

Classics as an Activity

(An abbreviated version of an address given to the
AGM at Newcastle on 11 May 1985)

Professor Kenneth Dover

My scientific friends sometimes reveal that they think of Classics as a finite corpus of knowledge which it is the business of the classicist to learn and transmit. They also tend to regard differences of opinion on any Classical matter as precisely that – differences of *opinion* – in which discovery and proof can play no part. (Archaeology, of course, is different; I am concerned here with language and literature).

The notion that in Classics there are 'only opinions', and the accompanying notion that Classicists judge an hypothesis more by its elegance of style than by its cogency of demonstration, is in part generated by the widespread and long-standing confusion which assigns science to one 'culture' and lumps Arts and the creative arts together in the other. If there are really only two cultures, one of them comprises the arts (with a small 'a'), devoted to the creation of what might be, and the other comprises active enquiry into what is and has been. Science and Classics belong together in that second culture. The confusion which I have criticised, however, has one excuse: the works of art which are the object of the classicist's enquiry are ends in themselves, evoking aesthetic reaction in a way in which nitrogen, for example, cannot. But, of course, beautiful insects, a mountainside stream, the night sky, can also evoke very strong aesthetic reactions, and they illustrate, more simply and vividly than works of human art, the happy coexistence of aesthetic enjoyment and active scientific curiosity.

The notion that the data of Classics are finite rests on the wholly erroneous belief that their collection was completed by the end of the Renaissance and that all answerable questions about them had been settled by the eighteenth century. In fact, up to the second half of the nineteenth century the number of people actively engaged in a serious attempt to answer questions about Classical literature was exceedingly small in relation to the immensity and difficulty of the subject.

We must admit, however, that the accretion of new data is slow by scientific standards, and our scale of publication is modest. A volume of *L'Année philologique* nowadays lists some 14000 published items on Classics – defining 'Classics' as what was done, written, said or thought in the central and almost-eastern Mediterranean between the second millennium BC and the sixth century AD. Of those 14000, some 2000 are repeated from earlier years in order to list reviews up to date, and another 2000 are books, including editions and translations. That leaves about 10000 articles and notes; twice as many as on Numerical Analysis during the same period, but far fewer than on Mathematics as a whole, and the rate of *discovery* – of inscriptions, papyri and manuscripts – cannot seriously be compared with the rate of discovery of new species of mite.

New data, however, affect our interpretation of existing data, sometimes in a far-reaching way. For example:

(1) The reader of popular – and even not-so-popular –

books of theology is often told that the noun *agape* was a Christian invention designed to differentiate between divine and sexual love. More careful writers may mention that it is common in the Septuagint, and therefore Judaeo-Christian rather than Christian. But an early Attic red-figure vase (Leningrad 644) shows a woman named *Agape*; she is lolling topless on a couch and holding a big beaker of wine. The associations of the noun therefore need reconsideration.

(2) In an epitaph of Antipatros of Sidon (*Anth. Pal.* vii 426) a sculptured lion upon a tomb is interrogated about the person buried there and answers the questions. A characteristic Hellenistic conceit, one might have thought. Yet an epitaph discovered in 1938 (Peek, *Griechische Vers-Inschriften* i 1831) presents us with just this form of epitaph; it comes from Thessaly and is datable to the mid-fifth century BC. Reconsideration of some of the supposed differences between Hellenistic and earlier poetry is in order.

There is no reason to suppose that new ideas about data long familiar to us will ever dry up. For example:

(1) In *Talanta* 1976 I made heavy weather of Timon of Phleious (*Suppl. Hell.*) 779, '[the Athenians] wished to turn the works [of Protagoras] into ashes'. Momigliano has now pointed out the high probability that the statement was modelled on Aristoxenos fr. 131, 'Plato wished to make a bonfire of the works of Demokritos'. There, 'wished' makes sense, because 'but he was prevented ...' follows, whereas in Timon neither 'accordingly, they ...' nor 'but they were prevented ...' follows. The probability is therefore that Timon was simply putting into vivid, concrete terms the thought 'the Athenians disapproved of Protagoras's works'.

(2) When I set to work on *Greek Popular Morality* I found it hard to believe that no one had thought of constructing a picture of ordinary Athenian morality out of the evaluation expressed or implied in speeches made to a jury. Actually someone had: T. W. Earp in 1929 (*The Way of the Greeks* p. 11), but he himself did not follow it up.

New ideas are often the product of changing attitudes, and it is reasonable to predict continuing change. For example:

(1) A friendlier attitude to sexual activity has cleared up an amount of muddled thinking about Greek homosexuality. Emily Vermeule's richly illustrated article in *Antike Kunst* 1968, unthinkable at the time when Hoppin wrote his *Handbook of Attic Red-figure Vases* (1919), was the breakthrough. A few years later I was able to integrate the iconography with texts which had always been available: Aeschines' *Against Timarchos* and Pausanias's speech on Plato's *Symposium*. The next generation of books and articles on the subject has picked up an idea put forward by Bethe in 1907 and now fortified by abundant anthropological data, the relation between homosexuality and initiation procedures.

(2) Few people nowadays believe a statement like

Thucydides just because he is Thucydides. Long-standing reverence for him as 'our authority' on the Peloponnesian War created a skotoma in commentators faced with the fact that in vii 42.3 he offers in parenthesis a summary of Athenian strategy which his own narrative shows to be misleading and unjust. Nowadays we agonise about this, and Christian Kopff (*Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 1976) suggested that the parenthesis is an interpolation from Philistos. Against that, I suggested (*Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy* 1981) that it is the product of what could fairly be called an obsession of Thucydides with speed of response in military operations, and that the obsession grew from his own experience at Amphipolis. A crucial issue in this argument is whether *kai autos* necessarily means 'he too'. At this point modern *Hilfsmittel* make discussion of the issue practicable. To look up every *aut-* listed in von Essen's *Index Thucydideus* and identify all those preceded by *kai* would have taken me many hours; with a computer-produced concordance it took twenty minutes. Mind you, though, the concordance occupies one and a half cubic feet and weighs three stone.

How important is it to do jobs like that? In modern literary criticism, and to some extent also in linguistics, some kinds of enquiry are vilified as bourgeois, trivial or obscurantist, and others are treated as 'valid' and morally superior. In Classics it is sometimes suggested that topics are of unequal moral worth; for instance, that the history of slavery matters more than the history of manuscripts.

Let us take up the challenge on precisely that point. I may assume, I hope, that the portrayal of slaves in literature has some relevance to the history of slavery. Now, in Aristophanes *Wealth* 823-end six new characters appear at Chremylos's house. The interlocutor is in each case either Chremylos or his slave Karion. In the case of Hermes, the fifth of the new characters, the interlocutor is certainly Karion, who is addressed by name; and for the last new character, the Priest, what the interlocutor says makes it virtually certain that he is Chremylos. Dramatic symmetry, reinforced by the extreme awkwardness of taking Karion off at 822 when he has just said why he has come out of the house, indicates that Karion deals with the Honest Citizen and the Sykophantes from 823 to 958, and Chremylos with the Old Woman and the Young Man from 965 to 1097. The manuscripts, however, are deeply divided about the identification of the person who speaks with the Honest Citizen and the Sykophantes, and traces of disagreement surface right down to the end of the play. Is that because ancient commentators (confronted originally, of course, with texts which did not make the identity of speakers clear) found it hard to believe that a slave could be shown talking as an equal to two citizens? And if they were wrong, is it not interesting that there should be a conflict between Aristophanes' elevation of a slave to the dominant role in the play (Xanthias does not appear in *Frogs* after the first half) and later uneasiness about it? And when we say 'later', how much later? Early commentators were familiar with a great quantity of Old and Middle Comedy and understood its nature; late commentators were not familiar with so much, and patently did not understand its nature, as their occasionally ridiculous *sigla personarum* show.

Of course the history of slavery is important. But *can* it be studied adequately without regard for the portrayal of slavery in literature? And can that be studied without caring who says

what in a comedy? And is there much hope of discovering who says what without studying simultaneously the 'grammar of theatrical technique' and what manuscripts and scholia actually say about attribution of lines? If I stop short at a few manuscripts of a few plays, I am stopping short in the knowledge that I could *probably* resolve some questions by looking at all manuscripts of all plays.

The answers to big questions are constructed upon a multitude of fiddling little answers to fiddling little questions. They can also founder on one fiddling little mistake, as surely as an apparent solution to a problem in engineering can founder on a misplaced decimal point. Unfortunately, original contributions on big themes attract more affection and respect than minor adjustments to matters of detail. I say 'unfortunately', because any fool can be original; the problem is to say something which is both original and also more probable than its denial. Several times in the last few years I have read for publishers typescripts propounding hypotheses which, taken by themselves, were exciting, even enchanting, but absolutely ruled out by masses of relevant evidence of which their authors were quite unaware.

Even writers who know what they are talking about write more big books on big subjects than they need. Perhaps 'need' is question-begging, or at least ambiguous, because in terms of market forces the publisher's profit and the reader's enjoyment are a measure of what is needed; but remember that on the market ignorant, false, articulate, entertaining, stimulating books have a better chance than dull, intricate, truthful books which actually further our understanding of the ancient world, and when I say 'need' I am talking of that furtherance of understanding.

On that criterion, books on big subjects (e.g. Thucydides) which fail to say anything which has not already been said by somebody, somewhere, are too numerous. A publisher's description of a book as 'a new approach to ...' is seldom true, and even when a genuinely new ingredient is present a short article would have sufficed. Graduate students contemplating research readily persuade themselves that they can discover something new and big about (say) the Greek historians' view of historical causation, or about the relation between comedy and society, and they spurn the humble jobs that are waiting to be done. Perhaps maturer scholars sometimes persuade themselves that what they have said is bigger and newer than it is.

Four kinds of publication are needed to keep Classics alive as an activity.

- (i) Articles which make their point and then stop.
- (ii) Any book which can fairly claim to be the first synthesis for a generation or more of data, arguments and thoughts only otherwise available in a mass of scattered articles.
- (iii) Reference books which make data accessible, e.g. corpora of papyrus fragments or inscriptions. Of all the new Classical books which I have seen in the last five years, the most exciting by far (to me) was the first volume of Threatte's *Grammar of Attic Inscriptions*.

(iv) Books which say something which has never yet been said. There *are* topics and themes in late antiquity which have yet to be the subject of thorough, systematic enquiry. Above all: we need a good lexicon of Byzantine Greek, a long and expensive project which would require international collaboration by several Academies.

You may shudder at the notion that a lexicon of Byzantine Greek is needed 'above all' 'to keep Classics alive'. But remember, I am speaking of Classics as an *active process of enquiry*. I have not forgotten that, as I said earlier, works of Classical literature are *ends in themselves*, and that calls for a fifth category of publication:

(v) Good translations, perhaps fresh translations as often as once in every generation, to keep pace with the changes in our own language. Inquisitive learning will not in itself generate good translations; but lack of it will certainly generate bad ones....

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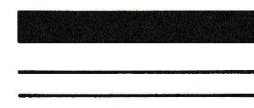
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Poetry and classical education, a personal view

Peter Levi.

The origins and growth of poets are less spontaneous and much slower than they themselves may think. Roughly, you are the more a poet the more seriously you take your task. By a fortunate psychological mechanism, poets adopt whatever beliefs about poetry will best protect their private dedication to poetry. If a poet is taught the classics at school, it may be useful either to react against them, or as in my own case to take refuge in them. Their vital role is that of access to quite other poetry, and a society utterly different from our own. Classical poetry is morally more naked than ours. It gives one a greater imaginative repertory, however slow one may be to make serious use of that. In my own case one must add a sense of privilege, almost an arrogance, because I found classical knowledge hard to obtain, hard-won and thrilling. I felt that by reading classics at a boyish level I knew more about poetry than poets do and through being a poet more about Greek and Latin poetry than some of my teachers.

These pretensions are of course intolerable, though they are not quite wholly ungrounded. I was slow to mature, but when I had done so I did find myself equipped with much useful knowledge and access to much more. It was the force of Homer and the sound of Latin and of Theokritos (as we conceived it) that transformed my ideas of what the word poem means. Many English poets from Shakespeare (who can be very Ovidian) and Milton (who in Latin is *the* great poet of the Thames) down to Tennyson (who was haunted all his life by the phrase 'desilientis aquae') can be shown to have imbibed repertoires of sounds in the same way, from Latin quantitative verse. Of course on arrival at Oxford I rapidly found my unexalted level; Edward Fraenkel plainly knew more about poetry, and music as well (to me a new dimension), than any young poet. As a poet meanwhile I found myself behindhand because I was not as knowing as the others about modern verse, not having specialised in English. For me, this was an extremely good thing, as I was able to grow slowly, and face my own problems in my own way. I escaped orthodox literary criticism until I was old enough to cope with it on a basis of life as well as literature.

I thought I could learn to write by translating the classics, but that task was very hard, though since Lowell's Dante and Juvenal in *Near the Ocean* it may be easier today. For me it has been a lifework to discover a kind of verse into which I could make versions from the classical Greek without dishonouring English poetry. The first halting and freakish attempts are scattered in a translation of Pausanias made twenty years ago. The most recent are in my *History of Greek Literature*. E. R. Dodds and Freddy Wells, whose son Robert Wells was to become the excellent translator of Virgil and of Theokritos, used to run a verse translation class for undergraduates. Dodds must first have encountered Gilbert Murray at just such a class. Such things gave one confidence and opportunity, but I could see the problems were beyond any solution of mine. I

tried to translate some Homer for a Third Programme series, but my version was rightly rejected. The only good result of the series was Christopher Logue's adaptations of the *Iliad*, which have gone on appearing ever since.

I have always wished I was better at Greek and Latin verse composition, and bitterly regret its decline in schools. What school nowadays wants to produce poets? It is interesting how often its best practitioners have been good poets in their own languages. But this is a question of thorough grounding which I did not receive, and young facility, which I did not possess except in English. Still, the attempts I did make were disproportionately fruitful, and the beginning of a much more serious inwardness with Latin verse in particular, and with the tones of Greek tragedy. The sort of thing that dispirited me as an undergraduate in 1954 was that my tutor's fair versions of the verses he set me, which were brilliant, had often been written when he was fifteen. I think now that the old traditional verses of that kind were a game, and I have always hated word-games even worse than ball-games. It is like the piano; one feels one would have learnt it very well if caught early, though in this one may be wrong.

What kind of inspiration have the classics been to me since then, and what kind of resource? Incalculably great. I do not know of a poet I prefer to Horace, or feel for more as a human being. But one cannot absorb him, the most interesting elements are those one still fails to express. I have found at different times that the moral poetry of Aischylos and his followers has been of genuine importance in difficult times. It has nourished me when nothing else could, and lasted a lifetime. It is still a matter of great pride to reproduce any echo of it. Homer is the greatest poet, and I think that dramatic poetry is in some ways a substitute for genuine (not literary) epic. This tradition has many ramifications; they are worth the years and years they take to study. But Homeric poetry is the greatest epic verse the human race has preserved, and Homer, whom English poetry nowadays can express least, nourishes us most. As Robert Lowell said, part of the point of the classics is that they cannot be absorbed.

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Causidicus

Language awareness: some thoughts from north of the Border

Bill Wilkie

The appearance in recent years of a number of books and articles on language awareness¹ has provided us with the opportunity of identifying a more acceptable place for Classics in the Lower School and, what is heartening, a place in a wider educational context than the promotion of our subject. That context is the improvement of basic literacy. Paradoxical though it may seem, securing a place in the wider scene may in turn lead to the preservation and promotion of the Classics, although that, to the indifferent bystander, may not be a proper aim of the exercise.

This is not to deny that Latin and Greek always had such a place and that there were practitioners who stoutly defended them in those terms (to say nothing of the ready acceptance of such a defence by the general public). The trouble was that their courses operated on what had become the unfashionably narrow front of Classics for selected pupils.

What replaced these courses in the 1970's has now been shown to have had its faults. Non-linguistic Classical Studies had immediate success with a wide range of pupils, but a new objection arose: they had no substantial role in the type of language policy envisaged by the Bullock Report (1975). We were not alone in that, of course. A gap had suddenly opened up across the curriculum. In the wake of the report, progressive Classics teachers have been suffering from a lack of good, published teaching materials, and the rest of us from a certain failure of nerve, not to say prejudice against the use of our subject for such a humble aim as the promotion of general literacy. In any case, were the benefits of courses in Classical Civilisation to be discarded overnight? The solution seemed to lie in the direction of a mixture of language and civilisation, but the writers had, and still have, to be found.

Meanwhile, some repairs to the gap began to be made: general 'taster' courses in languages, usually written by modern linguists, in which reference to Indo-European linguistic origins was made,² and Classical courses (albeit on the other side of the Atlantic)³ which attempted to use Latin and Greek for the more immediate purpose of which we have been speaking.

Here we may pause for a moment and consider various strands of thought, some of which have emerged in the course of what I have been saying. Literacy is a responsibility to be shared by teachers of *all* subjects (Bullock); Latin and Greek have much to offer to *all* pupils in terms of basic linguistic skills; Latin and Greek should play a part in any 'taster' course in languages; the part they should play is fundamental to any study of the Indo-European language tree; Classical Studies without language is an insufficient basis, in any case, for choosing to begin a Classical language; and, finally, Classical Studies without a language element is a misnomer for what is intended to be, in Wolf's words, 'The Study of Man in Antiquity'.

It may be comforting, if not illuminating, to hear what has been going on in Scotland for the past two or three years, but not before I pay tribute to the ideas of Robert Jarvis and Adrian Spooner: the stress on the importance of language education, and the use of Latin as 'handmaid' in the process of the detailed working out of the means to this end; the realisation that language must go hand-in-hand with the teaching of civilisation (and vice-versa); the recognition of practical difficulties; the encouragement given to aural as well as written skills; and, lastly, the sense of urgency combined with a degree of optimism. The situation is a challenge, one, but we *can* meet the challenge and, while the prophetic doom may sometimes be right, they seldom see how much we are responsible for the fate they have so ably prophesied.

North of the Border, then, teachers in Lothian Region have recently been using language-based materials in mixed-ability classes, compiled by their Adviser in Classics,⁴ an experience which has also been extended to the Upper Primary School area. In the West, materials are in preparation in Glasgow and a working party in Lanarkshire has produced two books which are rapidly gaining ground.⁵ It is with the latter that we should like to deal now.

A series of lessons, entitled 'Language in a Classical Studies Course' attempts to give a linguistic slant to some traditional Classical Studies topics. As the Introduction says: 'The aim should be not only to introduce pupils to the languages of the Greeks and Romans as an integral part of their civilisation but to deepen the pupils' understanding of their own native tongue. In particular it is felt that the extensive part of English vocabulary that is derived from Classical roots should be seen as a common heritage of all pupils.'

The subjects covered are: 'A Language called Latin', 'Books, Ancient and Modern', 'Looking into the Future' (the signs of the Zodiac), 'The Gods', 'Athens, a Democracy', 'Roman Republic', 'At Home with the Romans' (houses, family, life), 'Going to the Theatre', and 'English in Brief' (concentric circles and abbreviations). There is nothing new about the topics; it is the treatment that is different. Each lesson starts with a brief exposition of the theme, followed by a list of words culled from the exposition, together with their Classical roots, and then exercises for the pupils. (Example 1)

An Appendix was added, incorporating some later ideas into the working party. In it consideration is given to the treatment of mythological topics in a language-orientated way, and we can only admire the more thorough-going approach of Adrian Spooner in this field. We also began to foresee learning difficulties in mixed-ability groups, and an element of differentiation was introduced whereby the word lists were subdivided on a 'core-and-extension' basis. Again, examples are to be found in the Appendix. By this stage we realise that the use of Latin and Greek to improve the understanding

of English vocabulary only, was insufficient; Latin, in particular, might serve as a means of improving the pupils' grasp of English grammar also. A second booklet was produced in which our aim was to illumine understanding of the structure of an English sentence through the study of components such as noun, verb, subject, object, singulars and plurals, adjectives, prepositions and conjunctions. The lessons would also, it was hoped, serve, as the title suggested, as an 'Introduction to Latin' and a basis for choice further up the school. The methodology was adapted from the Cambridge Latin Course: a series of captioned illustrations, followed by an exposition of the relevant point of language, and pupil exercises. (Example 2)

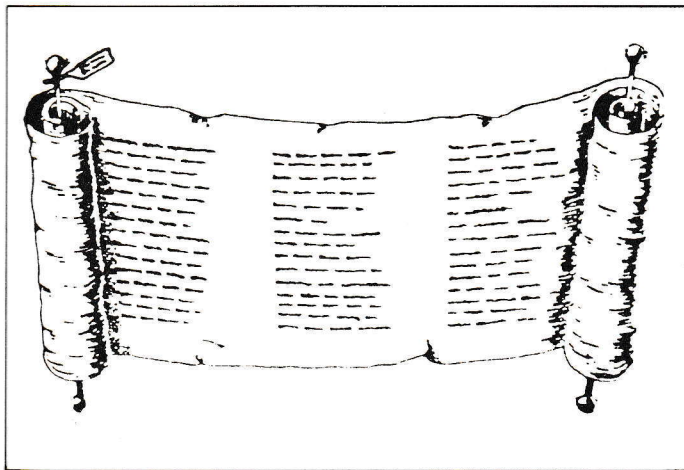
The faults of our material are plain to see in retrospect, but I have no doubt whatsoever that this is the sort of thing that should be going on in our schools and that Classicists should be a part of it. The job is one of conversion; if we do not re-shape our Classical foundation courses to take account of the demands of modern education I believe that we are finished. Nor do I see that the independent schools are immune from the kind of fate which many of the State schools have already suffered. The priorities are clear:

1 Courses in Classical Studies with a strong language element

Example 1

The commonest Roman word for a book was LIBER which is the word for the rind or bark of a plant. It is interesting to learn that the word 'book' comes from a German word 'buch' meaning beech as, long ago, Germans wrote on boards of beech wood instead of paper.

Animal skin or membrane was also used for writing. The best came from a Greek city, PERGAMOS, and this name gives us our word 'parchment'. Both parchment and paper were very expensive. For rough notes the ancients would use just about anything: boards covered with wax, thin sheets of ivory, leaves, fruitskins, bits of pottery, silk, linen, sheets of lead, even smooth sand. And of course they scribbled on walls too! It is interesting that the word 'graffiti' comes originally from the Greek word 'grapho' (γράφω), meaning 'I write'.



Papyrus was an Egyptian invention. It was made out of the rind of the papyrus reed. This was cut into thin strips, pasted close together, and hammered to form a surface for writing. The sheets were joined together and rolled round two sticks. The rough edges of the papyrus were smoothed with pumice stone.

Now it was called a volume; a title was attached to it like a label to tell people the subject of the book. To read the book you had to unroll it with one hand and roll it up with the other. Very difficult when you think how easy it is to open one of our books and read it!

of the kind being advocated must be devised, tried and tested *now*;

- 2 The target population cannot afford to be confined to the top 40% (or even 60%); it must encompass the whole ability range;
- 3 Some of these courses *must* find a publisher soon;
- 4 Simultaneously, some of us must press for co-operation with other language teachers in the writing, teaching and publishing of general language courses.

The rewards of all this are too big to be ignored: the exhilaration of breaking new ground, and a fresh way of teaching Classics in the Lower School which does not forego the chance of attracting pupils to the subject but, at the same time, makes a tangible and vital contribution to the general education of all pupils.

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THINGS TO DO

- (1) In the list below you are given some Latin words. Look at the lesson above and choose the English words which you think come from them. Put them into the blank spaces provided.

Latin Word	Meaning	English Word
SCRIBA	Roman slave who copied books out by hand
PAPYRUS	Writing paper made from a type of reed called 'papyrus'.
VOLUMEN	A roll of papyrus
TITULUS	A notice, label
MANUS	A hand
MEMBRANA	Animal Skin

- (2) Can you think of any other words in English that come from LIBER, MANUS and SCRIBA? Write down as many as you can.

Example 2

Now look at the sentence below:

1.



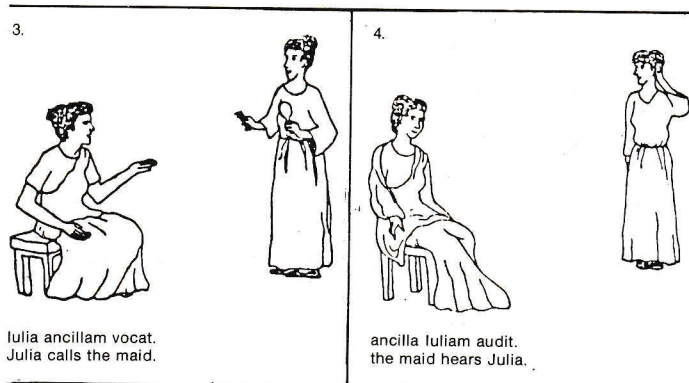
Sextus servum spectat.
Sextus looks at the slave.

2.



servus Sextum videt.
the slave sees Sextus.





If we ask the question, "Whom does Sextus look at?" we get the answer, "the slave".

If we ask the question, "Whom does Julia call?" we get the answer, "The maid".

By asking this question, we find out who is the OBJECT of the "looking at" or "calling". This is said to be the OBJECT of the sentence.

We have now met TWO forms of the same word:

SEXTUS	SEXTUM
SERVUS	SERVUM
IULIA	IULIAM
ANCILLA	ANCILLAM

The different forms indicate if the word is the SUBJECT or the OBJECT.

If Sextus performs an action, such as looking at the slave, the form Sextus is used.

Sextus servum spectat.

If Julia performs an action, such as calling the maid, the form Iulia is used.

Iulia ancillam vocat.

If somebody else does something to Sextus, such as the slave seeing Sextus, the form Sextum is used.

servus Sextum videt.

Similarly, if somebody else does something to Julia, such as the maid hearing Julia, the form Iuliam is used.

ancilla Iuliam audit.

RULE: the -US or -A endings are the sign of a SUBJECT.
the -UM or -AM endings are the sign of an OBJECT.

OBSERVE:

1. In Latin, the *endings* of words are important.

They can show if a word is the SUBJECT of the sentence.

They can show if a word is the OBJECT of the sentence.

Therefore they help to explain the meaning of the sentence.

2. The meaning is always the same, no matter in what order come in the sentence.

e.g. ancilla Iuliam audit

means "the maid hears Julia".

BUT Iuliam ancilla audit

ALSO means "the maid hears Julia".

NOTES

- 1 G. J. Robertson 'Latin for all' *Hesperian* 4, 1981
J. Mingay 'Small Latin' *Hesperian* 4, 1981
Eric Hawkins, *Awareness of Language: an Introduction*, C.U.P.
R. A. Jarvis, 'Latin and the Age of the Micro-Computer', *JACT Review*, 2 Spring 1985 p.13ff.
A. Spooner, 'Language Awareness' *JACT Review* 4, of which author kindly sent me an early draft
P. V. Jones, 'Classics Teaching in the U.K.', *Latin Teaching* 1 p.35ff
The work of Masciantonio and others in the United States has been an inspiration to us all here. See Fannie J. Lemoine 'Classics, the Academy and the Community' *JACT Review* 2
- 2 Jenkyns, *Language Links*, Harrap
Aplin et al., *Introduction to Language*, Hodder & Stoughton
Professor Hawkins (see above) is general editor of a series of books published by C.U.P. under the title *Awareness of Language*. It is a feature of these courses that they not only introduce pupils to a wide variety of foreign languages, but in so doing endeavour to shed light on the phenomenon of language itself.
- 3 Florian, *The Phenomenon of Language*, Independent Schools Press, Massachusetts
Masciantonio's booklets including 'Word Power through Latin' are well worthy of mention. Teachers of English have not neglected the teaching of grammar in recent years either, and Classicists may find text books like Rogers, *Understanding Grammar*, Harrap, useful in their own work.
- 4 George Reid, Assistant Adviser in Classics, Dean Education Office, Belford Road, Edinburgh.
- 5 'Language in a Classical Studies Course', Strathclyde Regional Council, Lanark Division, Education Resource Service, April 1984. 'An Introduction to Latin', Strathclyde Regional Council, Lanark Division, Education Resource Service, June 1984. Single copies may be obtained on application to:

The Adviser in Classics
Orchard Educational Development Centre
19 Auchingramont Road
HAMILTON ML3 6JP

Commentaries on Translations

Professor Malcolm Willcock

We have seen a vast expansion in the last twenty years of the teaching of classical authors in translation, in Classical Civilisation or Classical Studies courses, at school (O-level and A-level) and at university. This should not be viewed as in every respect a second best. With some works, at the elementary level, one can learn more in translation. For example, who is likely to know the *Iliad* better, the one who has read two books carefully in Greek, or the one who has read and studied the whole in translation? And which of the two is likely to have had a more rewarding experience?

Obviously it is no part of my brief to belittle the advantages of the study of Latin and Greek. But not all are capable of the linguistic effort; and not all have the opportunity, even if they are capable (at school, that is, for all universities which teach classics, even the two ancient bastions, provide for the initial study at least of Greek); and not all those who have the opportunity wish to take it. I say that because our experience at University College, where we offer a course called 'Ancient World', is that a fair proportion of those opting for it are in fact perfectly well qualified to be accepted for Classics, but prefer the broader and less linguistic study.

The numbers now at university reading for degrees in Classical Civilisation are probably greater, even allowing for the single-mindedness of Oxford and Cambridge, than those taking traditional classics degrees. And in schools there is no comparison. What has been on my mind for some time is the particular disadvantage that they suffer. They are taught and examined from texts which were not composed for that purpose, usually Penguin translations. These are treated as though a verbatim understanding of them has the same value as a verbatim understanding of their originals has for the student of classics. This of course is questionable. But if we concede (as we have) that the study of translations of ancient authors is a proper academic discipline, merely one stage removed from reality, like the prisoners in the Cave, nevertheless these students have a further disadvantage in comparison with their traditionally taught brethren. Most of the translations, having been originally published for the generally interested reader, make no attempt to explain allusions, clarify contexts, give additional information to fill out the picture, or cross-refer to other works by the same or another author; i.e. to provide what ordinary commentaries provide for the reader of the same works in the original. The fact that most classics students do not pay great attention to the notes in their editions is not a counter-argument; the notes are there, and they can and should turn to them if there is something they do not understand. The reader in translation does not have this opportunity.

There are two unfortunate consequences. First, the student reading in translation is more totally dependent on the teacher; this can do little to encourage a properly critical and enquiring attitude of mind. Secondly, and worse, such students must spend a lot of the time in a fog of vague understanding; they do

not have the key to a wider frame of reference. Such translations are often highly intelligent. They would be served with more help.

This problem is not unrealised. More recent Penguin editions had many more notes (e.g. Peter Green's *Juvenal*). Loeb's have foot-notes. But for conscious commentators to a particular translation, excepting perhaps Cornhill Flower's *Hackforth for Plato*, where the subject is philosophy rather than literature, I can only instance in the past the *Companion to the Iliad*, directed to Lattimore's translation, which there was a precedent in the work of the same publisher, Leaf, using our old friend Lang, *Leaf and Myers*, the curtailed Prentice-Hall series of Greek tragedies.

More is now being done. Aris and Phillips are producing a series of individual works to a common format: a translation, and commentary directed primarily at the student of translation. This should help a wide range of readers. Of course it will not benefit O and A level students if the examining boards choose that particular translation for inclusion in their syllabus. In the case of Aristophanes, that is right, because the editor of the Aris and Phillips edition, which will eventually include all eleven plays, is the same as the editor of one of the two Penguins, namely Alan Sommerstein. What we need ideally is a series of commentaries on the commonly set translations, a commentary on Rex Warner's *Thucydides*, Desmond Lee's *Republic*, C. Day Lewis's *Antigone*, and so on. John Betts of Bristol Classical Press has been asked to set up a scheme to achieve something like this.

The aim is a series of short booklets, almost pamphlets, fifty or sixty pages, produced as cheaply as possible so that they may be within the range of students, and mostly within the range of the regular translations. The initial plan was for Greek works, the first of which, due out in 1985, is, not the first of *Thucydides*, but the first book and half the second of *Thucydides* (Wiedemann); then there will be Plutarch's *Life of Alexander* (useful for historians), and five plays, *Antigone*, *Oedipus at Colonus*, *Hippolytus*, *Clouds*, *The Hellenic Society* showed interest and gave financial support to the initiative. Following this the second stage is to be Latin; and the works so far committed to the press are Plautus *Rudens*, Cicero *Select Letters*, Sallust *Catachresis*, Tacitus *Annals* 14. In addition, a triumph, C. Day Lewis's *Aeneid*, commented on by R. D. Williams, is already in the press. (For more information, see John Betts' notice in the JACT Bulletin of Summer 1985, p.8.) Not all of the initiative is directed to the commonly used translations; in some cases the editor is, as with Aris and Phillips, producing his own. Even so, they should go some way towards the filling of the tangible gap, and the improvement of the lot of the student who is to be examined on his knowledge and understanding of the translations of the ancient authors.

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Graded Tests in Latin

Pat Story

The Cambridge School Classics Project has recently published the first part of a graded test scheme to accompany the Cambridge Latin Course. The purpose of the scheme is to help teachers maintain and increase the motivation of pupils, especially the average and less able, by providing them with a series of clearly-defined short-term and attainable objectives and by recognising their success in achieving them. But before embarking on a description of the scheme and discussing the opportunities and problems presented by graded tests one ought first to establish what a graded test is.

The usual description, 'a criterion-referenced, non-competitive test', is not very helpful; it will not mean much to the uninitiated who may very well dismiss it as yet another piece of educational gobbledegook, while those with experience of graded tests will perhaps want to challenge its accuracy and add qualifications. It is more helpful to start with a few familiar examples of graded tests that many will have taken without knowing that they could be described as graded tests. Such are the Girl Guide and Boy Scout tests for badges, life-saving certificate tests, the examinations set by the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music and shorthand and typing tests. In all these tests there are clearly defined standards of performance and knowledge which the candidates are aware of in advance; for example, aspiring life-savers know that they will be required to retrieve a brick from the bottom of the pool, swim so many lengths etc. Passing such tests therefore depends on meeting certain explicit criteria, i.e. they are criterion-referenced. In this they differ from most internal and external school examinations which are concerned to obtain a 'good scatter of marks' and where the criteria for obtaining a pass (or any other mark) are not made explicit to the candidate. When the results are announced he will know where he stands in relation to other candidates, but not precisely what his mark or grade means in terms of skills acquired or material mastered. Such examinations are known as 'norm-referenced'. As we shall see later, the differences between norm- and criterion-referenced examinations are not always as distinct as they first appear.

Again, criterion-referenced tests are non-competitive in the sense that there are not a fixed number of awards (certificates, medals and the like) that have to be competed for; anyone who meets the criteria will receive an award. The successful candidate may then proceed to train for the more advanced tests of the next level of proficiency. Here one sees the point of calling the tests graded; the skills and content to be taught are analysed and arranged in a number of grades or levels of difficulty, which can then be tested.

Until the mid-seventies graded tests had been the preserve of the kind of organisations mentioned above – those on the periphery of the school system or outside it altogether. They were introduced into schools in the mid-seventies in Modern Languages (and to a much more restricted extent in Mathematics and Science) by enterprising groups of teachers

working to reform the teaching of their subject particularly to average and less able pupils in the early years of the comprehensive school. It was clear that the traditional objectives then set in Modern Languages at CSE and O level were quite irrelevant for many pupils who would give up the subject long before the fifth year either because they had no hope of passing or because they would decide there were other subjects they would rather do. The groups of teachers therefore set themselves the task of devising courses for these pupils that would arouse and maintain their interest and give them a sense of achievement. They decided to aim at developing pupils' ability to use the language in everyday situations, and to construct small coherent units of work which would be differentiated by subject matter (going shopping, asking directions), skill (speaking, reading, comprehension) and level of difficulty. Achievement would be assessed by graded tests taken as each unit of work was completed and as pupils were felt to be ready to take the tests. Success would be recognised by the award of a certificate recording details of the level of skill achieved. These pioneer schemes of work and their accompanying tests have been enormously successful; they have been adopted or adapted by many other groups of teachers working in conjunction with LEA's and now involve over 200,000 pupils.

A survey of graded tests accounts for their success as follows: 'In sum, the success of schemes in general lies in teacher commitment and pupil involvement. The systems as they have been developed, mainly by teachers, are designed to set pupils tasks which they can see to be relevant to real life and in small enough instalments for them to achieve success and, through success, motivation for the next instalment. The tests are therefore an indispensable component of the schemes because they show all concerned – pupil, teacher, employer, parent – that what has been achieved is a positive contribution to the pupil's development.' (1)

Furthermore an evaluation of graded tests schemes in North Yorkshire and Leeds (2) showed that considerably more pupils who had taken graded tests chose to continue with French after option time than pupils in a control group.

The relevance of these developments for Classics is clear. We have *mutatis mutandis* the same problems as the modern linguists – a large number of pupils begin Latin but do not have the ability to continue beyond the first or second year; others have the ability to reach O level or CSE but take another subject when option time comes along. Any teacher who has taught pupils who know they are going to give up Latin at the end of the year would be grateful of some means of motivating them to do some work; and it is no wonder that such pupils are apathetic or disruptive if they see no coherence in their study of Latin and are not offered any recognition for the year(s) they have spent on it. It would also be cheering for pupils who are determined to stay the whole course to gather a few certificates on the way; and if the results of the modern language survey are

anything to go by, we might even succeed in motivating more pupils to continue with Latin.

For these reasons the Cambridge School Classics Project in 1983 set up a Graded Tests Working Party to devise a graded tests scheme. Its first booklet of tests was published in January, 1985. (3) It contains three alternative written tests each designed for the end of the first Unit of the Cambridge Latin Course. The purpose of the tests is twofold: first, to find out whether the pupils have gained a reasonable competence in the language skills taught in Unit I; second, to examine pupils' understanding of the aspects of Roman society and everyday life presented Unit I and their ability to make comparisons between the ancient and modern worlds. The language test takes the form of an unprepared passage tested by comprehension questions of various types. The questions on the background, some of which are linked to the unprepared passage, include some open-ended questions and some based on pictures. The tests are meant to be within the compass of most, if not all, pupils taking Latin and it is hoped that pupils will enjoy doing them. Successful pupils receive a certificate from the Project recording their achievement and teachers are asked to ensure that this is presented to them on some public occasion. There is also an optional reading test whereby at three points in Unit I, pupils choose a piece of Latin taken from the Course, prepare it and read it aloud to their teacher. Three satisfactory performances win an endorsement on the certificate awarded for the written test.

The response from schools has been so encouraging that the Working Party has started work on devising tests for the later Units of the Course. North American teachers of the Course have just launched their own version of the scheme. It is obviously too early to attempt to evaluate the scheme and its effects; but the experience of working on the tests has presented the Working Party with a number of theoretical and practical questions which have to be answered (or at least acknowledged) by anyone thinking of introducing graded tests in a school subject. The rest of this article will consider some of them.

One of the first questions to arise is how far graded tests in Latin (or Modern Languages) can live up to the traditional requirement to be 'criterion-referenced'. Immediately one gets away from testing physical skills (e.g. retrieving bricks from the bottom of pools, typing so many words per minute) it becomes very difficult to insist that only those who show complete mastery of a task should pass, especially when the tasks set are necessarily quite complex, e.g. translating a piece of unprepared Latin. One could imagine a perfectionist who might insist that only those who translated the piece without making a single mistake could pass the test. But most of us are more soft-hearted or more realistic: we fix a pass standard and maintain, for instance, that any candidate who obtains 30 marks out of 50 (or, in the new jargon, shows mastery at the 60% level) possesses sufficient understanding to pass the test. One might agree with the perfectionist that his view was right – mastery should mean complete mastery – but the corollary would be that to avoid depressing pupils utterly any tests that were devised for them should be very easy indeed so that they did in fact have a good chance of getting everything right. And indeed there is much to be said for this principle, but many of the worthwhile skills we wish to develop in Latin are complex, and sooner rather than later we should be forced back to the

familiar position of allowing partial mastery to count as a pass.

Even if one accepts this, there is the further difficulty of describing what that partial mastery actually means. To take again the example of the pupil who gets 30 out of 50 on his unseen and is therefore deemed to have passed the test: how does one describe in advance what he needs to do to pass the test? One could start by listing the vocabulary and grammatical features that he has to recognise correctly, but one often finds that these are inadequate measures of competence; for example, a pupil will often translate a verb or construction correctly in one part of the passage, but be unable to cope with it if it recurs in another part. The easiness or difficulty of a passage does not depend entirely on vocabulary or grammar; it also resides in the content and the style of the piece. It is, for example, a common experience to find that many pupils in their mid-teens cannot cope unaided with Latin containing even a small amount of abstraction, even although the vocabulary and linguistic structures may be straightforward. Thus criterion-referencing presents problems in Latin and many other school subjects where it may be difficult both to specify precise criteria in advance and to apply ideas of mastery. Nor are graded tests the only form of assessment to be afflicted with the problem: Sir Keith Joseph is intent on criterion-referencing each grade in the new GCSE examination and working parties have already been set up in major subjects to consider how best this is to be done. Here we see an attempt to impose criterion-referencing on a largely norm-referenced examination and it is difficult to see how one can describe achievement at various levels without using comparisons of a norm-referencing kind – 'a candidate achieving Grade C will show a less detailed and complete understanding of syntax than a Grade B candidate' and so on. However Classics, for once, gains from being a minority subject; with any luck we should learn from the hard experience of others.

Graded tests are described as being 'non-competitive' as well as 'criterion-referenced'. This is also worth a little consideration. Many graded tests have only two grades, pass and fail and everyone reaching the pass standard is accorded some form of recognition. But a race may ensue between pupils to pass the higher levels of the test first ('I'm on Grade 5, you've only just done Grade 3'). This may or may not be a bad thing according to one's educational philosophy, but the point is that graded tests do not automatically remove the spirit of competition from the classroom.

Much time in the Working Party's meetings was spent on discussing the practical problems of running the scheme. How can teachers be left free to administer tests when the class (or individuals) are ready to take them without involving the Project in the production of a great number of parallel-test passages? (Anyone who has tried to write a coherent, interesting Latin story which has a fixed wordage and yet incorporates a particular set of linguistic features will know how time-consuming this task is.) Again, how far can one expect teachers all over the country to mark consistently to the same standards? How can one ensure that the award of the Certificate actually means something? What about the cost of the scheme?

Our eventual answers to these questions involved compromises, as the following account of procedures will demonstrate. The school buys one copy only of the test

booklet. At the end of Unit I the teacher chooses one of the tests, duplicates it for the class and administers it according to the instructions in the booklet. These lay much stress on keeping the tests secure as they will be set again in future years. The teacher marks the test according to the mark scheme provided and then sends the papers and the marklist to a moderator – a teacher in another school, who has agreed to take on this task out of sheer goodness of heart or in the hope that his fellow classicist will act as moderator for him in turn. (Readers will note that this is yet another example of unpaid work that teachers take on in addition to their teaching commitments.) The moderator re-marks borderline cases and a one in three sample of the other papers and after consultation with the teacher signs the marklist. This is then sent to the Project office and the required number of certificates is despatched to the school for presentation to the pupils.

Arrangements can be made for absentees and 'near misses' to take one of the other tests, leaving the third test to be used the following year. A rotation of tests then ensues, which it is hoped will continue for a few years while the Working Party is busy writing tests for later Units.

Thus the scheme provides some flexibility in that the teacher administers the test whenever the class finishes Unit I and does not have to wait for the end of term or end of year, yet tries to ensure some control over the administration and marking of the tests; this is essential if the scheme is to have any esteem in the eyes of teachers, pupils and other interested parties.

The overt cost of the scheme has been kept down by charging only a small price for the booklet and the certificates, but the school is expected to duplicate the test papers and the teachers' and moderators' work is voluntary.

There are other less tangible costs that have to be considered by anyone involved in testing and examining. Even if one is devising tests that are intended to be easy, there will inevitably be a few pupils who fail through no fault of their own. Here one can only try to minimise the hurt or avoid the problem by not setting the tests in the first place. Again there is a danger that if graded tests were adopted in many subjects, pupils might find themselves showered with certificates and the currency might well be debased. But this is not happening at present and even if it did, it might not have the effect predicted. There is much anecdotal evidence that pupils enjoy having certificates and the feeling of achievement these bring, and the lives of most of them are not so constantly punctuated by success at school that they are likely to become blasé.

Graded tests schemes have recently been given official encouragement and large sums have been invested by consortia of examining boards in research and development. It is very likely that graded tests will come to play a much greater part in the assessment of the whole school population than at present. One would hope that the kind of flexible and relatively informal schemes already developed by teachers will continue to be used in the lower years of the secondary school. The introduction of more advanced levels for fourth and fifth year pupils, with validation by the examination boards, might well solve some of the intractable problems of differentiation that have so bedevilled GCSE. Instead of one omnibus examination that is meant to enable all candidates to show positively what they can do, it would be simpler and more effective for fourth and fifth year pupils to take a number of

graded tests appropriate for their ability. One can imagine, for example, graded tests for the Cambridge Latin Course designed to accompany each of the later Units of the Course. Schools with less able pupils or very little time might find the graded test for Unit IVA or IVB was the most they could achieve: that achievement would be officially recognised and entered on the pupil's profile of achievement at 16+. Other schools with more able pupils or more time might progress to a graded test whose standard, if not its content, might be that of the present O level. Of course Latin classes are often not homogeneous in ability and in a thorough-going graded tests scheme pupils should be working at the level that suits them. This would mean a change in school organisation at least in the later years; classes organised by chronological age would give way to classes of mixed ages working for the same graded test. Would a class composed of 14-16 year olds with possibly a couple of 6th Form beginners, working at the level that was appropriate for them, be less manageable or efficient than our present arrangements? I think it might very well be the opposite, but with GCSE looming up – an examination with a great future behind it – there will not be much chance for experiment at this level in the next few years. But the success of graded tests so far and the interest now officially taken in them means that they will not go away or be confined only to the early years of the secondary school. Watch this space in five years' time.

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NOTES

- 1 Harrison, A. *Review of graded tests*. Schools Council Examinations Bulletin 41. Methuen Educational, 1982, p. 41.
- 2 Buckby, M. and others. *Graded objectives and tests for modern languages: an evaluation*. Schools Council, 1981.
- 3 Cambridge School Classics Project, *Cambridge Latin Course, Graded Tests Unit 1*, obtainable from C.S.C.P., 17 Panton Street, Cambridge CB2 1HL, price £3.