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James at Wadham and as collaborator

Since the 1990s the Oxford Classics Faculty has had a post called the Grocyn Lecturership, which is dedicated to organizing and delivering the teaching of Greek and Latin, especially to those taking beginners' courses. It was to fill this key role that James moved from his beloved Harrow. His seven years in the post was a period of creative consolidation: our very successful 'Course II' had just begun, for those with neither Greek nor Latin at A Level, and so had 'MILC' classes, 'Mods Intercollegiate Language Consolidation' Classes, which also still run. With Andrew Hobson and a team of others James provided seven years of students with a fine linguistic foundation. The programme to train graduate students to provide Greek and Latin 'MILC' was a particularly important innovation, its influence ongoing through those whom James taught to teach.

Then, as now, Wadham was committed to expanding the range of students taking Classics; and when the post was offered to colleges Peter Derow and I set about persuading our colleagues to bid for association. We could not know who would be appointed, but Governing Body understood the probabilities and was by no means sure that it wanted to elect a superannuated teacher to a Fellowship. James was chosen by the committee; and so the case came to Wadham: should we offer a Fellowship? To be frank, his undergraduate record was not a distinguished one, and Harrow was not necessarily a name to impress fellows of Wadham; but he had started to publish in earnest, and we'd managed to get a much admired senior figure, Cliff Davies, as one of the college representatives on the committee. With Cliff's support, after much debate, James was elected. So he came — and, after all the controversy, everyone quickly came to love him.

The key to this affection in Wadham as elsewhere was his capacity for friendship, his conviviality, the range and depth of his enthusiasm and his knowledge. He was also extraordinarily willing to take on jobs, as the Warden has described. Dean was a role to which James was particularly suited: one might think he was named for it. One story of his wisdom and tolerance appeared in the *Telegraph* obituary; here's another. My Ancient History colleague Peter Derow lived in college. Once when he was on leave he got into a heated debate with Olivier Hekster, who was teaching in his stead. Over a bottle or two of wine in Peter's room the conversation had turned to opera and *La Traviata* in particular: was Renata Tebaldi or Maria Callas the greater Violetta? This needed to be settled by listening to *Addio del Passato*. They first listened to Tebaldi on Peter's stereo, and Olivier then went to his room, also in Front Quad. For reasons that seemed to make sense at the time, he decided not to take the album back to Peter's room, but to play the aria at high volume with the window open; Peter returned the favour from his room; and the following morning they both received letters from the Dean. James pointed out that he had never sent down a Fellow or a Lecturer, never mind both in one go, but would be perfectly happy to do so if they repeated the exercise. As often, his humour had far more effect than sternness might have done.

James had no obligations to teach for the college. But of course, being James, he did teach, giving tutorials on Greek prose from the term he arrived. Gradually he expanded his range. On first meeting I asked him what he might be interested in offering: 'Anything that would be useful,' came the reply. 'I'm a generally literary sort of bloke.' In retirement he was the model Emeritus Fellow, keen to help out, whether by teaching or by buying Twiglets; delighted to be involved in the college's classical activities, but never interfering; a master at working the room at a party and then quietly slipping out. Occasionally his slight clumsiness might obstruct the quiet departure, however, and the whole room would hear a histrionic 'O my gaaahd'. Above all he paid attention to individuals, their interests and needs. He could quickly find rapport with students: at the Wadham Classics Summer School in August one sixth-former emerged from her half-hour tutorial saying 'I've just discovered my new favourite person!' Gossip he relished too, and (like Bowra) he could be delightfully rude about people, though I never heard him be rude to anyone, or about a student.

James was also a model in his continuing productivity. The Wikipedia page has a list of books he wrote or edited — 29 items: we've heard extracts from three of these. If one of the best things I've done for Wadham was to help persuade the college to make James a Fellow, one of the best things I ever did for myself was to suggest in early 2008 that we team up and write a commentary on Propertius 3. I had been working on Propertius since 1980, and when I spotted that there was a gap that could be filled while these studies were fresh in my mind it seemed important to make this commentary feel a very different undertaking. James had written a little on Propertius, and he had spent decades thinking about how to explain linguistic difficulties in clear ways. He had completed his own commentary on Euripides' *Supplikes* not long before, other projects were well advanced, and he tentatively said yes. We experimented in writing, exchanging, and revising commentary on two poems, and quickly found that we could work together. I learnt so much, not least about getting on with it and bringing work to completion. As well as a sense of where there was a need for grammatical comment, James had an ear for sound effects and for drama that I lack. He was good at seeing informative parallels in English literature, though our word count meant we could not include them all. I enjoyed the comfort of knowing someone else was making progress, as he always was, but above all I had enormous fun. We said at the start that we might mark places where we disagreed; in the end there were no such places. We both took pleasure in the cut and thrust of argument about interpretation, and especially about English phrasing, trying version after version in an effort to produce clarity or a satisfying cadence. I'm now talking as much about the second commentary, on *Aeneid* 3, as the Propertius one. This came about simply because I wanted to write another book with James, and I am proud to say that we found a text that suited us well. James's Thespian tendencies become more prominent here: in his mind this was a performed text, with him playing the part of Aeneas, or through Aeneas of the Harpy Celaeno.

In 2016 he was diagnosed with prostate cancer; he was open about this to his friends, stoical in undergoing treatment, and amusing in recounting its comic aspects. He got through, and by last summer the prognosis was good. Inevitably he had thought more about his own mortality, and was relaxed about that; but he was pleased and a little proud to have survived in a good state. The spring saw the publication of two major works, the commentary on *Aeneid* 3, and another, with

Chris Collard, on the *Iphigenia at Aulis*, the final volume of the Aris & Phillips Euripides, a series that Chris had edited from the start: James organised the party to celebrate the completion of the series. When books were done, he always felt at a slight loss until he had some other work on the go. Last summer the gap was longer than usual. He carefully read through all of Pliny's *Letters*; but then found someone else had recently published the sort of selection he had in mind: 'I don't seem to be shedding any tears!' he told me in one of our last email exchanges. We do not know why he died — the autopsies were inconclusive; possibly he had a stroke while he was swimming. But we do know that he died a happy man, having lived a full life, and with no major project unfulfilled. The timing was good for him, though tough for others. People have helped themselves cope in such cases by creating stories about the death. In the ancient world, there is a repeated myth about those who died in water: their beauty was fatally attractive to the deities of sea or river. Thus in tales about the Argonauts Hylas, seeking water from a pool, is dragged in by the nymphs who live there, and Propertius 2.26 has a number of such cases, including Helle, who was immortalized by giving her name to the Hellespont. So I fancy that the nymphs of the northern Aegean, now to be known as the Jacobean Sea, were aware that their Greek was getting corrupted as time passed; seeing their opportunity as James swam in their waters, they took hold of the man who could restore their speech to its ancient purity. And there his soul remains, correcting, encouraging and inspiring.