

Thoughts for an April evening:

When I was a graduate student at Massey College in the mid-1970, I was asked, if I had any say in the matter, at what university would I like to teach. I replied “Trent University”, not (I hasten to assure you) because I wished to follow my brother to that institution, but for reasons which I shall explain later. A few months later I went to have lunch with Desmond Conacher, my undergraduate teacher, who is the first of many figures to be remembered with fondness and gratitude this evening. He had had a call that morning from Bryan Reardon, the Head of Classics at Trent, that they were looking for someone to teach Greek in the upcoming year, and was I interested? I said that I should be very interested, to which he replied, “Good. You have an interview next Tuesday”.

So I made the first of many treks between Toronto and Peterborough, had my interview with Bryan Reardon, and then came the acid test: sherry and lunch with the Traill Senior Common Room. The first person to greet me was Max Young who had taught me Roman poetry ten years before at Trinity, the next was James Neufeld who had been a year ahead of me at Trinity, and waving from a corner chair was Gordon Johnston, a year behind me at Trinity, whose younger brother had the room next to me in Cosgrove House. Add the Ron Thom architecture and furniture from Massey College and I felt very much and instantly at home.

For my first two years I was a sessional instructor –you do know what the collective for these is: “an insecurity of sessionals”. Then in 1976 Janet Bews, the Head of Department, said that she had some bad news and some good news. The bad news is that “we can only offer you a half-time position next year, the good news is that it will be tenure-stream”. I used the free time to finish my doctorate, then returned for a fourth year (full-time), and in the spring of 1978 received a letter from Tom Symons: “I have just been reading the report from Senate and would like to be the first to congratulate you on receiving tenure”. I was not even aware that I had applied for tenure. You will forgive me if I muse fondly on “the good old days”.

Of my colleagues during these 38 years, I must mention first JANET BEWS, one of the great founding figures of this University, whom I always thought belonged among the lady dons of Shrewsbury College in Dorothy L. Sayers’ Gaudy Night. From Janet I learned how to include C.S. Lewis and Charles Williams in a course on classical myth; to ask not why we tell myths, but why and how we retell myths; and that when I taught CL 200 it was a literature course, but when she taught the course, it became a myth course again. Then DAVID PAGE, one of the great teachers at Trent, about whom I will say tonight only that anyone who has known David Page has come off the better for that experience. Of my more recent colleagues I salute:

- JENNIFER MOORE, who enjoyed far too much the term when I was her Teaching Assistant in Roman History;
- ROD FITZSIMONS, who shares with me a love for the sites of the ancient world, drinking good beer, and winning at trivia (well, two out of three);
- CHRIS TINDALE, who came along when our Department needed a firm hand at the helm and steered us admirably through some choppy waters;
- HUGH ELTON, whose persistent encouragement (some might say ‘nagging’) by e-mail and especially in person made sure that I got my Loeb volumes out on time;
- SEAN LOCKWOOD, with whom I have had some really good chats about Alexander the Great this year;
- GEORGE KOVACS and ARLENE ALLAN – there is something immensely satisfying when former students become colleagues and friends;
- JASON McCLURE, whom I got to know only this year, and for a Roman literature man seems a very sane and able fellow;
- JACKIE TINSON, who twenty years ago pioneered our women studies’ courses and whom I taught in Latin 200 (more years ago than either of us will admit to) – we read

Cornelius Nepos' Life of Alcibiades, to which Jackie's indignant reaction was, "I didn't take Latin to read about some Greek!";

- *MARTIN BOYNE, to whom I and the Department owe a great deal – he founded the Classics Drama Group at a time when the Department badly needed a boost in morale – this one-time venture has become a permanent fixture at Trent, and I glad that four of its directors (Martin, Lucy, Arlene, and Beth) are here tonight – it has been nearly 26 years since Martin first stepped off the plane from Scotland, and immediately registered for an ESL course;*
- *finally two people who have been at the very core of the Department run: BETH CHAPMAN, our departmental secretary in the 1980s and early '90s, who invariably greeted us with a happy and cheerful smile, even when she had had to walk through the slush along Chemong Road, on a morning after the Petes had lost badly; and KATHY AXCELL, the heart and soul of our department, for whom it has my pleasure to work for the last twenty years, in six different locations and three colleges.*

I said earlier that Trent had appealed to me, and that was because it was trying to be something different in a university: offering small-group classes, close contact between faculty and students, liberal arts rather than professional schools, and above all, a college system. I have been in academia for 48 years, and always in a university with a college system: attending Trinity College, Toronto; Lincoln College, Oxford; Massey College, Toronto; and three Colleges at Trent (Trill, Champlain, and Otonabee). I have always had an aversion to large centralised bureaucracies, be they on Parliament Hill, at Queen's Park, Blackburn Hall, the Synod House of the Diocese of Toronto, or the Kawartha-Pine Ridge Board of Education, and I have found in the colleges that essential and comfortable smaller unit where one belongs, where one feels at home, the place "where everybody knows your name". Or as Professor McGonagall well puts it in the first Harry Potter novel, "your house will be something like your family within Hogwarts". For "house" read "college" and "Trent" for "Hogwarts", and the founding fathers of Trent are nodding in agreement. Trent, when I first came, had a vigorous college system, a tradition that I have worked hard to support, sometimes against indifference and sometimes against active hostility, first as Elwood Jones' Senior Tutor at Otonabee College from 1978-1983 (many thanks are owed here to Elwood for his confidence in me), and then as College Head myself at Otonabee from 2003-2008. Here I got to meet and work with the unsung heroes of Trent, those who always put Trent and its students first and made it very much "like your family": such as Judy Stephenson in the College Office, Clare Pearl and Bruce Shearer (Otonabee College has existed for forty years, with only TWO Head Porters), my Senior Tutors (Jane Mackie, David Beresford, and Derek Newman-Stille), and of course Michele Sparkes, who has done all the work for which the last three College Heads have taken credit; so much of the spirit and life of OC is due to her. By the way, if we push the analogy with the houses of Harry Potter, then Otonabee must become Gryffindor, and I am open to suggestions about where to find Slytherin.

I have been asked two questions lately: what are you going to do, and will you miss it. Last Sunday over Easter dinner my brother offered a word of wise advice from his own experience: "What am I going to do? I'll know it when I see it". Books and articles to write, travel certainly (I have an invitation to speak at the University of Rome), take up golf again, teach Latin to Robin Lathangue's son, perhaps become involved with Sacred Heart College. I did mention to Archdeacon Gordon Finney, our Rector here at St John's, that in retirement I would have that much more time to spend around the Church. It may have been my imagination, but as I left I thought I saw him reaching for the bottle of brandy that he keeps in the third drawer of his desk.

What will I miss, or, better, what will I not miss? I shall not miss: red tape and bureaucracy, Peter Gzowski College, endless committee meetings, dealing with Aramark, Conferences, Room Bookings, spending my weekends writing new lectures, and 9:00 Latin

classes on Mondays. What will I miss? Collegial occasions such as that final Thursday when my colleagues and almost all of my fourth-year students turned up at the Ceilie following my last class, Kathy singing or humming along with her classical music station, and ... teaching. When I was in the U.K. on sabbatical in 2008/9, apart from Oxford (and, I suppose, Cambridge) the mantra seemed to be "Teaching begins at graduate school". Teaching undergraduates there is left to sessional instructors and part-time appointments. My view has always been that teaching and students come first, and in fact I prefer to teach the courses at the first-year level. Here I can communicate my own enthusiasm for the ancient world to those who are meeting for the first time: the tragedies of Oedipus or Pentheus and hearing their reaction "but it's so modern", the fantastic comedy of Aristophanes and Lucian, the intense emotional scenes of Priam in Iliad 24 and Dido in Aeneid 4, Plato's Symposium (of which C.S. Lewis wrote: "to die without having read the Symposium would be ridiculous; it would be like never having bathed in the sea, never having drunk wine, never having been in love"). I have taken a special pleasure in introducing to my students the oldest story in Western Literature, The Epic of Gilgamesh, where all the great issues of human life are raised (humans and gods, the wild and the civilised, male and female, acceptance of mortality). Janet Bews first showed me this work and I pass it on to my students, hopefully with the same sense of wonder that first affected me. It dates back to the 24th c. BC, and we fans of Star Trek know that a Starfleet captain will be telling that story around a campfire in the 24th c. AD.

Some of you will know that I began university by enrolling in Maths, Physics, & Chemistry – it was the '60s, after all, study science and save the world! – with the intention of doing Astronomy, but after a month of theoretical math I switched to Classics, meeting Desmond Conacher on my first day in my new department. In those days one needed Grade XIII Latin and Greek to study Classics, and I had been fortunate in having a Latin teacher (Douglas Lloyd, another to be fondly remembered tonight) willing to come in for 8:00 a.m. to teach us Greek – and so I did have Grade XIII Greek. But that was not when I first encountered ancient Greek. When I was five, my mother was learning ancient Greek while she was at home expecting my brother (probably more expectantly than I was), and she taught me as she learned the language herself. The text she was using was White's little red First Greek Book, and in Grade XI when I took up Greek again, the text was ... White's First Greek Book. Thus I was not learning Greek in High School, but re-learning it. Who knew at the time that picking up my mother's Greek text would be a life-defining experience?