To the much advertised International Conference ‘The Classics In The Classroom’ came twenty-six speakers from the USA and UK, Canada, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Denmark, Holland, and China (Hong Kong), joining nine locals (and John Pryor whose introduction to Thursday’s ‘after dinner’ speaker - John Ward - was itself a speech) and three interstate visitors (among them Constant Mews who chaired sessions but did not deliver a paper). Overseas speakers very eminent in their fields were: Martin Camargo, Professor and Head of the Department of English, University of Illinois, Champaign-Urbana; Robert Black, Professor of Renaissance History, University of Leeds; Steven Milner, new Professor of Italian and Head of Department at Manchester; Professors Lucia Calboli Montefusco and Gualtiero Calboli, Department of Classical and Medieval Philology, University of Bologna; Judith Rice Henderson and Marjorie Curry Woods, English Professors at, respectively, the University of Saskatchewan and Texas at Austin; Virginia Brown, Editor in Chief of the Union Académique Internationale series Catalogus Translationum et Commentariorum Medii Aevi and Professor at the Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, Toronto; Craig Kallendorf and Jan Swearingen, Professors in the English Department, and Cary Nederman, Professor of Politics, all three at Texas A and M University; Frank Coulson, Professor in the Department of Greek and Latin, Ohio State University; Douglas Kelly, Professor Emeritus, Department of French and Italian, University of Wisconsin-Madison. All mixed in well with the locals and contributed to spirited discussion after most papers and during breaks.

The conference’s aim was to examine classroom texts and practice in Graeco-Roman, medieval, and Renaissance times, focussing on the relationship between extant manuscripts, incunables, and cinquecentine of works written then and used in classrooms; on commentaries and notes upon them; and on the actual procedure, format, and content of the classrooms that used and produced them; with a concentration on the trivium (grammar, rhetoric, and dialectic) and on the place of Graeco-Roman works relevant to these. Scholars were invited also to contribute on other, related, topics.

We do not currently know precisely what transpired in the medieval classroom; how the contents of surviving manuscripts, incunables, and cinquecentine came to be written; how this information was used or for what audiences and learning environments; nor even how this knowledge was envisaged to be applied in the world outside. These aspects of manuscript, incunable, and cinquecentine, studies now receive increasing scholarly attention and, as the modern humanities classroom is so universally under threat, it
seemed appropriate now to assess the problems and possible solutions. We hoped that much light would be thrown upon why contemporary students were prepared to study intensively texts that were, by this time, between 1,000 and 1,500 years, or more, old. The contrast with our own practices today is marked and hung over our heads as we bored into the subject on so many fronts.

John Ward at the end of the conference concluded that, as a result of everyone’s paper and discussion, we had learned much more about what went on in the medieval and early modern classroom and how our manuscripts and early printed books related to that experience. In the future we could arrive at a more balanced assessment of the ‘pragmatic and utilitarian’ versus the ‘ornamental and antiquarian’ elements in medieval and early modern humanistic education. The ‘utilitarian’ implied not only studies relating to business and intellectual, secretarial, diplomatic, life, but also the notion that one should ‘learn lessons’ from humanistic studies. The medieval ‘utilitarian’ paradigm stressed long exposure to a foreign language and difficult texts in that language (e.g. Peter Riga’s Aurora, on which we heard an excellent paper) and required an acquired skill in oral Latin. The Renaissance paradigm continued these utilitarian tendencies, but added a greater measure of pure philological expertise, acquired in courts and in the somewhat more spacious university and studia curricula in secularised classical studies. Many of the medieval commentaries on classical works are notoriously deficient in a philological sense. This philological emphasis, today triumphant in death, worked against the utilitarian and set the past up as an object of study, not an experience from which to draw lessons. What lessons for life do students today learn in their classical studies? Would they now devote as much attention to classical proverbs, and the moral imperatives behind them, as did Erasmus? Would they learn as much about the crises of life from the experience of the Trojan War and related Greek legends as the audiences of Euripides would have been intended to? When we consider what paradigm to stress and to go back to in our own studies, we must remind ourselves there are lessons to be drawn from the classics: they cannot be taught merely as platforms for ‘new knowledge’. To promote a useful idea, previous generations were prepared to go wrong on the facts (e.g. Ptolemy of Lucca’s view of the Roman Republic, on which we heard an interesting joint paper). We, because of our own philological inheritance, must be more scrupulous and perceptive (in contrast to modern ‘sensationalists’ whose ‘insights’ regarding the Templars, the Holy Grail, the Ark of the Covenant, Leonardo da Vinci’s Last Supper, the Turin Shroud, etc. etc. are as wilfully ignorant of the best modern scholarship as they are wide of the truthful mark); but we should still try to draw lessons for the present. Even so, we can ignore some of the appalling ‘realities’ (e.g. those of late Roman republican life) in order to stress some of the ideals then current (from Cicero, Vergil, and others). Today, by abandoning a curriculum of selected compulsory classics, we abandon the chance to assess, arrest, and change, social directions. As Raffaello Morghen stresses, philology should be the ‘handmaiden’ in the house, not the mistress. Our task today is to dethrone the mistress philology, with its concomitant emphasis upon grant-worthy ‘new factual knowledge’, and restore to our classrooms a compulsory selection of key classics
and relate them to life as we live it and must in the future live it. One scholar present, to show what could be learned from the papers, selected the fact that the contributions by Martin Camargo and Ursula Potter (among others delivered) reinforced the conclusion that the plays of the tenth-century female writer and intellectual Hrotsvit of Gandersheim were quite likely teaching devices, like a colloquy, only better. On this and many other fronts, Ward concluded, the conference provided much food for thought about the rôle the classics played in the medieval and early modern classrooms, vis-à-vis that they play (or do not!) today.

All papers bar one had a European context. There were two on law and theology, two on the quadrivium, one on political theory, four on all the Arts, five on the trivium, five on grammar, eight on rhetoric, one on grammar and rhetoric, and eight on poetry. The Thursday night `after-dinner’ talk dealt generally with the problems of studying the classics and the humanities today (hard copies available from john.ward@arts.usyd.edu.au). Chronologically, three papers dealt with the period before 1100 AD, sixteen with the medieval period after 1100 AD, two with the middle ages in general, and eleven with the Renaissance period. There were no drop-outs or changes to the beautiful programme prepared by Juanita Ruys and this must rank as something of a record among conferences. The rather elaborate proceedings went without a hitch due to Juanita’s careful planning and weeks of hard labour: thirty-seven talks in all were delivered over three days; lunches and tea breaks were excellently catered for, as was a reception in the Nicholson Museum on the Thursday night when a talk (copies available) was given by John Ward and Neil Boness on a selection of manuscripts and cinquecentine which for the occasion Neil very kindly brought from the University of Sydney Rare Books Room; an elaborate conference dinner was held afloat on Sydney Harbour during Saturday night. John Ward chaired most conference sessions (with aplomb, though his time-keeping for the Friday came under severe criticism from Juanita Ruys!). Constant Mews chaired two sessions amply and excellently towards the end of the Thursday meeting, and Juanita Ruys herself chaired the last three sessions on Saturday with much elegance and exact time-keeping.

Funds for the conference came to about $75,000: about $15,000 from the Faculty of Arts, CHASS, and the Centre for Medieval Studies and the balance from an anonymous private donor, whose interest and enthusiasm for the project we very gratefully acknowledge. The sponsorship of the Centre is also gratefully acknowledged here and without the help of Centre personnel - Gabrielle Singleton, the Centre’s voluntary Administrative Assistant, and Melanie Heyworth and Yvette Debergue, doctoral and post-doctoral students at the Centre - the Conference would indeed have fallen on hard times. The Director, Margaret Clunies Ross, was at all times a tremendous help and John Pryor, Associate Director, admirably put his shoulder to the wheel on Margaret’s departure overseas. Without the help and leadership of these two eminent scholars the Conference could not have been brought off. As a result of the efforts of all these people, and most especially of the mountainous and careful hard work of Juanita Ruys, over two
years, the conference achieved all it set out to and actually made a substantial profit (over $10,400).

Stephen Garton, Dean of the Faculty of Arts, opened the conference amply and eloquently and his assistance in securing funding from the Faculty is warmly acknowledged. The support staff of the Woolley Building and the School of English, Art History, Film, and Media (now School of Letters, Art, and Media) played an essential rôle with the result that the Woolley Common Room emerged as a fine and most suitable venue for the conference activities. James Douglas, a Fine Arts Specialist from the Sydney College of Fine Arts, mounted a challenging and opulent display of ‘created books’ (hand-made, but not what you would expect) based on his Master of Fine Arts project for the University of NSW College of Fine Arts (2005) and prepared a powerful guide for those interested (copies available). The Saturday proceedings were brought to a most appreciated conclusion by a spontaneous and unexpected presentation to the two conveners by Greti Dinkova-Brun and Willemien Otten, on behalf of all the participants.

Some 65 people enjoyed the Saturday night Harbour Cruise Conference Dinner. Leading highlights were the stars above (of much interest to visitors from the northern hemisphere), the quite unexpected appearance of Pope Innocent III, the youngest and most dynamic of medieval popes, who addressed the conference in simple Latin (copies available), and the even more unexpected appearance (for all except Martin Camargo – see below) of a leading thirteenth-century teacher of dictamen, Pons of Provence, who adapted a reportatio of an opening address he had apparently once delivered at the School of Orléans, turning it into a long speech of praise and thanks (copies available) addressed to Juanita Ruys, sitting with her family in one corner, together with a presentation. Pons claimed he had over the centuries completely forgotten all he used to teach at Orléans, but had luckily obtained a copy of a reportatio of one of his introductory lectures, from Martin Camargo who happened to have a copy in his pocket, carefully transcribed from a manuscript in the Bibliothèque Nationale, and slipped it to him before the dinner began. It was lucky that these figures from the past appeared as they did, because John Ward, chairing the proceedings at this point, underwent a diabetic low and was rendered entirely speechless (a rare moment, much appreciated by all). Pons also made a presentation to Yvette Debergue, who was fortunately present.

At the conclusion of Pons’s speech and presentation, Professor Gualtiero Calboli, renowned for impromptu Latin panegyrics at Conference dinners, leapt to his feet, turned his jacket coat inside out, and delivered an extraordinarily learned mock polemic directed at the presumption of the conveners whom he charged with staging southern hemisphere appearances of persons much more appropriate to the northern hemisphere (Pons and Innocent III, that is) – though, as Innocent III explained, he only agreed to come and bring Pons from the several bowges of Inferno because word had reached him of the fine lectures delivered by John Ward over the years to eager students, concerning papal affairs and his own [Innocent’s? Pons’s? Ward’s? Ed.] particular achievements in the past.
Professor Calboli’s polemic was of extreme subtlety and was, alas, lost on much of the audience, so far has proper knowledge decayed in these parts. It took as its learned point of departure the ceremony whereby a Roman *eques* might change his status (temporarily), in times of sorrow or crisis, by doffing his ‘*tunica angusticlavia*’ (narrow-striped tunic) and donning a plain tunic. We provide here the text of Professor Calboli’s impromptu polemic:


[trans: A translation would have been appreciated for Centre Members with decayed knowledge. Ed.]

As you may see from this admittedly on-the-spot attempt at a transcription, the gist is that, if we are to present popes and other figures from Europe in our antipodes, thus overthrowing the proper order of things, then our University motto should be changed to confirm better to the natural order of things (the mind intervenes and corrects things badly composed and out of order).

For many, the conference’s highlight was the Sunday afternoon four-hour cruise around Sydney Harbour aboard the 1902 steam-powered *Lady Hopetoun*, originally the NSW Governor’s ‘launch’, superbly maintained and staffed by the Sydney Heritage Fleet. After an early afternoon spent around the main harbour, east of the bridge, and later along the Parramatta river and its estuaries, west of the bridge, few of the 28 aboard (the maximum allowed) would forget the final stages, silently approaching the bridge with the sun setting over the city with its lights slowly coming on. The foreigners on board (most of the passengers) had their breath taken away, averted they had never seen such a sight, and Rita Copeland (from New York!) was heard to exclaim ‘I want to live here!!!’.

After the cruise Rita and Steve Milner, with John and Gail Ward, went to the Dendy in Newtown and saw *Ten Canoes*, a suitable introduction to Australia’s distant dream-time past. There were two evenings at John’s and Gail’s Summer Hill castle, for those who could be rounded up at short notice, and many of the overseas visitors subsequently went on to Constant Mews’s follow-up conference in Melbourne (interestingly different from the Sydney experience – here we had too many, mainly short, papers in too little time whereas Melbourne had many longer papers and spaced them out, with time set aside for
discussion) and an adventurous few struck out further to remote parts – some rode the Ghan, others went as far north as Cape Tribulation, Cairns, Cobbold Gorge, and the Undara lava tubes . . . .

The interest displayed by (non-speaking) locals in the conference was fitful (perhaps the fees charged were considered high?). A few welcome faces and some keen students were noted but, as often happens when the mountains come to Mahomet at big universities, relevant scholars were too busy on vital tasks such as writing School newsletters, teaching, applying for grants, making sure their research output was prolific and in properly measurable places and forms, preparing for and administering quality and performance control mechanisms, attending overseas conferences, and undertaking a myriad minor tasks, to have time to attend a conference such as ours. Small universities and centres are different – one scholar’s interests are everyone’s - but at large universities, it is every individual for him(or her)self.

However, John Ward found the conference all he’d ever dreamed of and Juanita Ruys survived it and him well. Her vast across-the-board competence, her eternal enthusiasm, and endless resourcefulness went far beyond the call of any duty or reward and her ability to make conference and speakers sing so harmoniously is here profoundly acknowledged.

Available upon request: Cover, advertisement, and programme; Notes distributed to conferees on arrival; JOW introductory welcome remarks; text of JOW ‘After-dinner’ talk, Thursday, with hand-out; remarks and speeches at conference dinner delivered by Innocent III, Pons of Provence, and JOW.