



Holmes-Henderson, A., Hunt, S., & Musié, M. (Eds.). (2018). *Forward with classics*. London, England: Bloomsbury.

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.37074/jalt.2018.1.2.11>

There is something singularly ghastly about clichés when used by educational establishments. By definition, such institutions really ought to know better. But they don't.

So it is that my former school proclaims itself today, on its website, as a 'forward thinking ... educational community' that promotes 'values of respect and co-operation'. What a load of old cobblers. I prefer the 1950s model, when the shabbily gowned teachers (exclusively male and ex-military) exercised the cane and threw chalk at miscreants in a richly backward-thinking obsession with corporal punishment. The fabric of the gloomy old joint was largely driven by disrespect and dislocation. It bred a tougher carapace for the vicissitudes of life, though, than the soft-shell product of today's touchy-feely forward-bloody-thinking.

Nevertheless, I must concede that there was one spectacular instance of beneficence in those times past. The Latin master was renowned for his unusual largesse. In his secondary role as the fulcrum of the drama society, he would have us round to his house, fill us up with his home-made wine (concocted from gooseberries, raspberries, strawberries) and send us unsteadily into the night proclaiming Shakespeare to the stars. No-one complained.

Yet most of us failed miserably the GCE 'O' Level Latin exam that unfortunate, if memorable, year. It wasn't so much the wine as our school's own state of confusion. The exam came in two parts. One paper concerned itself with grammar and syntax; the other with translating the classics (Caesar's Gallic Wars, Martial and Ovid and all that stuff). The first was on a Friday; the second on a Monday. I can't recall, now, which of them was the grammar job and which was the translation. The trouble is, back then, the school appeared unable to remember either. We trooped into the exam room on the Friday, having swotted up – on the official in-house advice – for one sort of paper, only to be confronted by the other. Again, no-one complained. Some feverish further swotting occurred over the intervening weekend; but it was all too late. Recovery from Friday's uniform disaster was unattainable; I sense, maybe, that in any case candidates had to pass both parts.

Regardless of that personal misfortune, for I was one of the sizeable cohort that recorded an 'F', I find two positive factors endure to this day. I love my wine, and I have an abiding respect for Latin. The five years of classroom declension and conjugation – regardless of the ultimate examination paper cock-up – taught me some lasting lessons about sentence construction, about mood and voice, and about such wonderfully esoteric applications as the dative, the gerund, and the ablative absolute. They have empowered my journalism and my authorship in the fuller flower of my being; those years were not wasted. I welcome, accordingly, the publication of *Forward With Classics*, even if it does have a dreary title and some ill-chosen, out-of-focus, crudely cropped illustrative plates.

This book reports, in a series of essays and reflections, the gradual restoration of classical studies – linguistic and cultural – in societies worldwide. Such teaching had fallen into a sad state of neglect by the early 1980s; then, *Dei gratia*, a resurrection came gradually upon us. There emerged a pan-pedagogical push, a revival driven by some remarkable inventiveness of ideas: Latin clubs (presumably without fruit-flavoured grog in this PC world); bingo with Roman numerals; a cartoon character called Minimus ('the mouse that made Latin cool') for little learners; and dress-up sessions to enact classical drama.

In the UK, from where springs the book's driving force, there has been, too, some powerful support of a political kind. Michael Gove, a Conservative secretary of state for education, emerged as an impassioned advocate of the Classics rediscovery. *Forward With Classics* traces how the major changes, in favour of reviving these studies, arose with the newly elected UK coalition government of 2010. Latin and, albeit to a lesser extent, other classical subjects were enlisted in what was seen as an advance in social justice. However, their enactment was limited to schools in England; those of Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales operate their own systems under devolved powers. English pupils and teachers alike are quoted – exhaustively, and no doubt selectively – as saying how much the policy has enriched their overall education experience. Mr Gove, as the erstwhile minister at the head of the push (he has now been shifted to

another portfolio), is also quoted in the book, from the year 2014. He speaks as an apparent champion of egalitarianism:

Classics is one of those subjects where most university places are taken up by independent school students, and I think that's wrong. We should be giving state school pupils the chance to compete on a level playing field.

'On yer, Govey. To you, to the editors of Forward With Classics, and to all connected with this admirable initiative of recovery, I can say only: gratias tibi ago. And ... nunc scripsi totum pro Christo da mihi potum.¹

¹ The Latin quotation is a scholarly joke. Monks, traditionally, would sign off a sacred parchment with: *Nunc scripsi totum pro Christo, da mihi potum*. 'Now I have written so much for Christ, give me a drink' (rough translation). But if the comma is shifted, it becomes: *Nunc scripsi totum, pro Christo da mihi potum*. That, even more roughly, can be translated as 'Now I have done all that writing, for Christ's sake give me a drink.' The author in his youth was much amused by the capacity for playfulness in Latin, which gave rise to such constructions as *Caesar sic in omnibus*.