classics by a sadistic flogger, the Reverend James Boyer, of whom Sam and the other boys, including fellow class-mate and eye-witness Charles Lamb, were in abject fear, yet to whom Sam was *at the same time* deeply grateful for his - to put it mildly - rigorous tuition in the beauties of poetry and language. The poet Leigh Hunt said that when Coleridge heard of Boyer's death, he deemed it

“lucky that the cherubim who took him to heaven were nothing but faces and wings, or he would infallibly have flogged them by the way.”¹⁶

Heaven, though, you notice. Not Hell.

Boyer left the school in 1799. A mere 133 years later, in 1932 (no time at all when it comes to the stamina of boarding-school traditions), Derrick Somerset Macnutt (DSM) became Head of Classics at CH. Still there in 1960 when we first came into his care, Macnutt was, to us hopeful boy classicists, an absolute scholar of both languages but a rather terrifying Classics master and, I came to understand and accept later, the *unthinking* flogger of our sensibilities, and of whom we likewise, for four years, were in fear. Yet, when I heard of *his* death in 1971, I drove fifty miles to be at his memorial service in the Chapel. I felt a pale relief torn between old terror, subsequent fury, and an enduring If It Hadn't Been For You.

And why? Because yes, we too had also been deeply grateful to *him* for getting the best out of us even by duress, *and* by perpetuating the School's long-established tradition of Verse Composition from English into Greek and Latin metrics: a formatively thrilling weekly opportunity to make creative decisions in all three languages which I have nowhere found Coleridge suggesting that he did not also get the chance to do. This luminous memory of a beloved creative process brought some

light to that exorcising poem written many years later to DSM, with Verse Composition standing firm in the fire, salvaged with its original joy intact as

an apprentice act
of riding on the richness of a song

we came so close to feeling was our own . . .¹⁷

The experiences at school which I think helped to haunt Coleridge irreparably were both better and worse than that; I mean apart from the flogging, the austerity, the abandonment: better, because his time was angel-winged with classical linguistic, philosophical and poetic enlightenment, the gentlest recruiting sergeant; worse, because it smacked of Stockholm syndrome and, if I may fleetingly mention Coleridge and me in the same breath, it made us complicatedly grateful to our tormentors, and convinced us that language and poetry, along with God, were the only *answers* to our torments. It was a conflict of inseparable feelings, like being cared for and neglected, closeness and distance, love and withdrawal, a lesson learned which had also to be unlearned.

So, 'how oft, how oft, at school' hammered on my door at title time, a double sigh of remembrance pinpointing that most indispensable feature of any training in the pleasure of overcoming obstacles in study: repetition. But Coleridge *in the poem* is saying that what happened so 'oft' was how he stared at the 'film, which fluttered on the grate', thinking of the home he missed, and longing that a visitor from home, prophesied *by* the 'stranger' in the grate, would arrive and replace remembrance with presence. We needed our visits at CH. I was fortunate that my father never missed one. My first words to him after he had died were to thank him, there in the morgue, for coming to see me at Horsham every three weeks without fail. And when I got outside, that was what my mother guessed I'd thanked him for.

Because Coleridge felt abandoned, he befriended poetry, the Muse a visitor like a parent or a beloved. But it was better to be waiting for *her*, knowing she would come sooner or later. What the literatures offer are conversations using words and thoughts and feelings, the common vocabulary of relationship, intimacy, reassurance, love, human presence, the closer you read them.

A ringing endorsement of this truth came in 2020 from the distinguished conductor Sir Bernard Haitink. In a BBC-2 documentary, Haitink gave advice like gold-dust to stick-wavers young or old which could equally transform the preparedness of actors, lecturers, translators and anyone else who has ever had the Humanities as a nurse: "Study your scores", Haitink said quietly, "and then if the Holy Spirit comes, you'll have a good day".¹⁸ Wonderful. If you want the cap to fit, and it does, then do wear it. I spent the next week reading Gray's 'Elegy' more closely every morning, and Keats's 'Eve of St Agnes' all week after that.

The boy who was me on the first of many trains south from Victoria in mid-September 1956 bound for a *railway station* called Christ's Hospital had his first memories of being alive near County Gate, on what was then the border between London and Kent, in the house of my lately widowed Nana. My cot was in the sitting-room. The fireplace, where the coke glowed a lot when the lights were off, was my earliest sense of a hearth as the focus of a space. At CH, 'focus' was revealed as the Latin for hearth; my father, than whom I have since met few people who were more passionately self-educated, could have told me that this wonderful word *focus* is used in geology and medicine, geometry, physics and astronomy; and I could later have added that Aeneas brought the hearth gods, the Lares, to Rome from Troy. CH was the hearth of my growing life from ten to eighteen. It gladdens me that, just as CH and the Humanities there did, 'hearth' contains the realities of *heart* and *ear* and *art* and *heat* and *earth*.

That those Lares protected boundaries, too, brings me back to our mythically named Ring Fence. I think of the Sussex country beyond, and that as-though-legendary nearest outpost of the Outside World, Donkey Bridge, a place gloriously absent from the Internet: one padded over it on cross-country runs, it was left behind in an instant and there the next time too to render the same service, asking nothing in return, like its namesake creature. I had learned that places mythologised themselves.

My future was steadily shaped by this years-long initiation in the ancient life and language of Greece and Italy, extending those countries north to just the other side of the Ring Fence we shinned over daily to wander in their ancient lands. Then I read Gilbert Highet's lovely classical Penguin *Poets in a Landscape*¹⁹, bought, on Pat Daunt's recommendation to us, in that bookshop in Horsham which sold the new colour-coded Penguins (brown for Classics, green for French, and so on), Highet treading the footsteps of the same Virgil, Horace and Ovid whose poetry had been letting us in on their lives already; from that book, I caught a passion, for *any* poetry on location, which has stayed with me for the rest of my life, like going to Horace's supposed birthplace in Venosa and then adding to my bucket-list his grace-and-favour Sabine Farm he was so happy on in his verse,

"This was one of my prayers: a little space of land,
with a garden, near the house a spring of living water,
and a small wood besides",²⁰

that it recruited W H Auden to a home in rural Austria and me to one in Tuscany.

It was a very significant threshold that CH then sent us all across with Pat Daunt and David Sherratt on that heart-opening journey to Rome. Wandering amazed through Highet's travels first and then the real Eternal City prepared my ground for another catalyst: the Classical Grecians' oddball tradition of doing (once we'd finished the French) the optional *Italian*-into-English unseen translation completely blind in the

Cambridge Schols exams week Unseens Paper, my début sight of Italian as a text for entering. That these different encounters helped to kindle a desire to live in Italy for real, and then thirty years as a translator from her language, were some of CH's greatest gifts. First stop was a Valdarno hill-top village not far from Milton's Vallombrosa²¹ within ten years of leaving CH. It felt like a natural sequel, in time and place, to that room in the Classics Block with the door which didn't shut. In fact, it swung open at a touch.

There had been four rectangular tables, one on each side of a nearly square room. Each seated three or four of us and had at least one whopping copy of the largest book I had ever seen or would ever see *and* have free use of every day, using both hands to open and dive into, let alone lift: Liddell and Scott Greek Lexicon. There must have been six or more of them, in various states of fatigue from the endless hits of consultation so that some of their two thousand pages were hanging on, but dwarfing the biggest Lewis and Short's Latin-English dictionary. Gerard Manley Hopkins would have enjoyed the fact that at St Beuno's College in North Wales where he trained to be a priest and had his great poetry breakthrough in 1875, the first book on the top shelf in the poetry section of the library was this largest Liddell and Scott. Lewis's first name, I never knew, was Charlton, which reminds me that my entire three-year career in that room felt more like being on Ben Hur's chariot (and once or twice Phaethon's) than a walk in the park. (Not in the next room, though. That was a different Classical matter altogether).

The table at which I was blooded into accuracy was just inside the door. I was in the middle of us, so a dash for the door would have been all the more beyond, just as it was part of, one's wildest dreams. As ever with the wisdoms one needs at fifteen, it was about thirty years later that I read that stirring Stoic advice of Epictetus on personal crisis management which would have come in handy:

"When a difficult crisis meets you, remember that you are as the raw youth with whom God the trainer is wrestling ...that you may win at Olympia: and that cannot be done without sweating for it".²²

Just as well, probably, because his word for wrestler is 'agonistes', so arresting in the hands of Milton writing about Samson. I was too young to appreciate the hidden blessing in being up against it.

Then there was a table looking across the room at the blackboard on the wall, another table under the window, DSM's chunk of desk on a dais in that corner, while the third-year Grecians sat, and sometimes slightly lounged on the strength of time served, at the one beneath the blackboard. This table had once provided places for E F Watling, who translated our *Antigone* for Penguins in 1947; E J Kenney, who would become just about the greatest expert on Ovid the world has seen; and Jasper Griffin, whose parents, his recent obituary records, were postal clerks, not improbably setting loose in him a campaign to conduct the biggest correspondence

he could conceive of in time or space - across the Alps, the Adriatic and the Aegean-, with the writing souls of antiquity, and leading to his marvellous *Oxford History of the Classical World* and his fame as a scholar of Homer.

In the fourth corner was an unassuming piece of furniture which the swinging door hid, so you had to know it was there. It still ranks as the most important cupboard in my life. Dozens of small white envelopes were kept in it, each containing A6-sized pieces of paper on which, in beautiful serif type, were passages from Shakespeare, Milton, Keats, Tennyson and others which we were asked to translate into Greek and Latin metres and which revealed to me English poetry's inner workings as we dismantled and re clothed it.

No longer did my unconfident eyes glaze over, as was often the case in an actual English class, however well taught. There was a different agenda in play here: each phrase had to be allowed to make sense to us, so that we could make sense *with* it, using Classical words we knew the syllabic values of. So it was miraculous suddenly to have handed down to me, by a leaver, a book which marked every single Latin word's syllables long or short. I still have it: Ainger and Wintle's *An English-Latin Gradus or Verse Dictionary* (1891), a lifeline to any line of Latin verse in the making. In his preface, Mr Ainger clearly believed in the value of what he and Mr Wintle had done as servants of a great cause:

"Latin verse composition seems to possess two advantages, as an instrument of education, for which it would be difficult to find substitutes. First, it is the proof and flower of that scholarship which loves the old writers with an unselfish love, and delights to clothe modern thoughts and modern expressions in the dress of ancient metre and rhythm. Secondly, it is an unrivalled form of drill for beginners, teaching them in all cases a good deal about the structure and powers of the Latin tongue, forcing them from the very first to think for themselves, and in some cases awakening a true poetic feeling, and a power of appreciating the best thoughts of the best men of all ages and countries".²³

But the Latin and Greek words we chose to translate the English *into* not only had to fit the hexameter, pentameter or iambic metres of the Classical models by having syllables that were long or short in the right places. Those words also had to have been used before, at least once, by some unquestionably reputable Greek or Roman poet of the right sort in their own works (poets if it was poetry, historians or orators if prose), which gave them the *imprimatur* for classroom use.

Luckily, that tireless double duo of Liddell & Scott and Lewis & Short had done the multiple marathon leg-work by adding beneath every dictionary definition copious quotations from those greats which showed each word in prime action. We came to be ventriloquised by the ghosts of the three tragedians, but not Homer for not writing 'proper' (Attic) Greek; Virgil, Horace, and Ovid were all kosher, Catullus could slip through, Tibullus was borderline; and we sounded off in the Athenian law-courts, the Roman Senate, or the classical history book in cod Demosthenean or Thucydidean Greek (Herodotus's was thought dodgy) or Ciceronian, Tacitean, and

Livian Latin. It couldn't be Silver Latin, either (they were all out too), only pre-Silver. Not Aristophanes or Plautus, because comedy was supposed to debase the currency of *gravitas*. I remembered this as I watched the carnage over Aristotle's unknown treatise on comedy in the 1986 film of Eco's *The Name of the Rose* set in 1327. Attitudes can last.

One does mellow about DSM after sixty years, if not less, although for ages I wanted to stand up as

Cicero now in my young self's defence
against him while he sits there in the dock
and grips his stub as I begin my line. ²⁴

I can still see DSM's fist, as I sat next to him, once draw a diagonal line through my work, and 'sign' it 'γ' (other times were better) with the stub of a pencil whose size I felt more offended by than the thickness of the line it made. In that same chair – we took turns to 'go up' - I was within far too much earshot of him objecting to, and at least double-underlining, ill-fated hunches of mine, among them a word choice in one of my verse compositions because it was recorded as only having been used by Vegetarius, a name he read to me from the dictionary with ironic relish and a sliver of good humour. Vegetarius no more wrote verse, let alone good verse, than his name should have told me he wouldn't have. In fact, look him up now and he seems to have vanished without trace.

But the passages of English poetry we spent hours climbing into and walking around in were as intoxicating in themselves as they were bewildering to transfer out of themselves. They generated a force-field even more substantial than his.

His trimming shears
made us the targets of his topiary,
tidied to death our faulty, vibrant prose,

humbled our nervy, valiant love of verse.
One thing was denied him. He could not
despoil or confiscate the saving grace

of English Literature he served us up
in printed slices for translation work.
"The woods decay, the woods decay and fall"

was my first-ever glimpse of Tennyson.
Could simply reading it have ever reaped
the harvest of conversion to a cause

that such an exercise brought home to us -
taking it to pieces phrase by phrase
"man comes and tills the soil and lies beneath"

assembling it in our hexameters,
an alien rhythm, an apprentice act
of riding on the richness of a song

we came so close to feeling was our own,
“and after many a summer dies the swan” ? ²⁵

Those first four lines of Tennyson’s poem ‘Tithonus’ ²⁶ were some of the most momentous I lived with at CH and they remain so: I am stunned that line 3 (the ‘man comes’ line) dares describe the course of a human life (forget Shakespeare’s Seven Ages of Man, and even the speed of Bede’s bird) in nine words. It was the first twenty lines of this poem that we were set to do into Latin one Easter holidays for the Richards Hexameter Prize. Nobody told us who this Richards was to whom we might become grateful, but I’m now wondering if it was the same one Charles Lamb mentions in his *Essays of Elia* memories of CH as

“Richards, author of the Aboriginal Britons, the most spirited of the Oxford Prize Poems; a pale, studious Grecian.” ²⁷

Living with the hexameter rhythm at home that Easter was different. It bonded me afresh with my father’s love of poetry and his books. I loved his impressed surprise that I had to put Tennyson into ‘flippin’ Latin’. The Richards moment probably did as much as any poetic metre has since to give me a metrical earworm which burrows, maddens, enchants, and solves the problem. It increased the likelihood that I would become so susceptible to the iambics of Emily Dickinson that after reading or quoting her poems for any length of time, I start talking like her parrot.

Someone at CH obviously thought Tithonus worth serving up to us twice, because they set us the final verse for Greek iambics too. After that, I felt I knew him so well that I didn’t need to look him up, the poor mythic immortal but ageing wretch, in what was then a more or less new pair of books (1955), the two-volume Robert Graves *Greek Myths* I bought on a Saturday visit out with my father at that hallowed Penguin bookshop that isn’t there anymore. Graves wrote as though these myths had all happened. They certainly did to us. Besides, who can say that Orpheus’s looking back at Eurydice, after specifically being told not to, is bunk? It mirrors our insistent human folly. And since the Greek and Roman writers all quoted from the myths as if they were holy writ, we drank them in as a branch of Classical history uniting the credible and incredible, like we did King Arthur, throughout their systems of belief and the books which came of them.

The Trojan War was a major teaser: Homer and Virgil, hailing from the dawn of literary history in the West, read like historians of real events one moment and mythology the next. Until the German archaeologist Heinrich Schliemann identified the site of Troy at Hissarlik on the Turkish coast overlooking the Dardanelles, it was assumed that Homer’s story was a feat of imagination told so realistically that it could simply be enjoyed as if it were fact. No sooner had Schliemann’s 1896

excavations found that Troy 7a on that site had burned to the ground than the spur for the imagination switched from feasible epic to feasible fact. Was there really a wooden horse, an abducted Helen?

We translated very little poetry into English as a written exercise. We spoke our Englishing of it in class, as though reading the Greek or Latin off a score and transposing its music and sense from remembered preparation into English. Pretending not to be reading our fresh or inherited English pencillings between the Greek or Latin print lines was risky, because a boy pretending not to be peering at his own crib always looked and sounded different from one laudably freewheeling in his head.

In prose, the major ancient orators like Plato, Demosthenes and Cicero were in the front row for our re-speechifying. Speaking *them* aloud made even more sense: we tried rising to the original speech's public occasion. Tony Coombs remembers how that prose diet was nearly all non-fiction – speeches in a law court, or letters, or philosophy, or historiography. We agreed on Tacitus's succulent style, to this day in a prose as highly wrought as it left us feeling, though even then we could feel its ingenuity rewarding our dictionary time. Tony to this day calls Tacitus 'one of the great pleasures', while for me he became a step up and on board English Metaphysical language as much as it had been for the poets of that language to have turned to him.

Over lunch, Tony managed to resurrect some names of those non-fiction prose writers we did *into* Greek and Latin, like Macaulay, Gibbon, and Burke, texts he then compared to those featured in our *English* lessons with David Jesson-Dibley and Olive Peto, which were almost exclusively fiction, in both prose and narrative verse like *Rime of the Ancient Mariner*. Tony thinks we then came to associate classical prose, and therefore prose in general, with truth or a commentary on real events, which made it all the easier to suspend disbelief when it came to the English novel and short story. When Classical poets said 'I', as Ovid and Horace did all the time, they said it so confidently that it sounded like a phone-call; we heard it as straight truth, as we did with the great English poets who pitch short or long poems in the key of 'I', as Coleridge's Mariner does in his blistering reminiscence, Wordsworth in his walking rapture, Tennyson in his famous grief, and the startling moment in the *Canterbury Tales* when Chaucer suddenly says 'me'.²⁸

Doing the unprepared Unseens into Greek and Latin was like being pushed on stage to translate surtitles off the cuff. My sense is (and the fact was) that while absorbed in doing an Unseen, we were absorbed *by* it: we became invisible to ourselves for as long as we had to guess from what we saw, lashed to the mast of the process as musicians are locked into stave-lines once they have started. It was like a running head-to-head with music's demands, avoiding wrong notes or playing notes that aren't there; and hanging on to the text's promptings, like learning to ride a bicycle,

muzzling our inner would-be 'riffer' with our angel's careful tread. Falling off, or getting stage fright, were both on the cards, because prepared spoken and shown-up written translation for DSM was also about the overcoming of fear. So it became a Scheharazade performance to cheat death for another day by being accurate enough. The adrenalin rush was at maximum, like waiting for a starting-gun but afraid of being shot by it.

The passing years' mellower light shows me DSM's bouts of exasperation at my Latin (and Greek) efforts as more profound now than absurd, although that "why can't you write what any reasonable Roman is likely to have meant?" lament of his left me thinking how, not having met any less Romans than he had, let alone reasonable ones, it all turns on that word 'likely'. I realise now that he was teaching me to know myself, whether or not that is what he knew he was doing; that his irascibility was born of his having been in the same harness for thirty years; and that his teaching interrupted the devotion to crossword-setting which had propelled him to fame as Ximenes of *The Observer*. More than once, my latest composition effort rested beneath that fist on a classroom desk-top mostly covered with the proofs of next Sunday's puzzle.

This double professional reputation even got him headhunted by the producers of a Tony Hancock film, I think *The Rebel*, who commissioned him to write a Latin motto for the front of a town hall whose letters lit up at night only for some of the bulbs to fail, those still lit spelling Coca Cola. He proudly shared his 'solution' with us: *cloacas colamus*, the municipally correct *we look after the drains*. It was said of him that he,

in real life, away from all of us,
was just a softie, rather good at golf,
loved G & S and rugby, tea and buns,

had no idea what jeopardy he made
his charges feel that they were in, was left
puzzled they should feel like that.²⁶

For a master crossword-setter to be so clueless is rich. But he had a sense of humour. Tony reminded me of his pleasure on being presented by us with a copy of *The Eagle* comic in which we had translated the speech-bubbles of Dan Dare and the Mekon into Greek, thus matching his own efforts of Greeking Lewis Carroll's 'You Are Old, Father William' from *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*.

DSM's emphasis had always been on language rather than literature, which was to our advantage as it made him more likely to retain on the syllabus the verse composition which so many other schools had done away with, because they no longer saw the point of it, or never had.

That said, we did do some literature with him, though it was as language that he wanted to talk about it. It was so important to me to have done battle with it young.

Ovid became the first of my *Seven Olympians* poetry lectures in 2012, during more than twenty years spent talking about poetry to audiences. Ovid's *Heroides* has no trouble now flourishing in the age of the #Me Too movement (Clare Pollard's 2013 *Ovid's Heroines* for Bloodaxe Books is versatile in its attunement with both Ovid's times and these), but it was a remarkable choice for a curriculum in 1961, when these poems had long been regarded as sub-Ovid or not by Ovid at all, perhaps because the relentless outrage they voice from women unjustly treated by men may not have endeared them to curricular types.

The *Heroides* are about relationship, abandonment, absence, the taking of women for granted. Ovid cleverly ransacked Greek epic and tragedy to help him write verse letters from women to the men who have abandoned, abused, and brought them to breaking-point, so that the build-up inside them cannot *but* be written out of their systems and psyches, whether those letters then get posted or not. It became clear to me when I read it that Tatiana's Letter Scene, reworked by Tchaikovsky from Pushkin's verse-novel *Eugene Onegin*, is in a direct line from Ovid to Carol Ann Duffy's *The World's Wife* (Anvil, 1999). The Classics endure as a delta dwarfing the Nile's in feeding the Mediterranean of the Humanities.

And when Ovid's lover-heroines' letters are translated by *women* poets, especially those whom time has also neglected (an imbalance made good by Christopher Martin in his marvellous Penguin anthology *Ovid in English*), then the authenticity of the fictional cry-out is redoubled and Ovid's writ runs all the stronger.

These *Heroides* were performances, dramatic monologues, impersonations. Ovid became these women: he transformed himself into them, and, with them and for them, felt their way to a catharsis, a change of life which, without him, he feels, they have never really had. In the year 2 AD, at the age of 45, he took the agenda of transformation into what, for art, was the even more creatively intense shadow-world of shapeshifting in his *Metamorphoses*, one of the most spectacular and moving poems of the last 2000 years, which gave Shakespeare 90% of all his Classical borrowings.

To a boy brought up on Perry Mason (*Inherit The Wind* came later), Classical oratory was a treat waiting to happen.

The brutality and insolence with which Meidias treats everyone alike are, I suppose, as well known to you, gentlemen of the jury, as to all other citizens ³⁰

can still leave courtroom drama nerds with their mouth open (there in A T Murray's 1940 translation) at the first sentence to come out of the mouth of the statesman and orator Demosthenes in his prosecution against the wealthy, irascible Athenian Meidias; the same mouth, his own, he would fill with pebbles and then shout at the ocean through them to cure his stammer, so maybe the force of that first sentence comes from needing to get it all out before he seizes up. It is, cunningly, also a prose

imitation of the shock of the actual punch in the face which Meidias had given him in the orchestra of the Theatre of Dionysus at Athens on the occasion of a dithyramb competition, which punch had triggered the civil action in the first place. We sat there like posterity's jurymen watching a masterclass in crowd-working, as Demosthenes credits the jury with the wisdom and daring to have done the same in his shoes:

For myself, I have simply taken the course which anyone of you would have adopted, had he been the victim of a similar outrage. I lodged a plaint in the Assembly against him as an offender in connection with the festival, not only for his assault on my person at the Dionysia, but for many other acts of violence during the whole period when I served as chorus-master. . .

"What yet remains to do is in your hands; but my hope is that the more the defendant has pestered you with his solicitations—I observed just now what he was up to in front of the courthouse - more likely I am to obtain justice".³¹

Re-reading it now, I can remember being in awe of the sheer manipulative eloquence of his reasonableness. The very idea of manipulation was here being shown in an unarguably good light. His prose inveigled itself into the jury's ears like an intimate's whisper. The inveigling masqueraded as a necessary virtue. It was startlingly impressive then. It still is. For once in that room, it was someone else doing the startling.

What a difference a few yards down a corridor can make. Pat Daunt, whose classroom was next door, created a completely different atmosphere. I remember no fear nor anxiety, and so was able to strive on better terms. He was the younger, more human face of the Classics Department.

It is a lament often heard from guests on *Desert Island Discs* that they had never had the chance to thank the teacher who had made a difference to their lives. I did. It was in 1999, 35 years after leaving CH in 1964, that I saw Pat Daunt again. I was on a Victoria Line train to Oxford Circus when the doors opened at Finsbury Park and the instantly recognisable Jean Daunt got in with a white-haired man in unfamiliar glasses who sat down next to me, she opposite. The last time I had seen 'Mr Daunt' anywhere near a train, he had run along the platform at Milan station in 1962 with a dozen white paper bags of sandwiches in his arms and had had the presence of mind, as our Rome train suddenly started, to thrust most of them through the window to us, before miraculously reappearing in the corridor, on that memorable school journey.

Could it be the same man? It must be. Seconds later, I turned to him and, unaware that my Classically trained grammatical correctness gland had just activated itself, asked: "Would I be right in thinking that I am sitting next to Patrick Daunt?" Whereupon he, as ever picking up on the conditional tense as a courtesy, said, "You would". I had clearly been unrecognisable too. Jean was loving it all.

We set to with a will (they were getting off at King's Cross), and in the space of ten minutes had invented a Classical Grecians (Greecs, he said) annual lunch club. It would meet for at least the next seven years, mostly at my local Holborn trattoria *Ciao Bella* (to his Italophile delight) where we made sure to book the round table. Pat, as we now called him, was in his element, as, it should be said, he always had been, in the days when we didn't know how to recognise that condition in other people *as their element*. Whereby, at one point during the first lunch, we noticed him uncharacteristically sitting back from the conversation and making a list of names in two columns: he was reconstructing from memory the cast-list of his 1963 production (in which several of us had acted) of Sophocles' *Antigone* on the Big School floor. He got them all right.

Big School's side doors had been entrances to Creon's palace. I came through one of them from a summer evening outside as the Messenger who reveals what has happened to Antigone and Haemon. It was a powerful night. So I felt not just familiar but *equipped* with Sophocles' play more than forty years later, at Epidaurus, when my guide told the story of the moment in a production of the play there: Creon had just delivered his first cruel speech to Antigone when, completely coincidentally, though it had sounded like a provoked reaction, a voice from the 30,000 strong audience had suddenly shouted out, *υπάρχει γιατρός*, is there a doctor in the house, and seventeen doctors stood up. The cry, an alert to a heart attack somewhere in the amphitheatre stalls, seemed simultaneously, even instead, to be sounding the alarm, at this first sign of psychological abuse on stage, that Creon clearly needed 'help', Antigone protection *from* him, and not a moment to lose.

Hearing that story, I relived Pat's production as in yet another direct line, back in time to CH from that Epidaurus night and forward from Sophocles' premiere of it in 442 BC in Athens. The story chimes, too, with the way that the Humanities stand by 'on call' to shed light, correct the tiller on the straying boat of our uncomprehending thoughts, long after we have left those buildings.

One time I got to Ciao Bella earlier than the others for our annual lunch. Pat was already there. He had been drawing a triangle on a napkin and said that he always drew one when he had to solve a problem, labelling its base corners with the two issues in conflict to see what suggested itself as the best word (usually an action to be taken) to put at the top. I was sixty. He was still teaching me. He was there. I was there. The top of the triangle said: 'The Thanking Moment'.

I told him he had been a huge influence on my life and teaching. 'But why?' he asked, genuinely incredulous. 'Because you showed us that your own passion for a subject can be brought into the classroom'. As 'proof', I reminded him how, when the subject of *asyndeton* came up (the Greek rhetorical flourish of, for example, a run of three unconjoined, unpunctuated nouns), he'd explained it as though waxing lyrical about a moment in Beethoven, tapping each of the three words on the blackboard with his chalk to the exclamation "bang bang bang no commas". Another time, he

had written a Greek sentence on the board with such enthusiasm that he had to stop himself from falling off the dais in a successful attempt to chalk up the Greek semi-colon question-mark at the end of it. He listened to my little speech admirably, quizzically, appreciatively.

I used his triangle strategy again last week. It worked. It always works. That he died in 2013 is neither here nor there.

‘Mr Daunt’ had turned on the lights of history and society in anything we translated and read with him. Suddenly there was context, a meeting of three: texts had their times and places, and so all three became real. We discussed what kind of pioneer Thucydides had been, in his *History of the Peloponnesian War* as he set about maturing the historian’s role to embrace issues of morality and politics. Pat called him ‘Thuc’, as if he was on nickname terms with the old boy.

We explored, by translating all of Euripides’ *Helen*, how experimental his theatre had been, and – I remember this vividly – how Euripides picked up the inheritance of ritual Aeschylus and personal Sophocles and shot off at tangents with it, creating a drama highway all the way from 5th century BC Athens to what was happening right then around our theatrical-initiate ears in the latest news from the London theatre, as Pinter’s own tangents became dominant and once again audiences and critics were asking what theatre is and where it was going.

It was Pat who let the ancients teach us the nature of friendship: through him, we got post from Cicero, following his pen through the generously self-revealing paragraphs of his twenty years of letters to his old and close friend Atticus and pulling out plums like ‘How few are they who are able to carry a rather weighty letter without lightening it by reading it’; and his *Letters to Friends*, one of which has him telling Varro that he will drop in on him and that “if you have a kitchen garden in your library, we shall lack for nothing”.³²

Who better than Pat to have introduced us to Socrates? We saw that great man in action talking with his friend Crito, apparently unappalled by being in prison and awaiting execution within days, his Greek a model of crystalline fluency and cogency. It did appal young me that he could be so on song at the brink, and I even wondered if *that* was why. It electrified the lexicon-hunting of everything he was saying, about justice and injustice, and his (for me) maddeningly well thought through refusal to be bailed out and saved from death by Crito. Having in my own life agreed to take a friend to Dignitas in Switzerland should it come to that, I link back to Socrates’s mind, certain in repose. I am haunted by his tremendous independence of thought.

Pat Daunt was genial and cheerful. He smiled. He never seemed tired. He gave us correction that felt like feedback. He was the central trainer of my apprenticeship.

His was a natural *and* a classical goodness, his passion for the subject as finely judged as it was infectious.

It is a rule of considerate conversation to be ready to explain what one means. The Classical poet and writer are not available for questioning and they always knew it. So their use of metaphor and simile, their chosen figures of meaning, ensures *in advance* that the reader down the ages will understand *as fully as possible* what they meant, an elegant take on saying 'put it another way', to a puzzled-*looking* listener, which teases out any part of meaning otherwise left hidden, as on almost every page we turned in Homer's *Iliad* with the Headmaster, Clarence Seaman, as here in Book 16 with Homer making sure we knew exactly how one particular warrior fell to the ground:

Sarpedon toppled over, as an oak tree falls,
or poplar or tall mountain pine which craftsmen cut
with sharpened axes, to harvest timber for a ship—
that's how he lay there stretched out before his chariot . . .³³

CMES was a weekly visitor to the CGs' room, on Friday mornings. Older Grecians said he had his *Iliad* lessons down to a fine art: by the time he'd finished the poem, all the Grecians he had begun it with had left, so he could start it again. It was a terrific introduction. His own measured speech seemed born of Classical metre, the years he had spent knowing where the foot-breaks of a line should go, guiding his everyday voice. He lit my Homer beacon and is present to this day whenever I read Homer himself or those like Keats and Joyce and Walcott who read him in times gone and reveal Homer burning in them.

CMES also showed me an extraordinary act of kindness when, on a pre-dawn stroll round the school after being up all night at the bidding of the Horsham constabulary, he found me in the Thornton B dayroom long before the bell and uncleverly with the lights on, battling through my verse composition. His response was text-book: concern for my sleep as well as the rules, and an offer of extra tuition.

Seen from the inside, it is unconscionable that the Humanities should be dismissed as 'the softer option' (as though 'hard' options are what we always need) by vulgarian bigots who unaccountably have the power to do the dismissing or get it done. Socrates told Crito: "serious thinkers, I believe, have always held that some of the opinions which people entertain should be respected, and others should not. . .". But these individuals harrumph ill-humouredly that Classics is myth and dead language, alien to the world of work. Clearly, they think they can do without the illumination of their language's ancestry; and, when they weep, or experience loss, they do not, as we do, turn to Cicero's *On Friendship* and Ovid's *Heroides* as to a good doctor or a friend. Therapeutic Ovid would be tickled pink to be most of the word Covid, since his philosophy of expecting change and the need to embrace uncertainty spice up our mental survival of it.

“Perfer et obdura, dolor hic tibi proderit olim. (Keep it up, stand firm. Such suffering’s bound to/pay off in the end.)”³⁴

On the day that the 45th President of the US went on trial in his second impeachment, I came across Cicero on his feet in the Roman senate, saying (apocryphally – Sallust says he said it):

A nation can survive its fools, and even the ambitious. But it cannot survive treason from within. An enemy at the gates is less formidable, for he is known and carries his banner openly. But the traitor moves amongst those within the gate freely, his sly whispers rustling through all the alleys, heard in the very halls of government itself.³⁵

We can trace that recent American president’s slurring of the Press as ‘Enemy of the People’ back to its birth in the *Roman Senate* when the *hostis publicus* label was slapped on their commander-in-chief, Nero, not on the scribblers. And it did for him.

We listen when someone tells us, as an old friend once did me, that all anyone needs in life is to mark, learn and inwardly digest the first of three Delphic maxims inscribed in the vestibule of the Temple of Apollo at Delphi: γνῶθι σεαυτον, Know Thyself - words I had for years not thought of in relation to Myself before. I passed them on to my eldest son one night, and he said, with incredulous relief, ‘Is that it, then?’

That the classroom beyond Pat Daunt’s belonged to Martin Barker (MWB) - our serious, impressively methodical, and clearly convert-to-the-cause guide through the unfictional narratives of Xenophon’s *Persian Expedition* and Livy’s *History of Rome* - came to mind lately when I was thinking about Climate Change and how the End of the World really is nigh if we let it. We had an Imminent End of the World experience at CH in 1962, and no option to let it or not: no, it was all in the hands of American and Russian ‘grown-ups’ who did have the option but were pretending not to have.

I will never forget it, because I was unsure whether I would survive to remember it: sitting on Big Side near the cricket pavilion that afternoon looking out across the First XI square in late October and latching on for comfort to the sight of something which seemed the epitome of our world’s indestructibility: a racing cloud.

That it was racing on this particular afternoon, though, made you wonder if it had got wind of the future, as animals do, and was off. For now, it was making sunlight and shadow chase each other across the grass beyond our feet, so that we were torn between believing and doubting the eternal renewal of grass: was grass, too, about to be destroyed, all of Big Side and the planet? Or would nature be all-powerful again tomorrow, even tonight? I thought how literature, art, and music had never tired of celebrating the power in nature, our blessed smallness in her presence; and how the Humanities, like God, kick in for us whenever we remember to call on the solace nestling in their wondrousness which it would take something pretty vast to

obliterate. The Humanities are a laser treatment for the eyes, the mind, the heart, fitting us with Humfocals for seeing everything, including imminent unknowability.

The sheer power of what was about to be destroyed would surely prove stronger than the will to destruction. Wouldn't it? This was 28th October 1962, deadline day in the Cuban Missile Crisis, that afternoon's sun unseasonably hot, like a defiant flare of resistance.

Martin Barker was hall warden that evening. The *crescendo* unison chant countdown to the expected world's end soon after 6 o'clock left him reaching for his cavil, understandably red-faced from the unprecedentedness of it (the world having not come to an end on any other warden's 'watch') and from the unfairness that he should be in a minority of one pitted against us in having to take action such as even Xenophon had never had to cope with, and succeed where Canute had not by turning the tide of eight hundred young Believers in an Alternative Fact. Always a man of few words, MWB let his hammer speak. I think it spoke Ancient Greek that night, Xenophon's "Brevity is the soul of command." ³⁶

On that same 28 October 1962, the BBC's online diary *On This Day* still reports, "faced with a huge US fleet including eight aircraft carriers that had formed an arc 500 miles from the eastern tip of Cuba, Soviet vessels approaching the island turned back" ³⁷. They must have read their Xenophon, a master of the art of retreat. But then Xenophon was a student and personal friend of Socrates.

To that first donning of the bluecoat that made us look alike, we brought childhoods which made us similar already. What that coat did was much more than unify. The ethos of CH comes alive in both the uniform and the building fabric of its backdrop, so we inhabited costume and architecture together. Stepping newly blue-coated into our new world of quadrangle and cloister, arch and avenue was like walking out onto a stage for the first time with no role to play but the school's, an obligation of daily performance and no script. I had never seen a quadrangle or a cloister before, let alone walked through them or belonged in them. It made 'All the world's a stage' even easier to agree to. This acreage of school within the Ring Fence *was* the world.

But whereas old schools normally have newer uniform and older buildings, our uniform was, and thankfully remains, 350 years older than the school. This gave us a completely different perspective (whether or not we knew it at the time) on the timelines of the Humanities, as of Mathematics and Science. We knew the fact, if not the implications of it for us, that our clothes predate Shakespeare, and the rise of the Baroque in music and art, and the invention of trigonometry in 1595. Their silver-buttoned origin in 1552, only six years before the Elizabethan age began, makes them hail from a time of flowing Renaissance, the rediscovery of the Classics two centuries old and counting, and only a century after the Gutenberg printing press changed for ever the reach of the word. An aging Michelangelo was at work on the

Rondanini Pietà in Rome in 1552, and Edmund Spenser was born that year or the next.

Clothed in deep Tudor, we ourselves were placed that much closer to the Classical World proper and the midst of its revival. We were pre-Elizabethan as the Greeks were pre-Roman and the Romans pre-Italian. It brought us, and still does, a sense of historical and cultural vantage, from which point we can look both ways, to and from 1552 and 1902 (the date we are housed *from*), and to and from the present. For us, the great histories of English, British, European and world literature, music and art, the Western Humanities, unroll forward and back into their pasts *from* 1552. It gives us a longer, and a privileged, view of history, drama, literature, music and art.

That *kind* of privilege (in a school which sets its face against such a thing) is our inner support-teacher in the classroom, where the necessary virtue in reading or listening to or looking at anything created in the past is to be able to stand with one foot planted firmly in the year of its creation, the other in the present. This absolute uniqueness of schooling is then clinched by those who teach there. To show us that the Humanities need no resuscitation are those who, in being drawn to teaching at CH, have already bought into its anti-elitist ethos as a *sine qua non* of their own lives and beliefs. (In most cases, at least).

That is why studying *anything* at CH is different from studying anywhere else. The combined effect of our shared home origins and the school's unique ethos works: if you do come across an Old Blue who has airs and graces (God alone knows why), you may be sure that CH is not the cause. CH gives us the singular air and grace we need, but never the plural. Such a lived anti-elitism was like a second cradle, helping father the man and woman.

Whether we are aware of it or not, what we 1552-ites are *getting* is a heightened sense of living through those ages on a par with the exhilarating time-travel career Virginia Woolf gives to her Orlando. Born in 1570 less than 20 years after Christ's Hospital, Orlando was still only in her mid-thirties more than 350 years later, a life-span arching from the court of Elizabeth I to market day in the Old Kent Road in 1928. In his book on Woolf, Jean Guiguet writes that Orlando "takes part in the life of each century with an admirable flexibility and open-mindedness"³⁸.

Our uniform embodies the spirits of at least four of the Humanities - art, history, anthropology and drama. No wonder Fashion has been a university degree course for decades now. Giving any uniform to young people about to enter adolescence, and then insisting they go on wearing it until they are 18, might have challenged their notion of cool (which we didn't have yet). In fact, it seems to set aside (at least till the holidays) the universal desire the young have to use clothes to express their individual personality, character, temperament and sexuality. What is left, when they *don't* have to, is the individual.

As a Housey boy who was at CH more than twenty years before Hertford came to Horsham in 1985, lately watching a video of Band Parade and seeing equal numbers of girls and boys marching into lunch dressed almost exactly alike, I was gladdened by the relaxed pride with which they all carried themselves. I was left thinking what an instructive and conciliatory instrument of education our uniform is. It has accidentally found a brilliant solution to the difference between genders which clothes have usually made hay with. It uses the Tudor, (just) pre-Elizabethan, model to blur those differences creatively (hair and shape the signal exceptions) in the interests of our natural inner androgyny, without it having to be military. No, it is inter-gender and non-binary, it frees otherwise binary-prone young genders, and so its retention is actually moving *with* the times.

This is inspirational in an age – the present, the last fifty years – when a woman can lead the world on climate change, circumnavigate the world, run for presidential office, be a president, and play the great Shakespeare leads like Lear (and not just his daughters) and Hamlet (and not just Ophelia) and Macbeth (and not just his wife); and the proximity of the sexes to each other in equal measure at CH surely now means that a young man's empathy for Ophelia and Cordelia is no longer a matter of unfordable mystery such as we had to peer at then, nor is it a big deal for boys and girls alike to imagine what it is like, as Ovid did in his *Heroides*, to be in the other gender's shoes. This is at the heart of the massive and unique blessing of a CH education.

It made good reading in 2011 to learn that CH students present and past saw the uniform as inseparable from the school's unique identity, and as a unifying strength, over 95% voting to keep it. Retaining the uniform is a central strategy: yes, it's costume, not just uniform; but also it's a non-verbal anti-elitism that helps achieve Blueness. In a community whose members are equals before they start, there is a greater chance that their sense of the collective spirit will benefit them all and the society at large.

Many a false word is spoken in jest. Whoever apparently described CH as 'Charterhouse in fancy dress' is quoted more than his phrase-mongering merits, whether or not, as I am led to believe, he was talking of how the identity of a CH peopled by fee-paying parents would change. The phrase has no merit because it would never be true; tarnishes what may well have been its own good intent; and plays into the hands of those who see CH uniform as quaint, eccentric, anachronistic or in some other conceivable way *patronizable*. (And, of course, enviable).

The bluecoat, like the school it makes famous, is unassailable: it allows plenty of room for the growth of a balanced human being whose worth and selfhood can shine through an outward appearance which can provoke no assumptions about the here and now. It doubles the liberation of fancy dress, in that the wearer is not having to be someone else for the evening, let alone for years. In an age of increasing

concern about the constraints, masquerading as freedoms, in social media on human interaction especially among the young, the theoretical limitations of a uniform which the wearer takes such pride in, and the immediate belonging to a community of like-dressed as well as like-minded souls, make it as liberating a 'fetter' as writing metrical verse. "Our dress," says Leigh Hunt, "was respected out of doors, and is so"³⁹. He was at CH during the French Revolution. Nothing has changed.

I cannot think of a course of study which does not give students the overlap of work and play: the adventures and conjurings, formulas and casebooks, of mathematics and science; and the creativities and impersonations and empathies of ancient and modern languages and literatures and drama, history and art and religion which are at the heart of the Humanities. The inspirational direct line from Mesopotamia to Galileo to Jodrell Bank (whose new Lovell telescope was all over the papers during my first summer at CH in 1957) runs parallel to the human instinct to make speech sing on the page from Pindar to (then) Auden and the story of theatre from Aeschylus to Shakespeare to Pinter, whose soon-to-be legendary early plays from *The Room* to *The Homecoming* book-ended my time there, starting in that same year of 1957, so that we talked about them and saw and read them in the holidays and began to get what all the fuss was about by feeling the shock – and the *point* - of their off-a-cliff spareness, their much-mocked silences, their refurbishing of Everyman.

Scriptless as we make our entrance, we discover new language: school slang, the poetry of new names at roll-call. The buttons on our coat-cuffs rattle on the desk as we open our books on the words of others which we need, words of elsewhere and elsewhen, Latin, Greek, French, German, and the actions and speeches, lives and deaths of history, the heights and depths of geography, the beguiling wordlessness of instrumental music and welcome intrusiveness of words into that music by the singing voice, and the teaching of the spectrum in art.

Those words we are given in the classroom are not only to read, but daily opportunities for us to improvise with, and for our instinctual voice to perform, to the standards of the hallowed best of the past by reading aloud as well as we ever have, by translating and transcreating from the word-hoard of centuries, and to make *those* words the new words on our lips and pen-tips, inking our script. This process, once started in the right hands and classrooms, becomes our word-history, part of a wider and deeper cultural history. So we learn to connect: with the first ascent of Everest in 1953 still fresh in our minds in those days, we find Wordsworth crossing the Alps and climbing Snowdon in our early books and are suckers ever after for the literature, art, music and very *idea* of climbing.

Orlando is Woolf the novelist *at play* in fiction (as Cervantes was in *Don Quixote* and Fielding in *Tom Jones*), making a game of history in her genre-busting book, a biography which reads like a history, and is one; and a novel, a sequence of episodes, a letter to the reader, and a love-letter, in the spirit of the acrobatically all-

encompassing story that David Jesson-Dibley made for, and of, all of us in his *A Pageant of Christ's Hospital*, performed in the Garden Quad in the summer of 1963 with a star cast including the boy king Edward VI, Elizabeth I, Edmund Campion, George Peele, Samuel Pepys, James II, Antonio Verrio, Charles Lamb and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and a historical crocodile of boys down the centuries. Woolf, and J-D as we knew him, in the space of her single short experimental novel and his short play, develop, she, a character and, he, a school, whose life-span of centuries also compares with that of the curriculum in many Humanities disciplines. Like seeing the Blue Whale in London's Science Museum then, it is a thing to marvel at, at the sheer span of the creation and, through art and good artifice, its fingertip fashioning of the sublime in time or space.

Tony Coombs posted his copy of *A Pageant of Christ's Hospital* to me last autumn. I had forgotten that in it, Coleridge gets to speak from his 'Frost at Midnight' two lines which capture his misery in Newgate Street, then spoken to his sleeping infant,

For I was reared
In the great city, pent 'mid cloisters dim,
And saw nought lovely but the sky and stars. ⁴⁰

I thought how this testament to solitariness being spoken that night contrasted with the pageant itself, a display of community in action, a CH forte. In a text to me the other day, Tony Coombs wrote: "I think the shaping role of CH was a lot to do with societies. It was a model of a society in itself. And within it the varied structures of House, Classes, friendship groups".

So, I thought, it taught us how to be together and gave us what was for many of us our first living example of community outside of the family and more objectively realised than one. I have gone on being drawn to experiments in community, working at different times for the Arvon Foundation, the Poetry School, the Othona Community, and Exiled Writers Ink, and with regular audiences and groups. One of the mentors in my life who was not at CH but carries its spirit and secret is the Portuguese pianist Maria João Pires, who turned Belgais, the farm where she lived in her native country, into a Centre for the Study of Arts and especially music:

What we do here is just wake up people. It's like somebody's sleeping and you go and say, 'you have to wake up now' . . . because if they tried to *meet* themselves, they are going to create such a power that all this stuff is not necessary any more. You know, I think people have no idea about the power that is created by you being yourself. They have no idea that with this they can do anything. *Anything*". ⁴¹

In the workings of its uniqueness of community and society, CH wakes people up to who they individually are and can be, but in that special company of others.

CH's ethos hung from all the rafters – in classrooms, Chapel, Music School, Big School - priming us at every turn: on class and race in Forster's *A Passage to India* with the

wonderful Olive Peto; the value of every human life in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* (in the *Prologue*, the gathering of pilgrims at the tavern in Southwark felt like a coming-together on the concourse at Victoria station for the start-of-term special train); equality in Ovid's *Heroides* (those women were abandoned by men no matter what their class or human merit); the equivalence of cultures in the act of translation; mission across the world in Brangwyn's murals in the Chapel; the part-song competition in Big School for borderline warblers upgraded into exposure at the sharp end of musical performance on the stage; and an *unexposed* safety-in-numbers performance in Chapel for all in the *Magnificat* settings by Stanford and Walmisley of translations from the Latin Vulgate which taught me how to read music. All the while, the complicit fabrics of Tudor bluecoat and late Victorian building worked their dual way.

David Jesson-Dibley and Olive Peto were the presiding geniuses of our English studies. J-D's classroom was on the first floor of the Classics block, branch to its trunk. Tony Coombs and I remember him gratefully and fondly. His good humour and relaxed conversational style came from a lifelong love of literature – he was especially keen on the Pre-Romantics – and what passed for his approach drew us in to the text like a meditation-teacher. Tony's recall over lunch led to this flowing letter:

"Shakespeare in the classroom was always a living process of reading out loud, leading to a discussion that connected language, character and dramatic structure. We studied an excellent anthology of narrative poetry, *The Poet's Tale*. The exploration of breath-taking narratives went hand in hand with the stimulating contrasts in poetic language between Chaucer, Coleridge, Browning, Wilfrid Gibson. Sometimes we wrote parodies (of 'The Rape of the Lock', for instance), which was an entertaining way of getting inside the style and language of different periods.

After the age of 15 I was no longer taught Literature in the classroom by "J-D" (as we knew him). But in our final year, at 18 and 19, he led a multi-disciplinary group of school leavers in a more Liberal Studies approach. He sensed a complacency – a cliquish attachment to our specialist subjects and our university aspirations. He encouraged us to think about the lives of others, and the wider society that we were soon going to be living in. His classroom library was as much blue (Pelicans) as orange (Penguin fiction); there were lots of the Penguin Specials (on political hot-spots and social issues) and copies of *New Society* – all of these he encouraged us to borrow. In his struggle to get us to think outside our "comfort zone", he would occasionally try an experimental strategy.

Still a vivid memory, 55 years later, is the afternoon when one of the quieter and more mature boys in the class refused, in a confrontational way, to stop talking to the boy next to him. This was a deliberate challenge to the authority of the teacher, who ordered him out of the classroom. There was a palpable sense of shock in the room. David asked us to write about what had just happened. We were jolted into words. Only later did we find out that the whole confrontation was completely staged. It was set up by David as a provocation to fresh thinking and writing, which it undoubtedly stimulated. This was a radical intervention of a type that we weren't used to.

David was a searcher. His social compassion and his personal commitment to the people who had been left behind by society were deep. When we were at school, we didn't know anything about his prison visiting. A couple of years after us he left CH and moved to London. Here he started a fulfilling new career in adult education, teaching Literature and Drama for Birkbeck Extra-Mural Department, for residential courses and summer schools. The flexible part-time teaching structure

allowed him to focus on prison visiting. He was a listener and an enabler. Prison visiting eventually became his profound vocation".⁴²

*The Poet's Tale*⁴³ (with J-D) has taken on a mythic status for both of us. I bought a copy the other day to relive the impact of poems I had then never set eyes on before: riveting dark narratives in W W Gibson's 'Flannan Isle', Morris's 'The Haystack in the Floods', Pound's graphic and visionary 'Ballad of the Goodly Fere', Crabbe's 'Peter Grimes' (my introduction to Britten before the world premiere of his *War Requiem* in 1962), Matthew Arnold's largely forgotten 'Sohrab and Rustum', and Coleridge's complete *Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, which has haunted me ever since, along with *Richard II*, and the Prologue to the *Canterbury Tales* in what was then the brand new (1951) Penguin translation by Nevill Coghill. As part of Penguin's post-war thrust to salvage the civilisation we had not known, Coghill unlocked the neglected attic of Middle English after the War and made *The Canterbury Tales* and William Langland's *Piers Plowman* sound as though both poets had actually been living next door all the time.

To read and act Shakespeare is to know, both then and since, how his voice can come from the prompt-box within our earshot when we are on the stage of our own lives and busy improvising. We open a book of poetry, and into our mouths come the poet's instant translations of our feelings. We can be given the nerve to speak in our own voice, enabled by a poet who is doing the same, and whether our own words have failed us or not, we hear words we feel we would have said from our own truth if we could have. We can trust the poet-prompter to put our *own* words into our mouth. It is the same in music: Sir Simon Rattle, talking the other day about the most *honest* music he knew, the half-minute piccolo solo at the end of the third movement of Bela Bartók's *Concerto for Orchestra* which sounds, he said, like the last bird alive on earth at the end of World War II when the music was written, said, "you can see Bela Bartók sitting in front of you telling you the truth"⁴⁴.

I think that is what these poets do: they sit in front of us, their face framed by the page, and they tell us the truth, as Matthew Arnold does in 'The Buried Life'. And it isn't only their truth, it's ours, it's everyone's.

That rare joy in our lives, a real woman, Olive Peto took us through GCE A Level: lovely, charismatic, a fine actor and a director of plays, her warm, resonant voice lighting our lamps. She brought a woman's presence to our Chaucer, 'becoming' the female lead in his 'Boke of the Duchesse', and she drew us closer to Desdemona in *Othello* and to the women as well as the men in *A Passage to India*.

David Herbert was a vital guide to Keith Chandler, who became an English Grecian and played Leigh Hunt in J-D's *Pageant*. Keith wrote to me indebtedly:

"Of all the teachers at CH, Nell Todd and David Herbert were most important to me. I was taught by David Herbert at GCE and then A Level. His classroom walls were decorated by a metre-high frieze of characters from *The Canterbury Tales* which, as a natural drifter-off, caught my imagination. "Mr

Herbert”, as we called him – he would have disdained the more familiar appellations which some of his colleagues seemed to invite – had, above all, a huge enthusiasm for, and knowledge of, English poetry and Elizabethan drama. His *Penguin Book of Narrative Verse* is still, I think, the most thorough guide to that genre. He soon infected me with his love of stories in verse, from Langland to Robert Frost – an enthusiasm which has lasted and influenced my own attempts to write poetry.

David Herbert was the most gentle and encouraging of teachers – I can still visualise those kindly grey-blue eyes as he surveyed us, a supercilious group of Deputy Grecians, with patience and good humour. I was rather “put off” by the posturings and gimmicks of one or two members of the English Department, but with David Herbert his teaching methods were straightforward: first a lively reading followed by discussion and the systematic analysis of selected passages.

What with his idyllic house by Doctor’s Lake to which we were sometimes invited for Literary Society evenings, and his never less than courteous manner, he seemed to me to be semi-detached from the rough and tumble of daily CH life. Somehow I wasn’t surprised to learn that he had left teaching to set up his own publishing business. “Gentleman and Scholar” – sounds old-fashioned, but to me and many others he was a lifeline to more civilised pleasures than were routinely to be found in a post-war all-male boarding school”.⁴⁵

I used to dream that I had managed to leave CH without handing in my Grecians bluecoat and still had it. But the Humanities at CH were meant to come home with me, and stay, in hundreds of ways. The sight, first thing in the morning, after rain, of a snail halfway up a wall outside my front door just the other morning prompted the driven man in me to think the poor thing’s heading for nowhere promising, before the undriven man sees it’s heading *away from* the rainwater on the ground; and I’m back to the day my first Latin teacher (in the Prep) who then taught us General Studies in the Upper, the genial, clear, and gently amused Peter (Austin) Jones brought avant-garde art into class on the front cover of that weekend’s *Sunday Times*: irregularly geometric off-cuts in different colours making a small hump-backed shape, Matisse’s *The Snail*. It was the first time any colour supplement had fronted with abstract art. I see it every time I see a snail or read the word, and remember how snails were snails then as now, Matisse’s leading backwards to Shakespeare’s *Venus and Adonis* and the lines Keats would be so beaten all ends up by:

Or, as the snail, whose tender horns being hit,
Shrinks back into his shelly cave with pain
And there all smothered up in shade doth sit,
Long after fearing to put forth again . . .⁴³

Peter Jones’s Matisse emblazoned my sight of a snail, and abstract art, for good.

Getting closer, young, to the poets is like being put on different terms with Nature and God. The poets, narrators, novelists, dramatists, composers, artists and performers we get to know at CH are among the Leaving Service’s “*great benefits that you have received in this place*”. The memory of what they said unlocks the lifelong daily support we need from them: to finesse our integrity, accept our losses, comfort our unclarity, look to the mind, the body and the spirit. Our teachers even left us printed testimonies to add to their live lessons on Humanities’ shelves – like

Edward Malins's books on Yeats and on Irish Gardens, David Herbert's *Penguin Book of Narrative Verse*, David Jesson-Dibley's selections of Robert Herrick and Leigh Hunt, and Peter Jones's *Penguin Imagist Poetry* and his own poetry. So we find, in their love for their life-subject, a confirmation, were any needed, that we have been on the right lines taking them with us on our journey.

From the years of lexicon-leafing eureka's, we learn to diagnose English words, translating them back into antiquity and letting their meanings stare us in the face. Doors to the vaults of science, medicine and psychology stand ajar for us to home in on the words of Greek and Latin ancestry. It arms us as translators. It fedges us in our dialogues.

Translation helps unlock life: it ups our game to see plainly that wisdom and humanity can be learned from those who in our childhoods were called 'foreigners', reducing the negative in 'us and them' to a larger single 'us' on the world's single stage of past, present and future. Taking up careers in translation, we find it - as we began to know it when young - to be an art which is sibling to that of empathy, coaching us to understand the writer's reason for writing something. I remember less ruefully in this respect DSM's "why can't you write what any reasonable Roman is likely to have meant?" It helps us write for ourselves, too: as Peter Daniels, poet and translator from the Russian, has written:

"Translation is good discipline, like editing, but also liberating - you don't have to start a poem from nowhere".⁴⁷

This pass key opens up moral and ethical outcomes: take the responsibility of knowing how any word ending in -phobia is about fear before it is ever about hatred (a majority think the opposite), that we fear strangers or Islam or people of colour before we ever hate them, and we hate them because we believe their otherness has caused our fear of them.

The Coronavirus pandemic in the autumn of 2020 has done much for the debate on mental health. Mortality has become as much of a daily issue as shopping, and those young enough to think seldom of dying, or old enough to know better than postpone at least the thoughts of it, may therefore be readier prey to an enemy as invisible as Covid: anxiety. The Greek word that gives us 'anxiety' - $\alpha\gamma\chi\omega$ (ancho) - means 'I choke'. The Classical poets and writers showed their successors and us how to grasp that our human anxiety, our fear of mortality and resistance to change, our self-defeating indignation at setbacks in any shape or form, let alone size, all need addressing head-on and getting the juice out of and our breath back.

The human need to face, and deal with, these issues is literally as old as the Greeks, who we first read doing so at CH where change and isolation were less strong than tradition and community, the latter pair ideal for learning about the former. Keith Chandler wrote to me of the lockdown: " 'Well well', as David Jesson-Dibley would

sigh, flapping one hand and running fingers through his hair with the other, 'I daresay we shall all survive...' " 48.

Life under lockdown in the 2020-2021 pandemic is compared to living in wartime. We who were brought up clear of World War Two's end and knew of it through family stories of local air-raids, were brought up close to it again at CH, gathered, as in wartime, round a rather crackly radio for an outside broadcast from the newly consecrated Coventry Cathedral of the premiere of Britten's *War Requiem* on 30 May 1962. An unbroken link revealed itself back 38 years to World War One in Britten's settings of Wilfred Owen, killed in action in 1918, the very same year that the original church - which the Luftwaffe bombed during the destruction of Coventry on 14 November 1940 - had been designated as Coventry's Cathedral.

I'd never heard bells like it before. I'd never heard of Wilfred Owen. And I'd never imagined that there could be any connection between the Latin Requiem Mass and modern poetry. Outside of what Big School and the Chapel gave us, it was the most memorable musical experience of my time at CH and, like Classics, it created waves which went on breaking.

No-one who has heard the *War Requiem* will forget Owen's modern soldier voice bursting into the church of the Mass, and how Britten homes in on Owen's war *noise*, – the rattle, the pattering and stuttering – to clone his own sound, at one graphic moment answering Owen's irruption into the holy nave by wrenching the Latin Mass out of deep Church into a racingly dangerous outdoor arena with a single baton stroke.

Britten helped me back to John Donne's "Death, thou shalt die", for as long as that oath could last in a total war zone Donne had not imagined. In 1962, we were very much aware of Britten as a living composer still writing music, and the name Aldeburgh was as legendary as Coventry, and Chaucer's Canterbury, Shakespeare's Stratford, and Samuel Pepys's London.

My fascination with music was given respectable savvy and a more confident love at CH. As one of those who couldn't play anything, I remember the difficult mix of envy and joy walking down the corridor of the Music School past one tiny practice room after another, each with a piano, none of them empty, each of them healthily careless of volume, on my way to a house part-song choir practice or the Gramophone Appreciation class.

We who couldn't play anything had so much chance to make music by singing. Rehearsals in chapel for the whole school felt like the real thing they were. One Sunday afternoon we found ourselves among the massed choirs of Sussex schools at the Dome in Brighton for Haydn's *Creation* under the baton of Sir Adrian Boult.

Knowing that Vaughan Williams had just died gave an elegiac edge to Andrew Porter's performance of *The Lark Ascending* in Big School. Andrew, who became an enduring friend after CH, had to hold those two high final violin solo notes against the Big School clock chiming nine. My eye was caught by the admiration and incredulity on Peggy Seaman's face as he managed it, while we all knew the clock would have to be allowed its *own* way and Andrew be left with the composer's: Vaughan Williams had thrown everything at those notes, a 'hold' over each as well as dotted after, the marking *lunga* beneath both, and *even* a diminuendo - which made the clock sound louder.

With music as with poetry, it is better not to be prepared for what will hit you next, and one morning in our Gramophone Record Music Appreciation period was no exception. It made waves, all right. More than thirty years later.

In those days, gramophones could resemble varnished wooden ovens on legs. One of them graced the room in the Music School, large enough for a small orchestra, where the class took place. The varnished parquet and Malcolm Drummond's crepe soles enlivened an already expectant silence with an *andante con moto* squeak prelude as he approached that wooden oven, opened the lid, and placed an offering inside. You could have heard a needle drop, and we did. Never had my reluctant ears been less ready – nor more - for what happened next.

I thought, is that music first and words second, or are they happening simultaneously, first equal, joined at the thigh? *Both* were exciting. I'd never heard *any* of Britten's vocal music, nor heard *of* the poet, Rimbaud. Rimbaud had thrown half a keyboard of vowels into the first poem, Britten's opening setting on the same note reinforcing this sheaf of word-sounds -
ay/euur/a/ay/e/eh/e/a/ah/e/eh/e/a/ah/oh/ah – in 'J'ai seul la clef de cette parade, de cette parade sauvage'.⁴⁹

Only several moments later did it strike me that this French utterance must also mean something *verbally*. But I was already at home in the declamatory lusciousness of it, vital enough to have a meaning in itself. "I alone have the key to this parade, to this savage parade", he says. He, Rimbaud *was* the key, and by association so was the singer, to this parade, and it was savage. Rimbaud and Britten, in unison, were saying, "I've got the key, come on in, the parade's fine".

It's the *last* line of Rimbaud's prose poem 'Parade', from his cycle *Les Illuminations*, Britten's own title. Again more than thirty years later, in 1999, I taught the poetry of Rimbaud. In 2009 and 2010 I staged a weekend, at the Red House in Aldeburgh, of Britten's Poets, and *Les Illuminations* was in it.

At CH I discovered that I could get closer to the music in a concert if the performers were friends or classmates. It felt as though I was being given guest admission to the

secret of what for me was the miracle of playing an instrument or using the voice to that level of perfection.

Some of their concerts are fresh in the memory: as when Frank Hunter and Michael Follis sang tenor and bass solos alongside glamorous professional ladies off the London train at an edge-of-the-seat performance of Mozart's *Requiem* in the Chapel, attended, I think, by everybody. I listened to, watched, and sang in the school chorus in it. Opposite me that night was Brangwyn's *St Ambrose Training The Choir in his church at Milan AD385*.

Then Haydn's *Sinfonia Concertante* in B flat for violin, cello, oboe, bassoon, was put on in Big School, with Andrews Porter (violin) and Saint (cello) alongside Frank Hunter (oboe) and Philip Evans (bassoon): the first movement cadenza was my ear-baptism in what cadenza can *do*, exposing the players as the orchestra fell silent around them, pitch-perfection beckoning to boys left out on their own in a work written for adults.

It was mid-morning in early September at the end of the CH holidays more than sixty years ago, and I was still in bed. Not unkindly my father, popping his head round the door, asked: "You planning to get up sometime today?" "It's thick fog outside", I said, pointing to the window and something rather less than fog. "Ah, well", he said, as if the conversation was carrying on normally,

Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness,
Close bosom-friend of the maturing sun";⁵⁰

the opening lines of John Keats's ode 'To Autumn' which I had never read. My teenage mouth had fallen open. I had never heard Keats *spoken* before, let alone like that - in words made to sound like the most obvious thing to say, naturally, next. I trace my love of Keats back to that moment.

Within weeks, we read Keats's 'Ode to a Grecian Urn' at CH. Like Britten's Rimbaud, this score of words alone enchanted me into the scenes on the urn being worded and away from what the lines actually meant; and it shocked me, when I started listening properly to why its people and creatures could be thought happy with the prospect of no future, like the lava-casts of Pompeii, except that Keats's people were unscarred and art had frozen them worse than even anything that volcano could do.

William Morris designed and printed *Poems of John Keats* for the Kelmscott Press in 1893, by which time he would have employed Frank Brangwyn as an apprentice. But for me the link from Keats's 'Grecian Urn' to Brangwyn's sixteen murals for the Chapel is the relationship between motionlessness and dynamic energy. There is even singing and playing in both: Keats's piper inspiring the belief that "Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard/Are sweeter", and, in the murals, a child's singing voice and a playing lute, *The Conversion of St Augustine* and *St Ambrose*

Training His Choir, and, most memorably for me as I stared at it over my hymn-book or through my praying fingers every day for years from the Thornton B pews, Brangwyn's sixteenth and last mural of the set, *Let The People Praise Thee, O God*, with the unforgettable, dogged figure of the hunched organ player.

I was ten, and at the end of my first term in the Prep, just before Christmas 1956 before I saw inside the Chapel. Prep boys sat upstairs in the Chapel gallery for the Carol Service, and there for the first time I had a gods'-eye view of the Brangwyns stretching down both sides of the nave, tantalisingly difficult to see all, or even more than four, of, but the pleasure of their tempera colours in sharp contrast, to very great effect, with the red brick above them and sea of bluecoats in the stalls below against warm oak panelling.

The Chapel lights were all full on, but you felt light was on in the murals too. I had never seen a mural in real life before, let alone eight in one line and eight more opposite like two painted facing choirs. Even from above, you witnessed grandeur and simplicity coexisting, full-colour freeze-frames in dynamic stories of real events which had actually gone on happening after Brangwyn had 'stopped' them. The next best sighting of all sixteen together came to me at the Leaving Service eight years later, walking their kind gauntlet of watchful blessing in answer to my name. Living with the Brangwyns, as with our architecture, we could also ignore them for days on end while they went on making their vision-stories such a part of our living and breathing that they raised the bar of what mattered around us and kept it high.

Soon after I had moved into the Upper School and so to Thornton B's seats just inside the Chapel on the left as you enter, I stared up daily at that sixteenth mural, the most complex, his 'Let The People Praise Thee'. It wanted answers I never came up with then, even as I tried to immerse myself in it as a world away from the worry of that day's vocabulary test, only to find it mesmerically preoccupying too: the identity of the wretched little man in the impossibly green coat-like surplice who stole the show yet was ignored by everyone around him; whose frozen-looking fingers hung down onto the icy-shine keys of the little organ he was playing; and how so few of those gathered round him were singing, so many not, like a (to me then) desperate scene of praise in the face of human lostness.

All the more wonderful, then, to get answers from Libby Horner's magnificently illustrated and thoroughly narrative book, *Christ's Hospital Murals* (Horner, 2008)⁵¹, and yet remain content in the knowledge that this sixteenth mural had given me my first taste of a response to art (not a translation of it) which could not be marked wrong.

Different Old Blues will think first of one Brangwyn or another depending on where their House had sat. Sometimes our house-positions moved, or we went to Chapel concerts and sat looking at a new one: the chilling vulnerability of Stephen's freshly uncovered curving back before the first stone was cast; Brangwyn's fabulous greens

for the shallows through which Paul is being helped, leggy sea-bird spectators in the foreground like an advance guard of us in our pews looking up; a group of figures facing away from us as they arrive in Rome, so that we are facing the direction of their arriving, and St Paul is one of them; the Eastern composure of St Augustine in a garden and then at Ebbsfleet; St Patrick in the Forest; St Columba landing on Iona.

I can appreciate what one Old Blue, the artist Keith Vaughan wrote, after seeing the murals again more than thirty years after leaving CH:

"I looked again at the Brangwyns. It was like looking at my own face – at something so familiar that it was part of me. Nothing surprised. I had carried away no illusions. They were exactly the same. In each one were the same details which particularly pleased or displeased me, and the same sacred thoughts and fantasies which I had left there years ago when I had stared at them day after day for eight years".⁵²

Except that it was also *their* faces which come rushing back from Horner's illustrations. That picturing legacy from CH resonates through my marvelling at the antiphonally facing mural frescoes down both sides of Giotto's Scrovegni Chapel in Padua, and the visual language Dante talks of in Canto X of his *Purgatory* when Virgil and Dante find themselves face to face with sculptured friezes cut into the rock halfway up the mountain. The Brangwyns had become a blueprint for being surrounded by art and belonging in it.

No more than a hundred yards across the quad from the Brangwyns was the Art School. I 'see' inside it now, though I had no talent for what went on there, as bright with daylight and decorated in every colour imaginable and real, which was the work of the moving spirit of the place, Nell Todd. Keith Chandler shared his joy in her to me:

Nell Todd imported a wonderful spirit of gaiety and colour into the CH cultural life of the 1950s. With her red hair and lipstick in various shades of shocking-ness and flamboyant dress sense she brought a real sense of vitality and creative energy into what sometimes felt like a male-dominated and semi-militaristic school routine.

Nell Todd's "teaching methods" were far from conventional – from the huge gong which she struck to signal the beginning and end of each lesson, to the life-sized Sicilian marionettes which she kept propped up splay-legged as models for us to draw, to the Bach motets which boomed out of loudspeakers over both sides of the Art School, to the banner hung from the balcony of her flat which announced: "*The Eye when it is Opened beholds all the Wonders of the Universe*". I remember how for a short time she kept ducklings in her courtyard garden because she loved the tinkling cheeping sounds they made. Always there seemed to be wonderful props, fountains and fairground rides, gorgeous and fantastic costumes, in the process of being prepared for some forthcoming Shakespearian production.

As one of the very few female and motherly members of staff she inevitably attracted misfits and loners like myself to her afternoon Art Club, where she set us up with as much clay or paint as we could wish for in what she kindly called her "Genius Corner". What an extraordinarily vivid and generous presence Nell Todd was. Everything she did was accomplished 'con brio', whether it was playing the cello, or bringing back stacks of sticky oil paintings from her holidays in Majorca to

show us, or organising “art trips” to London galleries and even occasional picnics for some lucky few to experience “real opera” at Glyndebourne. I wonder what our contemporary Ofsted Inspectors, with their box-ticking propensities and preference for carefully planned lessons, would have made of Nell Todd!? ⁵³

In 2019 the CH Head of English, Stephen Walsh, kindly renewed an invitation he had made to me to come and talk to his students about translation. I had demurred before, because of a throat operation, but had also been relieved not to go. It took time to admit why, to myself and then to him. I wrote:

“When I was at Christ’s Hospital, I received, across the board but with awesome intensity in classical languages, a quality of teaching I have held as nothing less than sacred ever since. Like the Ancient Mariner, but untraumatized, I talk about it all over the place and remain very contentedly in its debt. Those years of daily translation to and from Greek and Latin, and also from French, have absolutely shaped my working life in languages; and that awesomeness has itself remained so productive, as though in a happily never-ending novitiateship, that I feel deeply reluctant to step outside the role by presenting myself in that old learning world again as the imparter of any wisdom. I fear the experience will be a memory-buster, and I, selfishly, can’t bring myself to risk it.

An accompanying reason for my delays in responding to your ongoing courtesy has been a hope that this feeling would pass, or I would be able to common-sense it away. This hasn’t happened.

It may, ironically, be that the very fact of coming clean with you, and with myself, about this will help to dispel its power up ahead. Sixty years on, I can’t count on it ... I am delighted without exception by the wonderful array of translations in the roll of endeavour you have decently sent me here, and I warm especially to the inclusion of Leopardi (whom I learned about in Italy from one of his finest translators, Patrick Creagh, as well as later taking a group on a Leopardi weekend to Recanati), Horace, Sappho, Baudelaire, and Machado, whose ‘Poema de un dia’ in particular and that whole collection *Campos de Castilla* strike me as one of his, and Spanish poetry’s, most scintillating achievements.

Stephen, I hope this finally puts you in the picture. Thank you for having wanted to continue to believe in what I have to offer, and congratulations, on this showing alone, for having clearly been continuing the tradition of awesomeness in literary language teaching at CH which is never going to cease being an essential part of the best education in any truly expansive and humanly centred culture”. ⁵⁴

Stephen’s empathic reply included the sentence:

“I’m sure the feeling won’t pass, but I will leave it to you to get in touch if you ever do want to ‘engage’ on any level”.

I hope I do. Meanwhile, it means a lot that ‘the feeling’ should have been respected by him as unpuzzling. Knowing the place where that feeling came from must have helped him.

Remembering a place while you are actually in that place, as I was that August midday in 2013, is rare. Usually, we are sobered by regret at our absence from a place and time, the memory summoned in a flash by a word spoken or written or read, like quadrangle; or a name, like Brangwyn; or a silver-buttoned coat or brick cloister or echoing footstep or a clock chiming the quarters and then the hour. Or even when we just wake up by mistake at five to seven.

London, 28 February and 31 October 2021

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NOTE: This essay includes some moments from my pamphlet *Imagination and the Classical Inheritance in Literature*, Guild of Pastoral Psychology, 1999. It also uses a paragraph or two and ideas which also feature in my lectures on Ovid, Coleridge, Keats and Edward Thomas, complete recordings of the last three of which are available at <https://grahamfawcett.co.uk/events/>.

POSTSCRIPT

Since writing this piece, it has been explained to me that a recent change to Housey intake policy has seen the admission of full fee-paying students who have come to represent some 25% of young people at the school. No age can ignore the tough love of that great unifier of the Humanities and Sciences, Pythagoras, when, as voiced by Ovid in his *Metamorphoses*, he insisted:

“Omnia mutantur, nihil interit”

Everything changes, nothing perishes.

But here I dare say Yes and then again No to Pythagoras in standing by everything I have written about equality and the bluecoat at CH. Our bluecoat has not perished. It remains the lightning conductor of change, ensuring that whatever change may be thought necessary can be harnessed to the school’s main purpose by the uniform’s enduring and unifying value as guarantor of the ethos of the place. The bluecoat is the soul of Christ’s Hospital. It says everything.

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