

5. New Horizons

My first project after 'retiring' from university teaching was to complete a portrait that I had begun of Kit three years earlier, with her favourite view at Budleigh Salterton as the backdrop (1).



1. Kit at Budleigh Salterton (2008)

Another painting that was completed at this time was the diptych 'Daphnis and Chloe' (2 and 3), a subject which also occupies one end of the Marriage Box. I am a great admirer of the Victorian Artist J.W. Waterhouse whose treatments of Greek myths are usually set within an English landscape brought to life by virtuoso brushwork. Here the setting was originally the valley of the River Teign in Devon, although I eventually modified the Daphnis half to give it a more tranquil feel. In his little book Longus describes the moment when Chloe looks

upon Daphnis for the first time with the eyes of love, although he is unaware of it and she can't give a name to what she feels. 'I'm in pain and I've not been injured,' she says, 'I'm burning hot yet here I am sitting in the shade...' For the time being Daphnis' gaze is fixed upon a blue butterfly whose transient beauty echoes his own but soon he will experience the same longing that she does. Rarely have the pangs of teenage love been described more delicately: 'they wanted something but they did not know what they wanted...' Many obstacles are placed in the way of the lovers before they finally make their nuptial vows but all ends happily and not just on the wedding night.



2. Daphnis (2008)



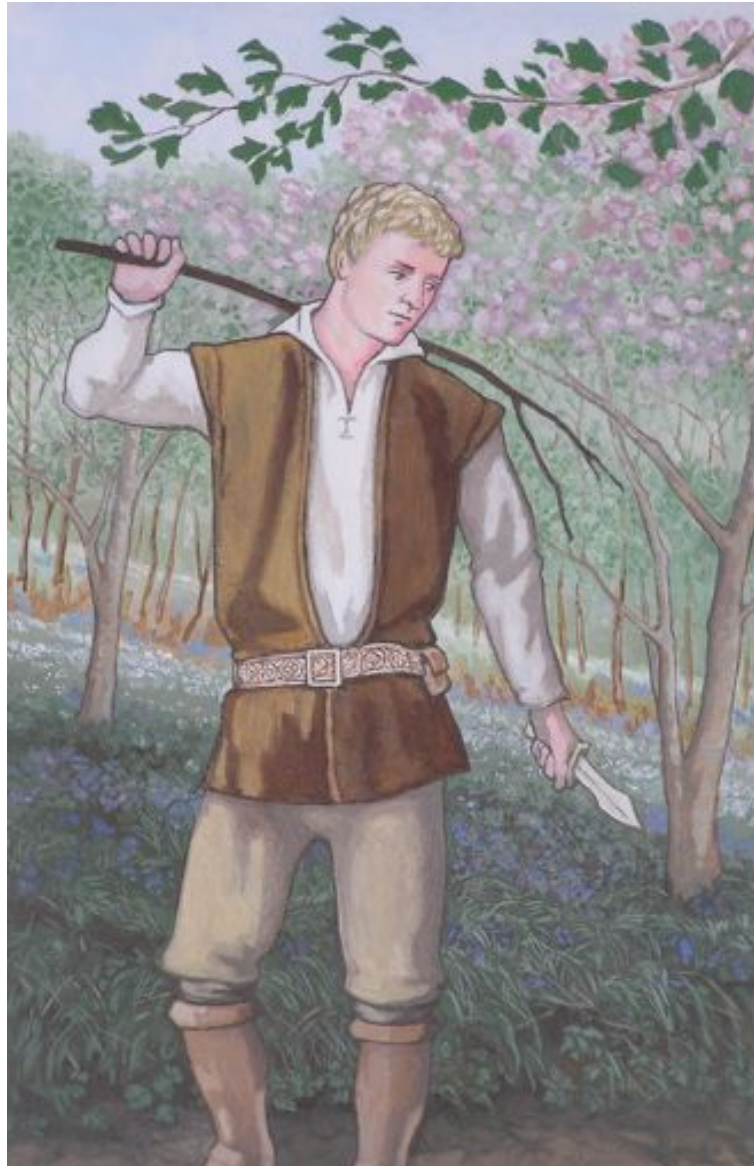
3. Chloe (2008)

I like the story of Daphnis and Chloe, not just because it ends happily but because it has a timeless feel. I've always been attracted to subjects of this kind, if only because they hold out the promise that my art will be understood (and valued) in the future. The same holds true for the Cycle of the Seasons. In my version Winter (4) is pictured as an old man sitting by his fireside, lost in his memories. The saddest part of growing old is that the mind often remains young, imprisoned within a feeble body whilst those around see nothing but grey hairs and the inappropriate behaviour that results from a mismatch between the individual's perception of himself and the reality of his situation. Spring can also be drawn into inappropriate behaviour through inexperience but being young is generally forgiven. My golden-headed youth (5) wanders through a wood carpeted with blue bells, his nonchalance the product of an innocent and carefree mind, very different from today's young people who seem to be full of cares and only able to experience joy through the annihilating effects of alcohol. I pictured Autumn (not illustrated) as a matronly figure rocking a baby asleep in a cradle, the baby being an obvious symbol of fruitfulness. Summer, on the other hand, I

thought of as young woman, her arms full of flowers, walking through sun-filled woodland (6). A similar series based on the calendar months is planned (13).



4. Winter (2008)



5. Spring (2008)

Whilst I was working on these fresh compositions I began the review of my earlier work that has resulted in this present selection. In doing so I realised how typical of my generation I was. Whether acknowledged or not our twin gods were Freud and Marx, both in their own way believers in the perfectability of mankind. For Freud the enemy was neurosis, usually acquired in childhood; for Marx it was the oppression of one class by another. Both were confident that the obstacles in question could be removed. Although Marx believed the oppressors would not surrender willingly, nevertheless he believed that history was on the side of justice. Alas, time has taught me that most crimes in history are committed by men of vision, lessening my faith in ideology. Hence my aim in 2010 is to understand myself more fully and to chart more accurately the journey I have been on. Whatever its conclusion the first stages of life's journey are bound to be more interesting for the traveller tends to be looking forward rather than back.



6. Summer (preliminary sketch - 2008)

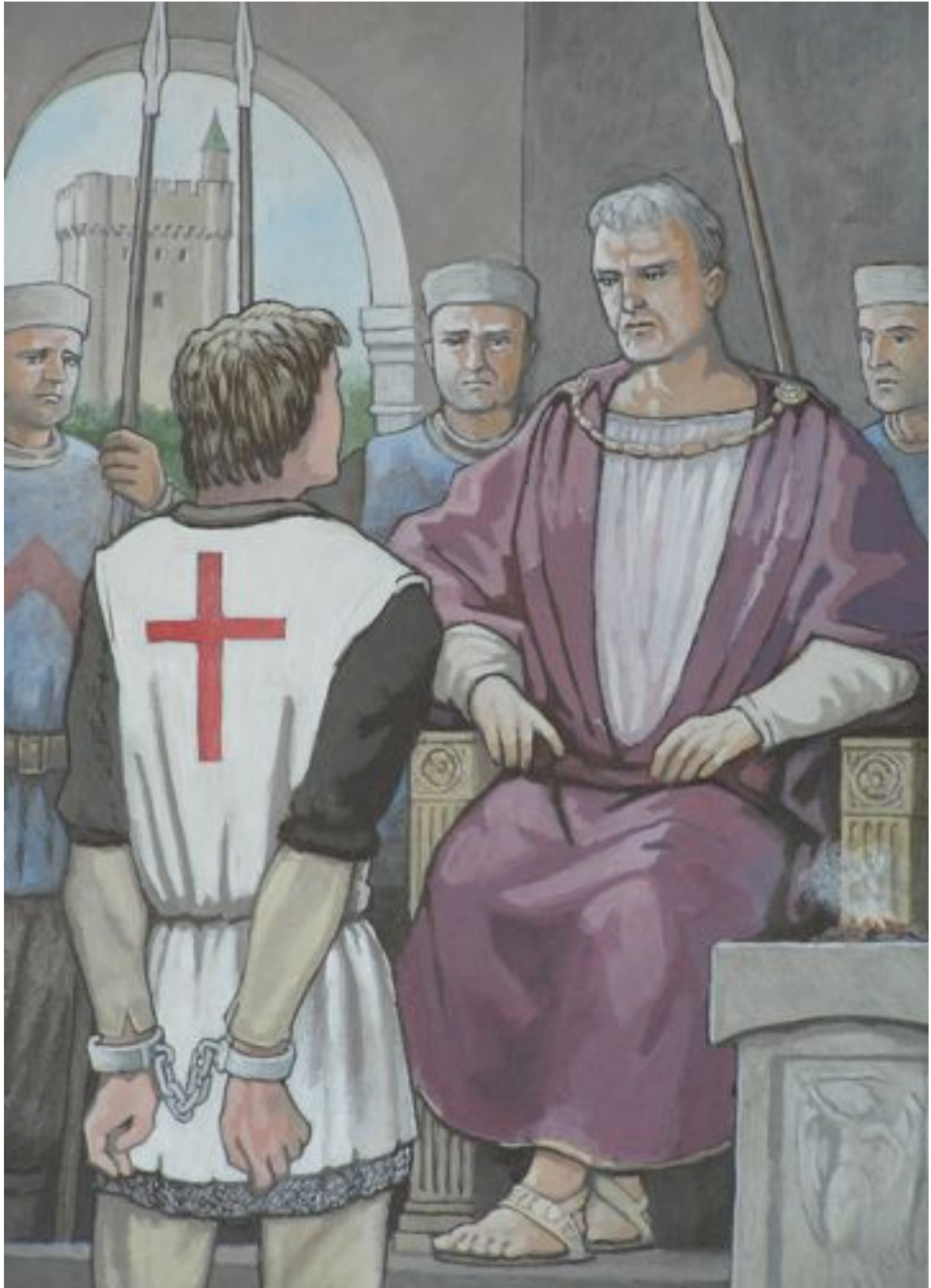
Although it has become less important to me to create images that 'teach' I still recognise the power of beauty. Never having been trained, I've tried to develop a style which serves my needs in a coherent and consistent way, that suggests life and liveliness yet allows the depiction of that which the eye cannot see and has never seen, which makes use of the forms of Nature for their loveliness but which is usually two dimensional and pattern-based. I am aware of the difficulty of rendering action by such formal means. In the St George cycle the saint's encounter with the Dragon evolved from a fairly static representation into a much more dynamic one. The Dragon hurtles in like a Second World War fighter plane but is held at bay with a sword that just about restores the unity of the composition (8). In the background is a fantasy castle that incorporates a version of the Sainte Chapelle in Paris, a reference to Pol de Limbourg's 'Tres Riches Heures', the most beautiful of all medieval manuscripts.



7. St George - the Virgin's champion (2009)



8. St George - fighting the dragon (2009)



9. St George before the emperor Dacian (2009)



10. Krishna and Radha (2009)

Following his defiance of the emperor Dacian (9) St George is put to death. A hallmark of Western Christian art is its emphasis on suffering – most potently that of the Lord Jesus himself on the cross. Eastern religious art seems much more life-affirming. For many years a simple clay bust of the Hindu god Krishna has greeted visitors to our house, brought back from India by my father at the end of his war service there. Krishna's nature as an emanation of the supreme god Vishnu is defined by his pleasure in the arts of love and in particular his love of the maiden Radha. They are the Romeo and Juliet of Indian art, without the attendant guilt or tragedy.



11. The Passionate Pilgrim (2010)

During the summer of 2009 Christopher was searching for a poem to set to music which his friend, the baritone Nick Merryweather could perform. Most of the songs in Shakespeare's plays have been set to music many times but I found a witty little poem in a collection called 'The Passionate Pilgrim' which seems to have been overlooked, perhaps because Shakespeare's authorship is in doubt. Chris's setting has not yet been performed but I went ahead and completed a series of illustrations for what might one day be a multi-media composition. In the poem a lawyer competes with a knight for the love of a maid: the knight has courage, the lawyer money. After a struggle common sense prevails over passion and she chooses the money. (11).



12. Sir Galahad granted a vision of the Holy Grail (2010)

Having listened to a new translation of the 14th century epic poem 'Sir Gawain and the Green Knight' I was drawn back to the Arthurian legends that so influenced the imagination of English kings like Edward IV and his grandson Henry VIII. Brave as he was Sir Gawain was denied a vision of the Holy Grail, as was the bravest knight of all, Sir Lancelot. It fell to Lancelot's son, the spotless Sir Galahad, to receive the ultimate reward of knighthood (12). Immediately afterwards he died, not wishing to live any longer in a fallen world. Just what Sir

Galahad saw at this supreme moment is a mystery. His hands are raised in acceptance; perhaps the Grail is not so much a vision as a surrender – the same merging of the self with the will and mind of God that Dante experiences at the end of the *Divine Comedy*.

Just who or what God is a question that has occupied me almost all my thinking life. As a teenager I rebelled against the monopoly of truth claimed by Christianity and, for a while I was dedicated pagan and then an agnostic. For all my doubts however, I have never been able to put aside the fact that the existence of the universe cannot be explained by science alone – in other words the primary school child's question: 'if God made the world, who made God?' If we accept that the answer to this question must lie *outside* what we know through our senses, then all things become possible – even the Incarnation. Of course to say that such and such is *possible* is not the same as saying it is a fact and religious men and women who claim authority on this basis must be prepared to subject their beliefs to rational investigation, especially if they are based on historical events. That is my view as a historian but as an artist I have often used religious forms and stories to describe the stages in my own journey between birth and death for it seems to me that there is such a thing as *imaginative* truth – a realm so rich and diverse that it far exceeds any other creation of the human mind. Both Dante and Blake were travellers in this realm and so, I hope, am I. I have often heard it said that human beings are *just* animals with the emphasis on just. We will certainly get nowhere unless we acknowledge our animal origins. Yet we are vastly over-endowed with learning potential and very little of what we learn directly relates to survival in the physical sense of the word. What are we to do with all the rest of that potential, which can so easily be deployed for evil as well as for doing good?

I have no idea how much longer my life's journey will last. Artistically it can continue until the very last moment of rational consciousness, bringing new and greater insights even as the light fades. I believe that Michelangelo worked until the day he died, still striving after the perfection that had eluded him – the most perfect of sculptors – all his life. Did Shakespeare go on thinking up plots after his retirement from the stage? We've no way of knowing but it is difficult to believe that his all encompassing imagination ceased to create new lines and characters, even as he potted in his garden in Stratford in the final years of a prosperous retirement.

The fact is that I have always had difficulty in *not* thinking even if I have not always been able to direct my thoughts as I'd have wished. The follower of St Francis in me wishes only for possession of the internal space between my ears – a big 'ask' in today's noisy world. All the best things seem frail, as they have always done, but somehow the Quiet survives. Only in the wilderness, as mystics down the ages have always known, can we experience that feeling of unity with 'the love that moves the Sun and other stars...' To follow that road, even in the imagination, is to return changed. That was the truth I tried to express in the *Book of Aten* and my other 'books'. Now, given the gift of time, it is a truth I feel able to address once more.



14. 'May' from a series still to be completed