

in piam memoriam Rahoul Biswas-Hawkes

When Rahoul came to join St. Paul's School as a John Colet Scholar in 2010 we gained a rare prize indeed: a young man of great intellectual ability, much curiosity about the world in which he found himself, and, I don't know whether as a new boy he would have realised this, someone who would have found favour with the great ancient Athenian Pericles who said that public involvement was everything. A man who just sat there minding his own business had in fact no business there at all. In our own little republic in Barnes Rahoul was to take on a heart-warming breadth of interests, and it was all mediated through one who showed from the start great personal kindness to others. He struck some people as quiet and even shy, but to me that is a misreading; shrewder people would notice his witty dry sense of humour, and the intelligent light in his eyes bespoke either his total understanding of something or else his invitation to **you** to share his baleful sense of the ridiculous. In Richard Baxter's tutor group he flourished immediately. The provision of Oreo milk shakes? Rahoul was in that from the start; did you want to know all the arcane data from the World Cup? Rahoul was your man, and Richard recalls with affection when Rahoul told a naughty junior boy: "you shouldn't say **that**; if you want to say that you should text it under the table." Rahoul proved on occasion more than a match for his tutor. There was his Odyssean cunning in the matter of the egg-hunt, which involved a trip to the Swedish School. Rahoul was the first to interpret the cryptic clue and also the first to ensure that everybody else did the actual running.

Meanwhile all the academics were falling into place and at the end of his first term, as his teachers competed with each other with their superlatives("impressive, detailed, extraordinary work ethic, absolutely sophisticated, nuanced understanding"); his poor tutor tried to sum it all up: "I tried to

pick out some notable areas, but the list was too long as Rahoul has actually left a trail of academic excellence across the board.”

Rahoul of course went on to develop a whole gamut of interests: there was Chess, D of E Bronze, there was the school newspaper, the Medical, Biology and Classical Societies; there was his music (piano and violin), he sang in the choir, performed in the cathedral on John Colet Day and was a member of the string orchestra. Over his time at the school there was a whole gallimaufry of academic enhancements too: he was a silver and then gold medallist in the International Maths Challenge with successes too in all three Science Challenges. But I think it was his involvement with our magic society which most accurately delineates him. He was a great performer, and excellent and patient teacher of the younger boys whom he recruited to the society in large numbers. He could always draw the audience and you never knew when the final flourish would come. Once when he messed it up he just moved seamlessly into another, easier trick, and no-one was any the wiser.

Rahoul had the talent to take any academic path but finally decided upon Classics, perhaps inspired by an early visit he'd made to Leptis Magna and Sabrathra when he was ten, as well as the St.Paul's trip to Greece. He began to study Greek when he came to us. His then teacher told me the other day “ how enthusiastic he was - and what a pleasure to teach.” Rahoul was rather worried in fact that in going on with Greek he would be at a disadvantage compared with those who had done it at prep school; what Rahoul didn't perhaps realise is that this type of modesty is often characteristic of our very best linguists, and he went on to be first in the set and third in the year as a whole.

It was of course as an 8th form Classicist that he really began to soar. I had the great pleasure of teaching him and noted at the time: “ he has a great philological interest and is rarely stumped for an answer when others are baffled. It was a joy to see what an excellent job he would make week on

week of the rather difficult English-Greek sentences I would set them; they proved very tough for some but Rahoul simply ate them up. Even a visiting Harrow School teacher noticed him, asking after a Latin lesson: “ who was that boy who did so well on the periphrastic future subjunctive?”

What was so gratifying about him however was that he wasn't just interested in the language but that he loved the literature too, to which he brought the best of all possible alliances, the heart and the brain. His Library list was certainly not for the faint hearted. His written work, always couched in a sumptuously neat hand made whatever he submitted a pleasure to read, and you knew in his hands you would get no waffle, and that he would get straight to the heart of the matter. His work on the Roman emperor Nero was amongst the best I have seen at that level and the epigrammatic way he commented on that strange emperor struck me as worthy of Tacitus himself.

Underpinning all this of course has been Rahoul's engagement with those in the world less fortunate, especially his work at the embankment helping serve hot meals to the homeless, or in Romania with the Libra Foundation where he worked with disadvantaged and disabled children. It is very much of a piece with the person we have known at St. Paul's. Many stories have been circulating in recent days among the boys telling of Rahoul's concern for others, his great kindness to those in any kind of need, and all done with a permanent smile on his face.

Pericles said in that speech that the best of all memorials was the one to be found in people's hearts, and as we offer today our profound sympathy to all Rahoul's family, we at the school know that we shall remember him with affection for the person he was and for the joy he brought us.

Simon May

St. Paul's School

March 11th 2016