

Teaching Classics to Sam Alito¹

Some years ago my wife and I decided the time had come to introduce our kids to Europe. While in England we stayed one night at University College, Durham, a grand Norman castle which in the summer functioned as a bed and breakfast for itinerant academics. As we were picking at our breakfast of fried bread and kippers, a young woman came up to ask if we would like a tour of the college. We accepted, of course, and as we walked past an impressive portrait of a gentleman in academic dress I asked “Who is that?” Our guide replied “I don’t know but he is very famous.” When I inquired how this could be, she replied, “We have all forgotten his name but he was professor of Greek and was famous for falling asleep in his own lectures.” Our children, for some reason, thought that was extremely funny and from time to time remind me of the story.

It came to mind again when I was invited to speak here at Wellesley College. With that clarifying moment in mind I decided I would not *lecture* but instead tell a story. It’s fiction, or rather fictionalized. You may recognize that some of the characters in it are based, to some extent, on real people who have been in the news in recent months. Others are loosely based on friends of mine, but I haven’t always bothered to change their names. Together, these characters raise some Big Questions about how we teach and how we learn but—well, you’ll see.

Imagine three graduates coming back in a few weeks’ time for their 25th reunion at Walden College, a fine ivy-clad undergraduate college dedicated to liberal learning, located not far from here. They had been good friends in college, were the only majors in classics that year, went their separate ways but were now looking forward to catching up with one another and renewing their friendship.

Each of them had done post graduate work in a different field, had held wonderfully challenging and exciting positions and made good money in them. They had agreed to meet at their favorite hangout of the good old days. The bar and grill was called “The Public Intellectual,” with PUB, flashing in bright red neon and the rest in cool blue of diminished brightness. It hadn’t changed much, or some would say *improved* much, over the years.

After a few minutes, Marcia² turned the conversation in a different direction. She reminded them that after graduation from Walden she had gone on to get a Ph.D. from Harvard in classical archaeology, spent time at the American Academy in Rome, and then become a curator in a museum famed for its collection of Greek vases. She built that collection to even greater levels of excellence, in part with the help of a dealer with the wonderful name of Medici. But then it turned out that Mr. Medici had been getting

¹ This text is adapted from a talk given at Wellesley College on April 6th 2006. Marc Lange of the University of North Carolina helped me think through many of the issues I struggled with in writing the piece.

² Compare the case of Marion True, an NYU graduate, curator at the Getty. See Christopher Reynolds’ “The Puzzle of Marion True,” *The Los Angeles Times*, October 30, 2005.

some of those beautiful vases from *tombolari*, the robbers of Etruscan tombs. In the past few months this connection, tenuous as it was, had blown up in her face. The Italians were demanding the return of some of the vases she had purchased; the museum board was in an uproar, her boss had quit, and “Professionally I’m now a leper, a *miasma*, contagious filth. No one will even speak to me when I go to professional meetings. And I’m afraid that the Italian authorities, or maybe even our state’s attorney general, will indict me—and I certainly can’t go back to Italy, which I love so much.”

Frank³ interrupted, “You *might* get indicted? I already *have been*. The trial is in just a few weeks. After my MBA I worked in the financial office at an Ivy League university and then moved to Washington to be CFO of a multi-billion dollar corporation that finances mortgages. I reported to a Harvard grad, a former Rhodes Scholar, a great guy, I thought, who emphasized that my assignment was to do everything I could to show a steady growth of profits and meet analysts’ expectations. A little cosmetic surgery might be needed now and then, he told me. Well, I did it, and look where it got me.”

Deborah⁴, a lawyer, broke in: “Why didn’t you two call me before you got into such trouble? Since I’m with the Department of Defense I couldn’t represent you myself but I certainly could have helped you find a good lawyer. You weren’t stealing or committing fraud to enrich yourselves; a good lawyer could have found a way for you to do what you needed to do without getting into legal trouble. That’s what we get paid for. Let me show you what I mean. In fall 2002 we began to get worried that the only interrogation techniques that had a chance of working on those Taliban prisoners at Guantanamo might get some of our troops in trouble. Someone could claim that they had used some techniques—such as hooding, deprivation of light, exploitation of claustrophobia, or of their fear of dogs—that were forbidden in the *Army Field Manual* or the *Uniform Code of Military Justice*. (As everyone knows, the Geneva Convention doesn’t apply in such cases.) We needed to use those techniques to prevent another 9/11. I did my homework and drafted a memo that showed a way out of the problem. The “cruel and unusual punishment” talk in the Eighth Amendment would only apply if the treatment was deliberately malicious and didn’t serve a “legitimate governmental objective.” And, of course, the kind of treatment we were talking about had an absolutely compelling governmental purpose. Also, since the *Code* allows a soldier to be given immunity from prosecution *after* a violation of its provisions, for example in exchange for testimony that would get at a bigger criminal in the case, I argued that immunity could also be given *in advance*, before any violation was committed, if what we call the “convening authority,” thought it was essential for the country’s security in time of war.

“Cool,” said Frank, “Did they buy that?”

³ Frank’s situation reflects that of Leanne G. Spencer and others at Fannie Mae. See the report in *The Financial Times*, February 24, 2006.

⁴ Compare the story of Diane Beaver as reported by Jane Mayer in “The Memo” *The New Yorker*, February 27, 2006, esp. pp. 35f. A copy of the memo is available at <http://www.defenselink.mil/news/Jun2004/d20040622doc3.pdf>

“When it went up the chain of command, the General Counsel⁵ liked it, and although I can’t speak about the official rationale right now, our interrogators at Guantanamo all feel they have the flexibility they need to do their job.”

“I wish I had talked to you before I got blindsided by the Italian authorities.” Marcia said.

At that point a gray-haired man who had been sitting with his back to them at the next table turned in his chair. He and his colleague had been having their regular Friday night supper of fish and chips and Guinness Stout. He said “I’m sorry to interrupt, but I couldn’t help overhearing. I don’t know if you remember me, I’m Professor Chipping of the classics department.”

“Of course we remember you,” the three of them said, more or less in unison. “We took every class you offered and loved them,” Deborah added.

“Yeah,” Frank chimed in, “they were awesome. I actually had to work in a couple of them, but I still got a charge out of them, especially those dirty Latin poems by Catiline or whoever it was, and that sex strike Aristotle organized to stop the Persian War and then wrote that play about.”

Professor Chipping winced. “Indeed. We needn’t go into the details at this late date, Frank, but I did want to say how sorry I am that you have each found yourself in such trouble. It’s very distressing—a real pity, Marcia, that your career (which I have followed with great interest through the scholarly journals) has taken such a painful turn. And you Frank, such an upstanding young man, caught in such an unfortunate corporate scandal.”

“At least,” said Deborah, “I haven’t had any problems like that.”

“Well no,” Mr. Chipping said after a moment, “not quite of that sort, but some people might think that using the law to subvert legality was an even worse offence—if you will pardon me for saying so. But please don’t misunderstand me; I’m not *blaming* you. If anything I’m blaming myself that I didn’t prepare you better for the difficulties you would encounter. It makes me very, very sad.”

“Oh for heavens’ sake, Chips—don’t be so maudlin,” said his companion, Caldwell Fishbein, a popular, voluble, but rather acerbic professor in the physics department. Students had various nicknames for him—“Cold Fission” or just “Fission” or sometimes “Fish.” Fission shook his finger at his friend, “You did what you could. No one expects that a classicist could do anything more than drill some grammar into their heads and maybe teach them how to throw a good toga party.”

⁵ William J. Haynes, a Phi Beta Kappa graduate of Davidson College, with a J.D. from Harvard. A brief bio is available on the Department of Defense web site: www.defenselink.mil/dodgc/gc/gcbio.html

“I’ve never had anything to do with toga parties.” said Professor Chipping, looking a bit shocked.

“Nor any other kind,” Fission added with a smirk. “I can prove what I said about classics.” Reaching into his briefcase he pulled out a journal.

“Take a look at the new issue of this rag *Liberal Education* which just came out.⁶ A guy named Don Elmore, a chemist at Wellesley, and some of his colleagues, polled students about what they thought was involved in studying various majors. In general the students didn’t have a clue. But they were confident about one thing: classics had nothing to do with stuff outside academia. It made no contributions to society; it was even less important than physics as part of a liberal education. Don’t frown, Chips—that’s good news for you. You are off the hook. If your former students get into a mess, that’s their fault, not yours. Leave the modern world to us scientists and go off and enjoy the fifth declension. That’s enough challenge for their distracted little brains.”

Mr. Chipping had heard all this before. In fact, he’d read the famous article, “Aim Low,” which Fission had published under the pseudonym Stanley Fish.⁷ In it, he argued it was all one could do to get students to some minimal level of competency in an academic field; he denounced efforts to develop students’ capacities for self understanding, civic engagement, taking responsibility for one’s actions and the like, as “a mish mash of self-help platitudes, vulgar multiculturalism... and a soft core version of 60s radicalism.” Fish had a way with words, quite beyond what you might expect from a professor in his field. Persuasive too; his article had convinced a lot of people to “aim low” and settle for imparting some disciplinary knowledge.

“Fission is right, Professor Chipping,” Frank added, not entirely to make the old guy feel better. “Our trouble isn’t your fault. We just, like, drifted into it, you know. And, after all, our problems are just personal stuff; they don’t have anything to do with what we did in college. You did your part, you taught some entertaining courses, gave some fair exams and the college gave us the certification we needed to build successful careers. You aren’t paid to proselytize or brainwash us.”

“I’m not paid much at all,” said Chipping with a sigh, looking at the bill for the meal which Fission had craftily pushed to his side of the table. “But I wouldn’t ever try to brain wash someone. I just feel bad about your situation and hope I didn’t do anything wrong.”

“You didn’t do anything wrong; just the opposite.” Deborah insisted, switching into her best court room manner. “Professor Chipping taught me what has been most important in my career—how to analyze a problem, how to read a text closely and imaginatively, how to argue on either side of a question, how to see what your opponents are likely to argue

⁶ Donald Elmore , Julia C. Prentice, and Carol Trosset. “Do Students Understand Liberal Arts Disciplines?” *Liberal Education* 92, 1 (Winter 2006) pp. 48 - 55.

⁷ Stanley Fish. “Aim Low,” *Chronicle of Higher Education*, May 16, 2003.

and beat them to the punch—how to build the best possible case for my clients. I got into Harvard Law because I'd learned these things and I use them every day in my job at the Pentagon. You taught us the skills we needed for success in a dog-eat-dog world."

"I wish someone would use those skills for me before some Italian court makes marinara sauce out of me," said Marcia.

"Well, thank you" said Professor Chipping. "Maybe I've blamed myself too much. I certainly wouldn't want to brainwash anyone. I'm glad you found my courses helpful, Deborah. I'm no expert in these matters, but I do wish you the best of luck, and a very happy reunion."

"Thanks, Professor."

"Goodnight."

"Goodnight...Goodbye..."

"Goodnight, Mr. Chips."

"Goodnight, Fission."

Goodbye, Mr. Chips.

"Goodbye Fission and Chips"

So that's the story, or at least the first part of it. Let's analyze it.

First, these characters are not bad people, or certainly didn't start out that way. They aren't crooks or sadists. As undergraduates they were good, likeable kids. Whatever they did, they didn't do it from greed or in order to profit themselves. They were loyal employees, devoted to the institution they served, hard working, patriotic. They're not, of course, typical. Even classics majors don't have a three for three record of getting into big trouble. But if we try to get out of the problem by saying they were just a few bad apples, we have to ask, "How did they get to be bad apples?"

So—second—how did things go wrong? The first answer to that question seems to be "incrementally." There was never a point when they saw clearly that they were about to do something they knew was wrong. There was an infinitesimal calculus at work. Take Frank's case: he had worked at a university making perfectly legal efforts to make the balance sheet tell the right story—careful management, each year ending in the black, but not so far into the black that donors felt they didn't need to contribute. When he went to Mortgage Financial, at first he did the same sort of thing, cosmetics really, smoothing out the wrinkles in the cash flow, showing the steady growth of revenues and profits from

year to year. Just what the analysts wanted. Then, one day, he posted as income some money that hadn't been received yet but he was certain would be coming in soon. When it didn't, other adjustments were needed. By the time the auditors caught it the fraud was in the billions.

He didn't start out evil, he slid into it. So did Marcia; so did Deborah. It's the infinitesimal calculus of corruption. None of us, I fear, totally escapes it.

Third, the issues are domain-specific. That is, it's not as if Marcia went out and passed counterfeit 100 Euro notes or that Frank was a child predator who roamed the internet looking for victims. The issues emerge within specific domains, and often turn, not on grand moral principles brought down from Mount Sinai, but on some interplay between long lasting moral principles and often-shifting and changing standards imposed in specific fields by organizations like the SEC or the AIA or the ABA. Hence it's hard to think that a course or two in moral and ethical reasoning will adequately deal with all the issues that might affect any of us when we start to slide into this kind of situation.⁸

Fourth, the story may at first sound as if it is all about personal ethics and hence, as Frank put it, "is just personal stuff." But each case ends up in the public realm—not just in a law court—but in confidence in financial institutions, in foreign relations with Italy and other countries, and in Deborah's case, in the values we hold as a nation.

Fifth, in each case, a lot turns on language. They all use terms like "building a world class collection," "cosmetic," and "flexibility" to describe what is something really quite different.

"Brainwashing" seems to be the word that let Professor Chipping stop his self-abasement. He wouldn't want to do *that!* We might have expected that someone who had spent his life studying the way language can move us and trick us would recognize how deceptive a word like "brainwashing" can be. But we all get tripped up from time to time by the deceptive power of language. No reason to blame poor Mr. Chips; he spent enough time blaming himself.

Sixth—speaking of "blame"—these graduates don't blame themselves at all; Mr. Chips does. Even after the talk about "brainwashing" he is still worrying about whether he has done "something wrong." Of course he hasn't, but as so often happens, guilt blocks another reaction: "How can I do it better?" Blame is too easy.

⁸ After reading an early draft of this talk a philosopher friend emailed me: "I suggest that it isn't some key pieces of ethical knowledge (e.g., some insight from Kant) or even the skills with which to engage in moral reasoning that the three friends lack. It was the capacity to step back and apply fairly mundane critical thinking skills to their own situations. That kind of capacity could be fostered quite as much in a physics class as in a classics class or a philosophy class, as I'm sure you'd agree."

What would happen, I wonder, if Mr. Chips raised his sights, thought *up* rather than down, and focused not on himself, but on the potential of the texts he taught? What if over the years he had tried to determine what that potential really is? To what extent can faculty help students see the deceptiveness of language, the incremental nature of corruption, the blurry line between the purely personal and what affects the community?

Strange to say, that is eventually what happened to Mr. Chips. Here's how it happened:

Unlike his more famous brother, the Latin master at the Brookfield school, our Mr. Chips was a genuine scholar. When it came right down to it, scholarship, rather than teaching, was his real "work." So when he got home, rather than thinking about the conversation at the pub, he picked up Ryan Balot's new book, *Greek Political Thought*, which he had purchased the day before. He opened to this passage in which Balot draws a contrast between ancient political theorists and their modern counterparts. It reads:

...modern political theorists draw sharp distinctions between public and private and take the public as their chief subject; they exclude consideration of the ethical development of citizens; and they draw a bright line between religion and the state. [But] ... 'the political' ... was... a distinctive feature of Greek culture... the field of activity in which citizens struggled for power by claiming ethical and intellectual virtue for themselves, by showing their concern for the community's welfare.... There was an essential link between the political and the ethical.⁹

"Ah," thought Chips, "if you go down that road, you might end up teaching classical texts as commentaries on contemporary culture and politics. I don't suppose Fission would approve. And of course, it was only a *claim* those Greeks made about their society, that it had a distinctive way of drawing intellectual and civic life together; it doesn't mean they acted that way. In fact, those Greeks were terrible people—slaveholders, imperialists, misogynists."

Just at that moment, as Chips was turning melancholy again, without so much as a knock on the door, in burst Dan Mendelsohn. He'd left his bailiwick at the *New York Review* to come up for a party celebrating a prize that one of his theatrical friends had recently won. And now, perhaps a bit tipsy, thought he'd call on his old friend Chips. "Saw your light on, Chips, and thought I'd drop in... don't mind do you? You asked me to tell you how the talk I gave at a Teagle Foundation Forum at Northwestern went. The answer is—they loved it."

"I can well imagine that; Northwestern—it's somewhere in the Midwest, isn't it?"

"What they really liked was the section where I showed that the authentically tragic was not something that was 'very sad' but was the clash of conflicting world views. That clash can be destructive but it can also be illuminating, and invigorating. They really responded when I said, if I may quote myself, 'In tragedy, as in the healthy democracy,

⁹ Ryan Balot, *Greek Political Thought*, (Blackwell 2006) p. 3.

vigorous and sometimes vicious debate between opposing parties is the life blood of the medium.”

“Ah,” said Chips “I do rather like that ‘vigorous and sometimes vicious’ phrase. Nicely crafted, Dan, but do you really think that tragic poetry has something to do with democratic politics?”

“They rose together; they fell together,” said Dan. “And it’s more than that; tragedy presents things *we* need to think about in our culture, maybe more than the ancient Greeks did.”

“Such as?”

“Tragedy, Greek literature in general, makes you think *up*, not down. It makes you think of the right way to live as an individual or a citizen—cautious, ready to see other points of view, alert to irony, ambiguity, unintended consequences, forces beyond rational prediction and control, and especially maybe, our vulnerability to self deception.”

“Now you are sounding like Herodotus or Thucydides, Dan. But, yes, I suppose there is something to be said for being alert to such things—though when I was at Harvard, Cedric Whitman would often say that ancient literature was an anodyne, something to assuage the pain of living in the modern world; certainly not something that has to do with politics or personal morality. I still think he is right, Dan, not just for the classics. *All* literature is culture bound, although sometimes a metaphor, a trope, an image—blind Oedipus for example—lingers on and we can still, even now, make good theatre out of it once in a while, don’t you think?”

“Good theatre, sure, sometimes, but I want to know why these images still work? How do they retain their hold on us? Isn’t it that they have something that we don’t find when we tune in to Oprah?”

Well, Professor Chipping wasn’t quite sure who Oprah was, and it was getting late, so he drew the conversation to a conclusion before it turned into an all night discussion of pop culture, or about whether comedy and tragedy have the same nature—the sort of topic Dan would be happy to talk about until the sun came up.

“I’d like to read your lecture, Dan, and then talk some more.”

“You can listen to it on your iPod; just download it from the Teagle Foundation’s website, www.teaglefoundation.org/grantmaking/grantees/forumsfull. It’s 45 megabytes. Or just bang my name into their search engine.”

Whatever that meant!

“Thank you, Dan and goodbye.”

“Thank you and Goodbye, Mr. Chips.”

And so to bed. Professor Chipping slept well, except for a dream which he still remembered vividly when he awoke. A fat man, with a big beer belly, had introduced him to a sneering woman with heavy make up. “This is my daughter; her real name is “You Can Get Away with It” but we call her ‘Entitlement’ for short.” “And this is *my* daughter,” the woman said, pointing to a sweet looking girl. “Her name is Delusion.” Then the three of them joined hands and danced around poor Mr. Chips laughing and mocking him.

Well, Mr. Chips didn’t need Freud or Artemidorus to interpret the dream. While he was reading the Iraq news in the *Times* over breakfast, he felt an uncharacteristic surge of anger. “How can those people in Washington be so stupid, so deluded, so fat, complacent, and arrogant? How could they feel entitled to start that war? How did they think they could get away with it?”

And then it came to him, a cascade of passages, Herodotus, Sophocles, but especially Solon:

*tikteĩ gar koros hubrin, hotan polus olbos hepetai
anthropois hoposois me noos artios hi.*¹⁰

Mr. Fullbelly fathers Ms. Entitlement whenever great prosperity draws near to people whose wits are not tight-fitted within them.

He had always translated it, “Satiety engenders overweening pride.” And Ate, the sequence to such hubris, had always been “disaster.” But the dream did it better. “Mr. Fullbelly” was better than *satiety*; “Ms. Entitlement” was a rather shocking way to treat personified Hybris, but, he thought, perhaps it got at the psychology of *hubris* in a way that “overweening pride” never did; and “Delusion” says something about how disaster happens. It comes, after all, from self-deception or blindness to who you are and what your situation is. It’s delusion first, then disaster. Yes, a bit crude perhaps, but not so bad: Mr. Fullbelly fathers Ms. Entitlement and her daughter is named Delusion.

“Hmm,” thought Chips. “That’s what we’ve been seeing everywhere these days—if you’re rich and powerful enough you feel entitled to lord it over those who are less well off. And if you are prosperous enough you may well think everything is going to keep going your way. Maybe our affluence is the root of some of our delusions, national and personal. You don’t have to go back to Herodotus to see that in operation. It’s the universal arrogance of power, and it’s right here on the front page of the *Times*, day after day.”

“Oh dear,” he interrupted himself, “all this talk of ethics and civic discourse seems to be addling my brain. Next thing you know I’ll be agreeing with that article Mark

¹⁰ Solon, *Elegies*, fr. 6 (West).

Edmundson called “Teaching the Truths.”¹¹ He thinks following old Matthew Arnold helps him teach better. Imagine! How quaint, how out of fashion.

While he was musing on this, and idly turning the pages of the *Times*, his eyes fell on the obituary of his old friend, Jim Freedman, the president of Dartmouth. The cancer had finally gotten him. Mr. Chips read an excerpt the *Times* had included from a 1994 commencement address Jim had given:

Hearing a physician say the dread word “cancer” has an uncanny capacity to concentrate the mind. That is what liberal education does, too. When the ground seems to shake and shift beneath us, liberal education provides perspective, enabling us to see life steadily and see it whole. It has taken an illness to remind me, in my middle age, of that lesson.¹²

What a coincidence, Chips thought. I was just thinking of Matthew Arnold, and there is Jim quoting those lines of his on Sophocles:

My special thanks, whose even balanc’d soul,
From first youth tested unto extreme old age,
Business could not make dull, nor Passion wild:
Who saw life steadily and saw it whole:
The mellow glory of the Attic stage;
Singer of sweet Colonus, and its child.¹³

Maybe Jim and Matthew Arnold and Sophocles had a point, maybe it *is* all about perspective, and seeing, and sometimes blindness, physical or moral. Maybe that’s why old Oedipus still has his hold on us.

That day the thought would not leave him. “‘Teach the truth!’ If I knew the truth, surely I would teach it. But since I don’t know it, what should I do? Perhaps I should write an article for *Raritan* and call it ‘Teaching the Possible,’ or simply put before my students those things I have read that might, just *might*, be true—and if they were true, would make a difference to them. Not ‘brainwash’ them—that’s silly—but help them see a little more clearly what they are up against. I wonder if Frank and Deborah and Marcia met Mr. Fullbelly and Ms. Entitlement and her daughter, Delusion, would they see themselves more clearly? Would it help? I don’t know, perhaps it’s worth a try.”

Well, I don’t know either, Mr. Chips. But let me tell you about something that has been bothering *me*. When the confirmation hearings were going on, I kept trying to remember

¹¹ Mark Edmundson, “Teaching the Truths,” *Raritan* 23, 1 (2003) pp. 1– 21.

¹² Quoted in Karen Arenson, “James Freedman, Former Dartmouth President, Dies at 70,” *The New York Times*, March 22, 2006.

¹³ Matthew Arnold, “To a Friend.”

whether I had ever taught Samuel Alito. He was a student at Princeton from 1968 to 1972, while I was teaching there. If I taught him, he is the most famous person I ever had in class, though, it seems, not the most memorable character I have ever met. I don't remember and have thrown away my old class lists and grade sheets. I don't really know; maybe, maybe not.

But in a wider sense, *of course*, I taught him; we *all* taught him. We had them all there before us: Sam Alito, Bill Frist, Don Rumsfeld, Madeline Albright, Hilary Clinton—and Bill Clinton, too—and Gore and Kerry and Dubya—and those who are yet to come, big fish and little ones, the rich and powerful and others, just ordinary citizens trying to live a decent life. We had them, whether we were teaching classics, or political science, or physics, or some other field, or if we were fellow students sitting next to them in class. We had them at Princeton, at Wellesley, at Yale, and at a lot of other places too.

Each of us, moreover, has our special knowledge and the questions we care about most. In classics we have those amazing texts, works whose full potential has still not been fathomed. Some of them, the ones I know best, have the uncanny ability to speak across millennia, and shout over the deepest cultural, ethnic and intellectual divides. I don't always hear very clearly these days, but I don't think they are muttering to Sam Alito, "Be a good liberal" or "History teaches that this ideology is right and that one is wrong," or "Vote this way or that way on this case or that." Their message is rather different. What I hear has something to do with seeing—standing where you can get some perspective, opening your eyes, and watching out for Mr. Fullbelly, Ms. Entitlement, and little Ms. Delusion.

I had my chance, and fortunately, you, whether you are a student or a faculty member, in classics or some other field, have your chance every time you enter class. No time for the cute or the fashionable, no room for blame, regrets, self condemnation; that's all too easy. No thinking down; raise the sights. Yes, Mr. Chips, maybe we can do it better—and maybe the tropes, and metaphors and images in those dusty old texts, and some of the shiny new ones, are there waiting to help.

It's possible; it's worth a try.

W. Robert Connor