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Funeral address

James: Public School master, Oxford don, classics junkie, culture vulture extraordinary, inexhaustible winer and diner, committed traveller; imaginative car driver; writer, editor, artistic omnivore, critic, mercurial conversationalist, drama expert and opera lover: a life full, fulfilling and fulfilled. But the essence lies in James the companion, the co-conspirator in the human comedy, giving freely of his idiosyncratic, profoundly humane, seemingly limitless generosity of spirit.

Although he spent the whole of his mature life in traditional English institutions, James hardly matched the image that career might conjure. He was no Mr Chips. He saw through the inherent absurdities of educational establishments with impish insight while nonetheless fully representing the values, virtues and occasional vices of a life of learning and culture, combining passionate academic rigour with wit and humour: scholarship could be entertaining, even funny. As teacher, intellectual and academic, James possessed the rare but important knack of being serious without being solemn. Beyond formal syllabuses, he impressed pupils with his world of plays, music, ideas and principled mischief. He treated them as people, not just recipients of a dry pedagogic exchange and, for many, he inspired and transformed their lives. A natural teacher and tutor, sensitive, sympathetic, encouraging, enthusiastic, this did not mean he was a soft touch; he possessed his fair share of dogmatism and pedantry, the flash of steel: at Harrow, rages at derelict or delinquent charges could be memorable, if not necessarily wholly effective.

It helped that James was a barely suppressed actor, an inveterate performer even if his formal thespian experiences were perhaps of a different quality: his description of his own schoolboy Richard II was something of a classic, while no-one who saw his Osrice in a *Hamlet* at Harrow in 1981 is ever likely ever to forget it. James enjoyed limelight while also being a great joiner-in: amateur

dramatics, foreign tours, advising the young, sitting on and chairing committees, running summer schools, assuming school or college offices, editing journals, giving lectures around the world, writing reviews, sending letters to newspapers. Institutionally, James loved to be involved, not because he wished to dominate but because he found satisfaction and fulfilment in working with and for others, it served his gregarious nature and restless interest in people.

To sustain this multitude of endeavours, the outward manner of relaxed bonhomie concealed the labours of a determined, serial workaholic, as it did an intense and occasionally debilitating expenditure of nervous energy. The scope of his publications testifies to an almost Stakhanovite discipline and drive, mirroring the precision of his mind and catholicity of his interests. Who else has written biographies of Sheridan as well as the Emperor Hadrian? A few weeks before he died he mentioned rather wistfully that for the first time in over four decades he was not under immediate contract to write anything. Yet his writing career is also notable for another revealing characteristic. James was a great collaborator, a delicate literary and personal relationship that he carried off with typical verve, attention, discretion and pleasure. James was always full of ideas for new projects but happy to achieve them with others.

This willingness to share speaks to James's most vivid qualities. He possessed a high degree of self-awareness, confident in his own abilities, but equally and amusedly alert to his weaknesses and foibles. Such realistic self-appraisal is unusual. Diffident towards intimacy, yet rarely content with his own company for long, James's compulsive openness to friendship knew few frontiers. Once met, it was always first names thereafter, however unassuming or grand the person (and James was never averse to celebrities). His extravagant but adept social manners lit up so many otherwise mundane occasions; he famously abhorred conversational vacuums. A great networker, he possessed a unique talent for hospitality and society. Going to meals, plays, films, concerts or operas with James became a way of life, stimulating and vital whatever the fare on offer. Of course, he could be imperious; and his clangers, certainly in his younger days, could be loud and heavy. His lively fascination with people

meant James was also a world class gossip, surely one of the best of his generation, rich in detail, sparkling with amused engagement with humanity. While a loyal and, in my case for fifty years, a deeply consistent, supportive, wonderful friend, James's friendships were never reverential; his clear vision of himself extended to all of us. Yet besides wit, charm and intellectual fireworks, James curated his friendships with warmth, care and devotion. Because he immersed himself in those he knew, he was loved in return, witnessed by the scores of those across the globe who now feel his loss so keenly. We will all miss the 'hi there!' greeting, the laser beam twinkles of shared amusement, the giggled laugh like a car trying to start on a cold morning, the flow of invention, the excitement and enjoyment of his company, the sheer fun.

James disliked over-pious mourning or pompous tributes, but one final note must be struck. To witness the open and unaffected courage that James displayed facing his cancer diagnosis and successful treatment last year was inspiring and humbling. That he should have gone so soon afterwards is hard to bear. A light has gone out. James was not particularly perturbed by death, although he was anxious about physical decline that in the event he was spared. He did not believe in an afterlife. But he has one, in each of us; and there he will always shine.

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