

A VISION

D'Arcy W Thompson

I was engaged one afternoon with my class in the study of that portion of the *Aeneid* where the hero of the poem and the Sybil journey together by dim, uncertain moonlight, through the shadowy spaces of the underworld. And when the lesson was over, I begged of my boys to learn one splendid passage by heart; and leaning back my chair against the wall, by the monotonous murmuring of their voices I was lulled into a strange reverie.

For the darkness of the under-world I saw three figures moving slowly; and the one was gentle and benign of aspect, and in him I recognised the Divine Master of Mantua, the honour and the light of poetry; and the second was of a sad and stern countenance, who regarded the Master with the admiration of a disciple; and the third was like the Spirit of Myself.

And we had reached the rim of the seventh circle; but from the inner circle there rose a stench so terrible and noisome, that I looked aside, if perchance there might be a place of refuge. And in the dark wall of stone there was a wide fissure like a natural doorway; and over the fissure was an inscription that I read with difficulty:- PAEDAGOGORUM DEFUNCTORUM SEDES. And the Divine Master went therein; and I went, holding the garment of the latter. And the fissure opened into a great vaulted cavern, the farther end of which was wrapped in gloom; and there were millions of gigantic engines shaped like mill-stones, and fitted each one with a handle; and the handle of each was like the sail-arm of a ship of war. And suspended from these handles were the forms of men; and the mill-stones were motionless, and the place was empty of all sound. And suddenly, from the farther gloom came rushing three Erinnyes; and the one was armed with a scourge, and the second with a

yellow reed, and the other with what seemed to me a long thin broom, from which the handle had been shorn. And rushing to and fro, they scourged the suspended figures, and the place was suddenly filled with the whirring and the creaking of a million stone-wheels. And the Disciple and I looked inquiringly in the face of the master; but there was a look of unwonted pain in his benign countenance; and while we gazed wonderingly, he gave a shrill cry, and fell to the ground as one suddenly bereft of life.

And when at length his spirit revived, we lifted him gently, and guided him, in our turn, back through the fissure to the rim of the seventh circle. But we feared to ask him aught; seeing he had been sore troubled. But he, interpreting our secret thoughts, said in tones gentle and very sad: They whom ye saw were PAEDAGOGI in the upper world; and their business it was to turn rapidly the gerund-stone. And forasmuch as I was born upon the skirts of Ignorance, and knew not the darkness of my day, therefore am I doomed to suffer sorely in the spirit with the turning of their gerund-stones. And I shall be PARSED thereby for twice a thousand years. And thereupon, the Pedant shall sit upon the Bagman, crushing him; and the Pedant shall choke in his own fat. And after that my spirit shall have rest.

At this moment I was roused by the sudden cessation of the wonted murmuring; and looking up, I saw the hour was on the stroke of one, and dismissed my boys to play.

From *Day Dreams of a Schoolmaster* by D'Arcy W Thompson, Edinburgh, 1864

VINDOLANDA: HOME OF MINIMUS

Barbara Bell

Once the Advisory Panel and I had decided on Vindolanda as the setting for the Primary Latin Project (in March 1997) it was hard to believe that we had ever considered anywhere else – it seemed so right. Visitors to Vindolanda never forget it; that has certainly been my own experience. It is very special, both for its unique collection of artefacts in the Chesterholm Museum, and for the famous writing tablets. In addition, you can often see archaeologists at work and the whole site is in a picturesque setting in a wooded valley, complete with running brook.

Aims

When beginning Minimus, my starting point was the Programmes of Study in English and History, prescribed by the National Curriculum, for KS2 (ages 7-10). My first aim was to help young children to have a clearer understanding of English, through a simple introduction to Latin. It was to be a language awareness course which would introduce pupils to such concepts as singular and plural and agreement of adjectives, which would provide a useful springboard for language learning at secondary level. Vocabulary building through derivatives was also an important part of the English course. The second aim was historical: most Primary schools opt to study the Romans as part of the Invaders and Settlers topic. This includes the Roman invasion of Britain and children are encouraged to understand what it meant to be invaded. They are urged to use primary source material and to evaluate evidence. It seemed to make perfect sense to look at a real family which came to Britain and, at the same time, to teach them a little of the language that that family spoke. So Minimus is

clearly not designed to produce top marks at Common Entrance nor to create Classical scholars – it is merely a fun introduction to Latin, in cartoon format. If pupils are switched on and wish to do more, then that will be the best possible spin-off.

Meet the Family

When taking secondary age pupils to Italy, it has always been my experience that a highlight of any trip to Pompeii is seeing the house of Caecilius Iucundus; pupils love the fact that he really existed. On the same principle, pupils who have studied Minimus should enjoy a visit to Vindolanda. It is the house of Flavius Cerialis, the father of the family, which is currently being excavated. Flavius was the prefect of the camp and lived there with his wife, Sulpicia Lepidina. (For ease of pronunciation, they are referred to throughout the course as Flavius and Lepidina.) Flavius was in charge of the 9th cohort of Batavians, who came to Vindolanda from what we would now call the Netherlands. The Birley family who are excavating at Vindolanda think that they had 2 or 3 children, probably aged from 5-8; they have deduced this from the size of their shoes, found in the house. Since this is rather an unreliable method of ageing someone, and since we have no certain knowledge of their ages, they gave me carte blanche to invent names and ages. I am indebted to the late Nancy Silver who suggested, during many enjoyable conversations that we had about the course, that I should include some teenagers in the family "since Junior school children are just wanting to be teenagers." This proved to be wise advice: hence Flavia, aged 16, named after her

father and Iulius, aged 13. I also wanted a young child who would show the natural curiosity of a toddler and get into all sorts of mischief - hence Rufus, aged 3. It seemed important for Primary children to include a family pet; for Nancy and for me it had to be a cat and she produced a scholarly list of possible names with their meanings. I settled on Vibrissa - whiskers; my daughter then decided that there must be a mouse "so that they can chase each other around the fort, like Tom and Jerry". Thus **Minimus was born**. In the testing schools, children soon identified the mouse as their favourite member of the family, so that gave us the name of the course. The family came alive and took on real characters when Helen Forte, the brilliant course illustrator, sent me the first set of drawings. These have been followed up by countless sets, at first black and white line drawings and subsequently in full colour. We have endeavoured to make their appearance accurate; I am greatly indebted to Lindsay Allason-Jones, Director of Archaeological Museums at the University of Newcastle upon Tyne, and an expert on Roman Britain and women in this period, for correcting our errors. Helen would immediately respond to Lindsay's helpful suggestions and mark 2 of each picture would have improved ear-rings or shoes, to fit in with artefacts found on site or nearby.

The family needed slaves and again their names are real slave-names, referred to in the writing tablets. Conscious of the concept of invasion and cultural differences, I decided on Corinthus, who is a Greek educated slave; he knows both Latin and Greek and teaches the children and Candidus who is Celtic; he is an excellent cook and is also expert at making things, such as the little wooden sword for Rufus. He was bought by the family when they arrived in Britain; the same is true of Pandora, the slave-girl who arrives in Chapter 3.

The Writing Tablets

It seems that Flavius and his family, plus the Batavians and Tungrians at Vindolanda, had to leave the fort in a hurry. They were summoned to help Trajan in the war in Rumania. Before they left, they must have gathered quickly what they needed to take with them, but decided, in pre-shredder days, to burn all the camp records. Thanks to a heavy fall of rain, the bonfire that they made was put out, leaving the charred remains of hundreds of tiny pieces of wood. These little tablets, when taken out of the ground, are messy, muddy and often stuck together. When separated many of them have a silvery sheen on them; it is only infra-red photography which reveals that they are in fact writing tablets and that the writing is an early form of Latin; it is a cursive script, with no punctuation or word divisions. The painstaking work of Alan Bowman and David Thomas in deciphering these has provided a fascinating insight for us into the life of the inhabitants of Vindolanda. Several of the tablets feature in the stories in Minimus. Perhaps the most famous tablet is the birthday invitation, when Lepidina is invited by her friend, Claudia Severa, to help celebrate her birthday party. I was intrigued by this tablet; no-one had ever told me that the Romans had birthday parties and it seemed a sure winner for young children. So in the first Chapter Lepidina receives her

invite and has to decide what to wear and what to take as a present. She decided to give her friend a ring; this is gold and has an onyx stone in the centre with the head of Medusa on it. Her friend's son doesn't recognise the face in the centre; so Lepidina begins the story of Perseus and Medusa. In response to requests from teachers, a Greek myth is told in each chapter, in English. The ring itself is in the Museum. The tablet deserves a careful look; it is written by a scribe, but at the end, Claudia has signed off herself, in a slightly wobbly hand. This is an exciting little piece of wood - it is the earliest writing in Latin, by women, in the whole of the Roman empire. And we've got it here in Britain!

Other tablets which feature in the course include the message from a soldier to Flavius, requesting more beer for the men; the letter from someone (his Mum?) to a soldier, reporting that she has sent him more socks and underpants; the view of the locals as "Brittunculi" ("silly little Brits") and what seems to be a copying exercise. In Chapter 4, the children are copying out part of Virgil's *Aeneid*. In the original tablet, the lines of Virgil, from Book 9, are followed by a comment in a different hand, presumably that of the teacher - "seg." - short for "segniter" - sloppy work!

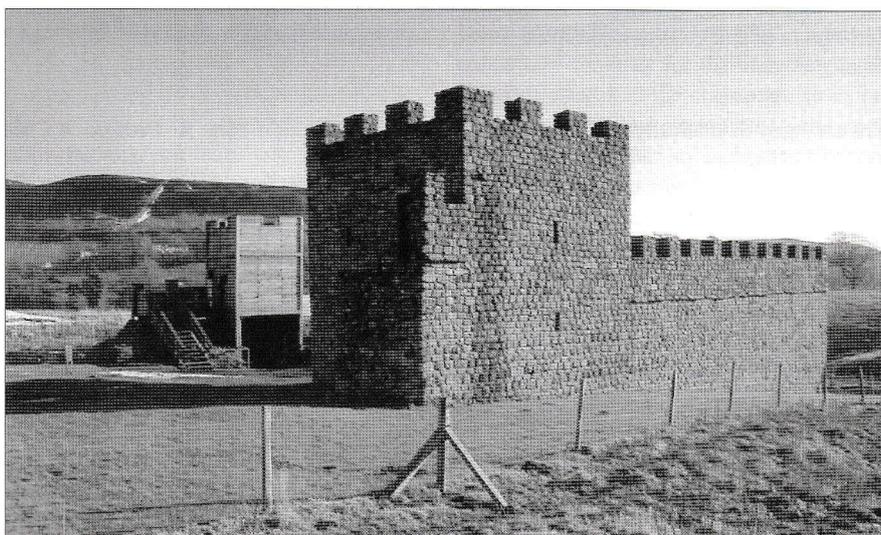
Museum Artefacts

I hope children will enjoy spotting objects which occur in the stories, such as the Medusa ring. They are sure to be impressed by the incredible collection of over 2,000 Roman sandals, along with many other leather artefacts, all well preserved underground in anaerobic conditions. They can see a child's sock, and Rufus' tiny shoe (which he loses in Chapter 10). They can also see Lepidina's exquisite tiny thonged sandal, and the wooden clogs which she puts on in Ch. 8, when she and Flavia go round the military bath-house. The floors are so hot that they need to protect their feet. I am sure they will also be intrigued to see the gaming board and loaded dice, the lady's hairnet, the comb, still in its case and the set of needles, still in their case.

The Site Itself

The site now includes imaginative reconstructions which are also carefully based on information found in the writing tablets and on artefacts found on site. These include an imaginary Roman kitchen and Roman shop, plus a temple, dedicated to the nymphs at Vindolanda. Students from Newcastle University helped to build a reconstruction of part of Hadrian's Wall and in front of this is a model of a ballista. Pupils should recognise this, as it is the basis for one of the picture stories in Chapter 9, where Vibrissa chases Minimus around it. Helen's illustrations of the cunning Minimus - under the ballista, in front of it, on top, around etc - should make prepositions clear.

Working with Helen, my Advisory Panel and teachers from the testing schools has made creating Minimus a most stimulating and happy project. My visits to Vindolanda have always been the icing on the cake; it is to be hoped that they will be so for a whole new generation of schoolchildren.



TELEDIDAXIS: a sophistic note on handling video conferencing

Adrian Spooner

PROOEMIUM

In the late Spring of 1998 I was contacted by David Black of Gwynedd Distance Learning Ltd about producing a Latin course to be delivered by open learning text and supported by video conferencing. Gwynedd had already been running GCSE and A Level courses successfully in a range of subjects from law via psychology through to electronics. The demand, he said, for Latin was now irresistible. The brief was to produce a course which would allow three hours a week self study, one hour of video conference support, and half termly visits to the schools involved.

The course turned out to be a "navigation aid" to the Cambridge course. It simply suggests a route through the course, structures the students' work, provides feedback where appropriate, and makes entirely reasonable demands for chunks of work to be sent to the tutor for marking.

This is what made me a video conference teacher: or so I thought, until, during and after the first session, I saw a scree-laden learning curve stretching out ahead and above me. Now I am some way up that curve, it seems reasonable to take a look back and briefly review the journey.

DIEGESIS

Video conferencing hardware consists of a computer plugged into an ISDN line (a clever telephone wire) with a camera and microphone stuck on top of the monitor. The camera and mike are minatory little items. They are going to take your image and your voice to a remote computer monitor which a group of students are watching and listening to. Certainly, you can call up a box in the corner of the screen which shows you what the students are seeing, but that is no help at all. Remember how unnerving it can be to catch your own image in a shop window, and only after seconds realize that is how others are seeing you. But what you are most aware of is that you are not in the classroom. What does that do for communication, discipline, forming relationships and building motivation?

Consider this: it might be safer to remove seat belts from cars, and air bags, and replace them with a steel spike sticking out of the hub of the steering wheel and pointing at your chest. It will make you drive more carefully.

PISTIS

So video conference teachers have the odds stacked up against them because they have to contend not only with the vagaries of the class and the rigours of the subject, but also the isolation imposed and enhanced by the technology.

Wrong.

Teaching by video conference is a *techne*, and so can be learned. Here is a novice's guide to avoiding the pitfalls and maximizing the opportunities created by the technology.

PRESENTATION TECHNE

You will not look on the monitor the way you think you look. For instance, you might favour a delicate mixture of spots and stripes, or perhaps a swishy paisley silk print. Unfortunately, the camera abhors patterns and bright colours, and your class will get migraine. Something plain and lightish will actually enhance your effectiveness as a teacher.

Be sure, too, that the volume level is set right on both sides of the interchange. The reasons for not being too quiet are obvious. Being too loud can generate echo and feedback. Then speak clearly and measure your pace, and be sure to catch all the consonants. Most important, avoid speaking at the same time as someone at the other end. Should this happen, you get a terrible puddingy mix of sound, and all you can do is wait for the air to clear.

Then consider the effect of where you actually lay the texts you are going to use in the lesson. Keep them as close together as possible, because if you divert your gaze too far from the camera, even briefly, you look to the audience as if you are losing interest, and then you lose their attention. If you cannot avoid looking away, tell the class what you are doing. Remember, too, that the same is the case with your audience. What to you might look like loss of attention and gazing into a corner could well be reference to a vocab list perched on a seat beside them.

Now for the *grande illusion* under the presentation heading. In real life you make eye contact by looking into peoples' eyes. On a video conference, that is how to lose eye contact. You are, in fact, looking at the screen. You make eye contact by looking into the camera lens. But then you cannot see the screen, so you think you have lost contact. It's an artificial skill, but you quickly learn to make regular and frequent eye contact, and then return to the monitor to see what is going on.

AMBIENCE TECHNE

The background against which you deliver your teaching is critical. You must avoid all the visual distractions you can. Take a look at yourself in the monitor, and make sure that there is no light spill from a window or badly directed light bulb. Also clear any notices that might be on the wall— your class will try, vainly, to read them. White/black boards in shot are bad news, too, especially if they have something written on them. If possible, broadcast from a small room. The picture breaks up the more the camera tries to look into the distance, and the echo can be horrible.

TECHNICAL TECHNE

One of the first things you will notice when you video conference is that, after your first utterance, you will hear it come back to you, faintly, after a couple of seconds. That is when your class hear you. You'll soon get used to that, but it is best to remember not to tell jokes that rely on . . . timing.

At first you might find it a bit of a strain to catch everything that is said, especially when more than one student is speaking. Ask for unclear statements to be repeated. If lack of clarity persists, I have found it helpful to cup my ear as a cue for the class to make the appropriate vocal adjustments.

Make sure that all the students appear on the monitor. It is disconcerting to hear a disembodied voice from stage left getting something wrong. Just ask how many students are present, then count the heads on the screen. It is also worth asking if there is anyone else in the room. It has been known for people to sit in on a lesson, out of camera, and it can be disconcerting to find out that that has happened. If people are sitting in, albeit out of camera, it is usually best to try to involve them in the lesson. The students feel a bit less like exhibits. Then, throughout the lesson, watch very carefully for the body language. It is not as obvious what is going on as it is in the classroom, so extra concentration will pay dividends. Under normal circumstances the students' eyes will move from the texts to you and then to each other. Concerted sideways glances means that there is a distraction in the classroom.

Do not try to hold text or illustrations up to the camera. The class will not recognize what it is. In addition, you will convey the impression that you have delirium tremens. Refer to illustrations that they have with them, and in the case of text, make use of the magical whiteboard which the program contains. Two clicks presents a white rectangle on the teacher's and students' screens. You can type text onto this screen, and the students see what you have typed immediately. This is particularly useful for displaying inflections. If you want written feedback from the students, they get control of the screen simply by commandeering the mouse. You can also send documents by B mail during the run of the lesson.

EPILOGOS

Are the problems inherent in the use of digital technology going to screw up the uniqueness of your own methods and insert a mental (as well as physical) distance between you and your students, reducing the real relationship you enjoy now to a mere virtual relationship? And if it does, are you then only virtually communicating, motivating, inspiring?

It is true that it would be better to have Latin properly timetabled in all secondary schools (and primaries!), with corporeal teachers in swishing distance of their devoted charges, available for soothing anxieties or driving on as and when needed. Yet, I have noticed a remarkable phenomenon. It is the very things (all mentioned above) that make teaching by video conference difficult which make it successful. Every time you go on line, you'll be reminded of the problems. So you compensate. You redouble your listening and watching, you concentrate more on your clarity of delivery and your use of body language and eye contact. You are driven to check understanding repeatedly and take the social and intellectual temperature. You make sure your enthusiasm is conveyed and picked up. Then you notice that the students are similarly straining every sinew in their work and responses. It is the natural thing for them to do under the circumstances. What you then get is a lesson more concentrated, more focused than you would probably experience in the classroom, because of the communal effort to exclude the extraneous. But

this mode of behaviour is not one you put on like someone else's shoes, which nip and bite, keeping you uncomfortable until the hour is over. It becomes an entirely natural mode of behaviour for that hour, not only for you, but for the students.

Then the lesson stops, and you log off. As you let the concentration go, you feel you have been teaching non-stop for a term. It is then essential to pour yourself a gargantuan G&T.

Teaching Latin by video conference is a means of enhancing the curriculum. The schools I teach either had had no Latin at all, or had had the plugs pulled on it. Now they have Latin. But further, we know that all schools will soon be connected up to ISDN lines. Schools will provide (probably evening) venues in which adults can go on line to pursue educational, vocational or leisure courses. This is what lifelong learning means when it is action. Peter Jones has shown us, with the success of his courses in the Telegraph, that there is a large audience out there for classical subjects, and one that is prepared to hack away at them alone or in small groups. Technology makes it easier for us to fulfil those needs, and provide real, solid evidence that there is a demand for the classics in the community.

Adrian Spooner, Director, Pentaxion Ltd.

SMALL LATIN, AND LESS GREEK

David West

How can my Muse want subject to invent
While thou dost breathe, that pour'st into my verse
Thine own sweet argument, too excellent
For every vulgar paper to rehearse? 4
O give thyself the thanks if aught in me
Worthy perusal stand against thy sight,
For who's so dumb that cannot write to thee,
When thou thyself dost give invention light? 8
Be thou the tenth Muse, ten times more in worth
Than those old nine which rhymers invoke,
And he that calls on thee, let him bring forth
Eternal numbers to outlive long date. 12
If my slight Muse do please these curious days,
The pain be mine, but thine shall be the praise.

'Shakespeare is in the Sonnets an astonishingly nonclassical poet.' Helen Vendler on this Sonnet 38 in *The Art of Shakespeare's Sonnets* (1998).

'How can I be short of things to write about while you exist?' The simple compliment is anything but simple in this sonnet. First, at the level of the senses, the breath is pouring from the beloved boy into Shakespeare's verse, and it is sweet.

Second, at a rhetorical level, there is technical terminology. 'Subject to invent' plays upon the Latin *Inventio*, the first of the five faculties required by the orator in the second chapter of [Cicero] *Ad Herennium*, defined in the Oxford Latin Dictionary as the devising of *arguments*, especially the devising of the subject matter of a speech. The 'sweet argument', is therefore part of this rhetorical play, and it is too excellent for normal utterance.

Third, and most important, is Shakespeare's exploitation of the Classical account of poetic composition. When Horace is writing his poetry he senses the presence of the god actually within him. In *Odes* 2.16 Fate has given him the fine breath, *tenuem spiritum* of the Greek Camena; in 4.6 it is Phoebus Apollo who has given him this breath of song; in 3.25 he has a new mind and is full of Bacchus as god of poetry; in 2.18 he rejoices in this same god of poetry, and his breast is full of him, *pleno Bacchi pectore*; in 3.4 his breath is blessed by the gods, *non sine dis animosus infans*. The first four lines of this sonnet therefore suggest that the

beloved is doing the work of the Classical Muse. The ground is prepared for the request in line 9, 'Be thou the tenth Muse'.

Horace enjoys number games. The Cerberus who puts down his ears at the end of 2.13 has 100 heads and no doubt 200 ears, but Cerberus with the golden horn who rubs his tail against Mercury's feet and legs and licks them in 2.19, has a three-tongued mouth. How many tongues altogether? At the end of 2.16 a *hundred* flocks and cows are mooing, a mare fit to pull a *four*-horse chariot is whinnying and Grosphus is wearing *double*-dyed purple. Horace would have smiled at the number ten in line 9 followed by the number nine in line 10. There is so much numerical play in the sonnets that some might even add up 10+9+9+10 in this Sonnet 38 and look narrowly at 'numbers' and 'long date' in line 12. Shakespeare is poking fun at the Classical Muses. Witness the sneer at 'those old nine which rhymers invoke', this last word being Latinate pomposity for 'invoke'.

In line 11 begins a metaphor from childbirth, and this, too, is close to one of Horace's odes. In 3.22 Horace addresses the virgin goddess who hears when called three times by girls in labour and saves them from death, *Virgo, quae laborantis utero puellas ter vocata audis adimisque leto*. In Sonnet 38 the poet who calls on Shakespeare's beloved should bring forth offspring, i.e. poems, which will not only have life, but will live for ever. In the Horace the girls are suffering the pangs of childbirth; at the end of Sonnet 38 Shakespeare is suffering the pain of poetic composition. This metaphor has a complex resonance. The Muse is the male beloved of the poet, and will act as Diana, chaste goddess of childbirth, helping the male poet to bring forth issue. The only issue Shakespeare can hope for is a poem, but it will have eternal life. The pain will be Shakespeare's if his 'slight Muse do please these curious days' ('curious' is a dig at hypercritical contemporaries), the praise will go to his Muse, the beloved.

The slightness of Shakespeare's Muse is another Classical recollection. Horace too pretended to believe that his poetic gifts were slight, *spiritum Graiae tenuem Camenae* in 2.16, and Tityrus under his beech tree at the opening of Virgil's *Eclogues* was practising *tenui avena*, on a scranrel pipe, as Milton translates it in *Lycidas*. Apollo's advice to Tityrus

in *Eclogues* 6. 4-5 is his version of Callimachus' motto, 'a shepherd ought to feed fat sheep and speak a fine-spun thread of song', *pastorem, Tityre, pinguis pascere oportet ovis, deductum dicere carmen*. Shakespeare understood this literary technicality. Even the silly pedant Holofernes did. 'Novi hominem tanquam te' he says of Don Adriano di Armado at the beginning of the fifth act of *Love's Labours Lost*, and goes on 'He draweth out the thread of his verbosity finer than the staple of his argument'.

Having reached Horace we remember *Odes* 4.3, where he addresses his Muse (as Shakespeare does in Sonnet 38). Melpomene could grant

dumb fish (Sonnet 38 line 7) the song of the swan, and all his poems are her gift, *totum muneris hoc tuum est*. Any pleasure he gives is hers, *si placeo tuum est*. It looks as though somewhere in the vast labyrinth of Shakespeare's brain there was a recollection of this ode of Horace. And why should there not be? Deep calls to deep.

But the three most recent commentaries on the Sonnets (by Duncan-Jones, Blakemore Evans, and Vendler) mention none of this. These poems are too good to be left to English scholars.

David West

RADIO ROMANS

Peter Jones

From time to time John Byrne of Radio 4 in Bristol asks me for some ideas for history programmes. It is easy to agree, since John was a major producer of the brilliant *That's History* series. One knows one is in safe hands – a vital condition when dealing with the media. There is, however, one *sine qua non* for any proposal: it must be so phrased that, if John decides it is worth presenting to the commissioning panel, he will be able to answer convincingly the one, big question – why should we put on this programme now? The point is that, since there are a million wonderful programmes that could be made at any one time, there must be some reason for choosing this one rather than that. It is not surprising if 'contemporary relevance' becomes a key criterion for selection. Contrary to what one sometimes feels, the BBC does want people to tune in to its programmes, and, rightly or wrongly, it feels that if a historical programme has a contemporary hook it stands a much better chance of being a success.

The second priority is that any series, however long, must argue a single, central thesis. There are two points here. First, there must be an argument. A string of good stories or fascinating facts will not do. The programmes must be going somewhere, driving towards a conclusion. Second, they must be simple, or perhaps rather simplex: 'not hedged about by too many qualifications'. In other words, the listener must know where they are at any point in the argument. Ramifications there will be, but the branches cannot be allowed to grow so far from the trunk that they start to multiply into yet further branches. This is popular history, not a seminar.

The recent series John and I concocted entitled 'Running the Roman Empire' exemplifies the approach. The Roman Empire looks contemporary because one can see it as a model for the European Union. Given that implied parallel, the theme of the series chooses itself – how did the Romans run their empire and did it work? The narrative story line again leaps off the page – each episode to take a different emperor, to see how successful (or not) he was, and to try to draw out the common reasons for success or failure (the element of thematic consistency). So we identified six plates the emperors needed to keep in the air – provinces, army, finances, aristocracy, *plebs* and *aula* – to form the repeating themes that underpinned each programme. Augustus, Trajan and Nero looked to provide a suitably contrasting hand of three emperors, and with Pliny, Tacitus and Suetonius providing the examples (years of listening at key-holes), the series wrote itself. Sophisticated and subtle it wasn't, but that suited me just fine.

I was, however, rather surprised when John said we should record the programme in Rome. It seemed something of a pointless extravagance. John's answer was that it would make all the difference: the physical presence of the real thing, he argued, would communicate the atmosphere to the listener and give the whole project a freshness and vitality that we could never hope to generate in a recording studio. With the lira at nearly three thousand to the pound, the argument suddenly sounded utterly convincing. Off, then, to Rome.

Here I comment on the pleasure of seeing an expert at work. John (an English graduate) had read and thoroughly absorbed my briefing notes on what we would see and how we should integrate it into the argument of the programme. He would interview me on site, demonstrating a complete

grasp of what needed to be said, showing me how to describe the surroundings for the listener, prompting me to see the modern parallels to draw listeners into the story (spin-doctors, men in grey suits, fat-cats, and so on), guiding and pointing the argument when I lost the thread, occasionally asking me to go over things again, but always in such a way as to make me more, not less, confident in what I wanted to say. It was impossible to feel anything other than completely secure. The technology too was impressive to an ignoramus like myself. John's gear was a small cassette recorder and largish mike; but in case it broke down or we were stopped by officials, I was wired up with a cassette the size of a cigarette packet that ran all the time, with an almost invisible mike attached to my lapel that would allow us to continue recording, without (evidently) alteration in sound quality. When we had reached a site, John took endless trouble getting the acoustics right, sniffing about like a trained bloodhound until he had found a location that gave off the right 'noises', and remaining alert throughout the interview to unacceptable intrusions (as everyone who has done this sort of things knows, switching on a tape-recorder acts as a signal for the complete police and ambulance force of a district to leap into immediate action, helicopters thumping, sirens screaming). John also had an uncanny nose for the main chance. When we found we could not get into the remaining wing of Nero's palace to do a piece there, he identified the entrance-hall to the British School at Rome (where he was interviewing the Director Andrew Wallace-Hadrill) as offering the perfect substitute, with its spacious, high-vaulted ceilings, and slight echo. As we hunted hopelessly around the portico of Pompey at the height of the thunderous Roman rush-hour for a suitable place to talk about the assassination of Julius Caesar, John turned into the Street of the Barbers and found there a cool, quiet, low courtyard, with a fine resonance and admitting just the right amount of distant hustle and bustle.

Presenters, however – which is what I was – are merely presenters. Our job is to make sure the oysters are edible. The lemon, pepper, tabasco and pearls are added by the experts. Here we were enormously lucky in being able to persuade people of the calibre of Wallace-Hadrill in Rome, Miriam Griffin at Oxford and Thomas Wiedemann at Nottingham (among others) to join in. So when the three days in Rome were up, John went off on his travels again to fill in the gaps and get the academic sharpness that such a programme requires if it is to be convincing. At the end of all this, there must have been about 10 hours of recorded material, needing to be boiled down into three half-hour programmes. This is where the expertise of the producer really shows, and if I say I was pleased with the result, it is because I know what I said on site in Rome, I know how it came out in the programme, and the difference could not have been more stark: clouds of hand-waving waffle magically condensed into broadly coherent utterance within a tightly argued framework, beautifully supported and deepened by incisive academic comment.

John is now working on a programme about Wembley Stadium and another about why our cities look as they do. I am pretty certain Plato would not have approved, but in this case, Plato would have been wrong.

Peter Jones