For Kevin Lee, Professor of Classics

NOEL ROWE*

For see, winter is past,
the rains are over and gone.
(The Song of Songs)

Had I not this morning learned that Kevin Lee was dead,
I would not have noticed that, day after day, rain
had turned the wooden tables in this courtyard charcoal-grey,
nor remembered
visiting the Rodin museum on another morning after rain
to find de Balzac looking back as if he understood why,
having caught water in its hem, his cloak
was holding it there,
nor felt suddenly a need to stumble through
an old Latin dictionary I haven’t used in years, just to read again
words like virtus, pietas, simplicitas, as if
they had done a better deal with death, one that English cannot
now recall.

(My Latin dictionary says they’re all to do with excellence of
character; no doubt
a Greek dictionary would give me other terms, just as powerful,
to say
how good a man you were, but I never got beyond the ablative
absolute,
so the only word that comes to mind is agapē.)

* Noel Rowe teaches Australian Literature and Creative Writing at the University of Sydney.
Had I not this morning learned that Kevin Lee was dead,
I might not have stayed in Holme courtyard long enough to see
that now, even in winter, the rain is over, gone, the sun
is putting out its hand to leave on disconsolate wet wood the
lightest print.