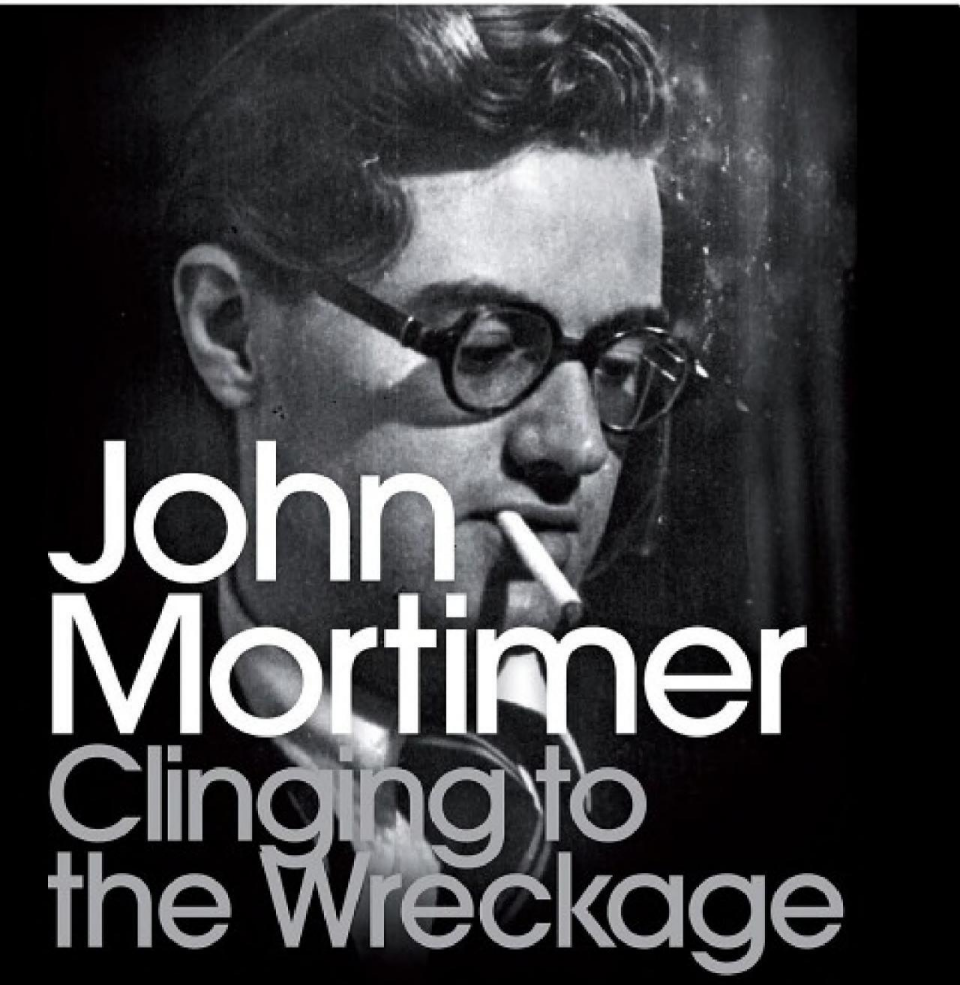

John Mortimer

Clinging to the Wreckage

MODERN CLASSICS

JOHN MORTIMER

Clinging to the Wreckage

A Part of Life

with an Introduction by Valerie Grove

PENGUIN BOOKS

For Penny and Sally, Jeremy and
Emily Mortimer, the Survivors

PENGUIN CLASSICS

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Introduction

'Love, the law, writing … I don't know which has occupied more of my time. Sometimes the three seem to have become inexplicably intertwined.' John Mortimer spoke these words in 1978, in a *With Great Pleasure* programme, recorded for Radio 4 with a live audience at the little Kenton Theatre in Henley, his home town. The favourite poems and anecdotes in that programme soon became the basis for 'An Evening with John Mortimer', or 'Mortimer's Miscellany', a show he performed for the rest of his life, in venues ranging from village halls to the Sydney Opera House. His talent to amuse – in plays, novels and in the law courts – found its outlet in anecdotes. He was a natural raconteur with a perfect sense of comic timing. The mélange of material embraced stories about his blind father (a distinguished divorce barrister) and his own tales from the courtroom, laced with his favourite poems recited by a rota of elegant actresses. Even after hundreds of performances (up to his eighty-second year when he packed the King's Head in Islington, from a wheelchair, eight times a week), audiences never tired of hearing his stories, just as he never tired of telling them.

So when he embarked on his memoirs, he already knew he could deploy the anecdotal approach, combining a prodigious memory with a cavalier attitude to inconvenient facts. Reneging on earlier promises to write his autobiography, in 1979 he accepted the blandishments of George Weidenfeld to look back on his crowded life as his sixtieth birthday approached.

This was already a busy year. He had reached a pinnacle of productivity and professional repute, still able to style himself the

only practising QC who was also a successful playwright, novelist and screenwriter. He was married to a much younger second wife, 'Penny Two', with an adored nine-year-old daughter, Emily, and living in Turville Heath Cottage, the house his father had built, with its vast and beautiful garden, an ideal scene for their family gatherings and show business parties. He had created his most enduringly memorable character for a 1975 BBC *Play for Today*: Horace Rumpole, the lovable, literary defence barrister who could sum up all John felt about the law. Rumpole instantly captured the affection of the public, and became, like Sherlock Holmes for Conan Doyle or Maigret for Georges Simenon, John Mortimer's nest-egg: a character who would keep him in his old age.

He had recently completed a second Rumpole series, and a dramatized six-part life of Shakespeare for ITV. He was about to start writing a monthly interview for the *Sunday Times*, a formula at which he proved a master. He would spend an agreeable hour or two with Graham Greene, Malcolm Muggeridge, Enoch Powell, David Hockney, Laurence Olivier or Mick Jagger – without the tiresome aids of tape-recorder or shorthand notes – and present a perfect summation of each life, mostly in dialogue. Lord Denning, the aged judge, told him he had once thought of standing for Parliament. Labour or Conservative? John asked. 'Oh, I never got round to thinking about that,' replied Denning.

He had also written, at speed, a screenplay of Evelyn Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited*, for Granada TV. The producers asked him to rewrite the six episodes. This was a professional blow. His rewrites, in the spring of 1979, were cursory. Then an eleven-week technicians' strike delayed the whole production. When work resumed, *Brideshead* had become a much bigger beast, a thirteen-part series: a new script was crafted by another writer, directly from the dialogue in Waugh's novel. Although his script was jettisoned, John's name remained on the credits as sole writer, for contractual reasons with the Waugh estate. In 1981, *Brideshead*

Revisited was watched by 11 million viewers. It became the most revered screen adaptation of the era, garnering every award and accolade. John went through the publicity interviews, unable to acknowledge that the script was not in fact his work. Publicly he was feted and lauded; privately he knew that the adulation was, in this instance, misplaced.

So when he started on this, the first (and best) of his five autobiographical books, he was liberated. Here was a story he could tell in his own voice: he could forget about producers, directors, actors, technicians; he could embellish, exaggerate, make everything sharper and funnier. There is a school of English memoir in which the protagonist portrays himself as a hapless and often bewildered onlooker, to whom stuff happens. *Clinging to the Wreckage* conforms to that tradition. Being an only child, born in Hampstead in 1923, packed off to an eccentric prep school, then an inappropriate public school, followed by wartime Oxford, first fumblings of romance, and the mysterious world of work, marriage and family life: all is recounted with an engaging air of bafflement. There would be gaps in the narrative: John would never write about the small scandal that ended his Oxford days, when he was 'shaking off the carapace of schoolboy homosexuality'. *Clinging to the Wreckage* would carry the subtitle *A Part of Life*, indicating an incomplete and partial account, ending at the age of fifty.

He could skim lightly through his first marriage, for instance. At the age of twenty-four he had fallen in love with a sharp, clever, captivatingly beautiful fellow novelist, Penelope Dimont, five years his senior, who already had three daughters – two by her husband, one by a lover – and was now pregnant with a fourth daughter by another lover. Penelope's divorce – after going through the charade of providing evidence of adultery, colluding with a private detective – was bound to embarrass Mortimer senior, doyen of the divorce courts. But it made a very good story for John and he later wrote a play about it. They married in 1949,

shortly after John had been called to the Bar, and also published his first novel, while Penelope published her second. Their lively domestic life in Swiss Cottage, eventually with six children (their own daughter Sally was born in 1950, their son Jeremy in 1955) when John rose at dawn to produce a novel a year, and struggled to get to court on time daily, all proved excellent memoir fodder. By 1958 'the Writing Mortimers' were on a high plane of celebrity, writing books, radio plays, screenplays, short stories. By 1961 the marriage was severely tested by John's affair with the actress Wendy Craig (star of 'The Wrong Side of the Park', his first full-length West End play), who gave birth to John's son – in the same year as Penelope, pregnant with her eighth child, underwent a termination and sterilization. This provided Penelope with the subject of her finest novel, the entirely autobiographical *The Pumpkin Eater*, which was later filmed.

But that was one of those inconvenient episodes. John would mention only the cracks that spread across the ceiling of their house, mirroring the fissures in the marriage. It was much more amusing to write of taking silk in 1966, of hilarious encounters in Hollywood, of arguments at the National Theatre, and of victories over the Lord Chamberlain and the anti-obscenity laws, in the *Last Exit to Brooklyn* appeal of 1968, the *Oz* trial of 1971, and the *Gay News* trial of 1977. Towards the end of the book he writes about his most famous play, *A Voyage Round My Father*, which had just been filmed by Thames TV at Turville Heath Cottage, with Laurence Olivier playing Clifford Mortimer, Jane Asher as Penelope and the handsome Alan Bates as John himself.

He could no longer be certain, John writes, which lines of dialogue his father had actually said, and which he had invented for him. 'The writer's gluttony for material, his habit of eating his life as a caterpillar consumes the leaf it sits on … may not only be an embarrassment to his immediate family. Writing down events is the writer's great protection, his defence and his safety-valve.

Anger and misery, defeat, humiliation and self-disgust can be changed and used to fulfil a sense of achievement as he fills his pages. And yet the catharsis is often too complete, the life he has led vanishes into his work and leaves him empty.'

These were honest words. He could, at this stage of his life, be afflicted by melancholy. But underlying anxieties about his work, and about whether he was appreciated and liked ('My career is over!' was a habitual cry) were certainly alleviated in 1982 when *Clinging to the Wreckage* was published. It topped the bestseller lists in Britain and America. The easy languor of his tone – amused, tolerant, modest, witty, ironical, vaguely patrician – disarmed and charmed critics, even if they were not duped into swallowing his yarns as the whole truth. 'I do not believe a word of it,' wrote Auberon Waugh, 'but thought it a jolly good read.' 'A cagey memoirist', Prof John Carey called him. 'Ironic and discreet, it is the kind of life you would expect from an unusually astute Cheshire Cat.' Victoria Glendinning agreed: 'Mr Mortimer is, intellectually and emotionally, very well defended.' To interviewers who challenged him, John admitted that it was not a confessional book. 'I don't do much confessing.' But it has been a perennial seller ever since, distilling the essence of a much loved national figure. Almost three decades on, *Clinging to the Wreckage* remains one of those memoirs that repay many further readings, yielding up further riches each time.

Valerie Grove, 2010

Illustrations

Keeping down the mutiny in the garden

In my 'barrister's set' (Ron McTrusty cartoon, *Evening Standard*)

An encounter with Rumpole (John Ireland cartoon, *Sunday Times*)

Turville Heath today (*Thames Television*)

Working at Turville Heath today with my daughter Emily (*Daily Mirror*)

'For the absurd man it is not a matter of explaining and solving, but of experiencing and describing. Everything begins with lucid indifference.'

— Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus,* translated by Justin O'Brien

A man with a bristling grey beard came and sat next to me at lunch. He had very pale blue eyes and an aggressive way of speaking.

'What do you do,' he said, at once and without any preliminary introduction, 'when your boat hits a Force 10 gale in the Channel? What do you do with your female crew?'

'I don't know,' I said, suspecting some kind of joke. 'What do you do with your female crew?'

But he answered seriously, 'Double your fist, hit her on the head and stun her. That way she's far less likely to be swept overboard. I stunned my female crew last Saturday. When she came round she said, "Shall we send up a flare?" "Don't be so bloody stupid," I told her, "make a cup of tea." '

'But isn't it very dangerous, your sport of yachting?'

'Not dangerous at all, provided you don't learn to swim. I made up my mind, when I bought my first boat, never to learn to swim.'

'Why was that?'

'When you're in a spot of trouble, if you can swim you try to strike out for the shore. You invariably drown. As I can't swim I cling to the wreckage and they send a helicopter out for me. That's my tip, if you ever find yourself in trouble, cling to the wreckage!'

It was advice that I thought I'd been taking for most of my life.

Chapter One

The distant past, when I was acting my solo version of *Hamlet* before the blind eyes of my father, duelling with myself and drinking my own poisoned chalice or, further back, when I was starting an English education, with huge balloons of boxing-gloves lashed to the end of white, matchstick arms, grunting, stifled with the sour smell of hot plimsolls which is, to me, always the smell of fear, seems clear as yesterday. What are lost in the mists of a vanishing memory are the events of ten years ago.

The end of the sixties, Flower Power and Children's Lib, the Underground Press and the Alternative Society seem as remote as the Middle Ages, 'Make Love Not War' as dusty an apophthegm as some saying of the Early Fathers of the Church. Childhood requires no effort of memory, but it is hard work to recapture the feeling of 1971, a year when Richard Neville, a young Australian writer, asked some vaguely liberated children to help him produce a 'Schoolkids' number of his magazine *Oz*, thereby promoting an obscenity trial which lasted for six hot weeks of that summer at the Old Bailey. As the trial started the children demonstrated in the street, carrying, as I remember it, banners bearing the legend 'An Orgasm a Day Keeps the Doctor Away'. The front row of the public gallery contained girls whose T-shirts were decorated with a portrait of the Inspector in Charge of the case. He stared up from his position of power in the well of the Court at a repeated view of his own flushed features strained between the small breasts of teenaged girls. The adult editors of *Oz*, Richard Neville, Jim Anderson and Felix Dennis, wore, for their first day in the dock, gym-slips and long blonde wigs, treating the proceedings with an

apparent levity far removed from the respectful stance and deferential silence of the more acceptable prisoners at the bar. Among the witnesses called was the comedian Marty Feldman, and I remember him whispering to me, on his way to the witness-box, 'Great to be working with you at last.'

What, I now wonder, did everyone think was going on? A children's revolution, the dawn of a new world when long-haired headmasters would chant Bob Dylan songs at assembly and an adolescent House of Commons would rap away in perfect love enveloped in a pungent smell like slow-burning Turkish carpets; and war, shamed by a poem of Allen Ginsberg's, would vanish from the face of the earth? The dream, whatever it was, has faded more rapidly than most, and the schoolkids of the *Oz* age are no doubt now paying their mortgages and driving their Ford Cortinas with a nodding dog in the back window, and holding down tough jobs as chartered accountants. Even the trial became calmer after its dramatic beginning, and the great majesty of the Criminal Law of England bent itself to a careful consideration of, among other things, Rupert the Bear, an animal long beloved for his docility and innocence, who was unusually portrayed, in *Oz* magazine, with a gigantic erection.

I sat in Court, I can dimly recall, wondering what preordained and inherited paths I had pursued to arrive, forty-eight years old, wearing a horse-wig and black tailed coat, to join in the examination of Rupert Bear at his point of high amorous excitement. Up in the public gallery the attendant teenagers played a form of Russian roulette. They passed round a joint together with an innocent cigarette, and when the officer in charge pounced he invariably confiscated the unadulterated roll-up. During the frequent lulls in the proceedings my mind was filled with other anxieties. I had written a play which was about to open; into it I had collected my memories of my father, and written lines for him, so that a man who had filled so much of my life seemed to have

left me and become someone for other people to read about and perform. In one way I felt detached from it; but a play is a public exhibition with its own peculiar dangers, another sort of trial. Not for the only time in my life I felt that the theatrical drama in which I was involved was more real than the Old Bailey and the due process of law. Also I was about to tell a wider public a fact which, in our small family, had been the subject of a discreet conspiracy of silence, something, which in our English determination to avoid the slightest embarrassment, we never mentioned. My father had been blind.

My father was a very clean man, who never took less than two baths a day. One day I came home from school and found him wearing a white towelling dressing-gown and sitting on the closed lavatory seat in the bathroom. My mother was squeezing out his toothpaste. She found his hand and put the toothbrush into it. Then she guided his hand towards his mouth. That was the first time I saw that he was totally blind.

We talked about other things, my parents asked me about my school, and, as usual, I found it impossible to tell them; just as they found it impossible to say that my father could no longer see me, that my children would be, to him, only the sounds of laughter and small screams in the dark. Bombs, air raids, bits of food prodded at him, and the edge of the pavement would, from now on, strike him as equally alarming, and for the rest of his life I would look, in his mind's eye, like a scrawny and awkward schoolboy of thirteen.

After he had finished his long process of washing I went for a walk with my father, along the Embankment, past Cleopatra's Needle and the Sphinxes, black beasts which the pigeons had decked with a white crust. He was a tall man, over six foot in height, with fair hair which left the top of his head but never went grey. His legs were long and very thin, his feet and hands small,

his stomach grew in swelling isolation. He had a high forehead; but his nose was thick, his chin grew fat and his lower jaw protruded so that he couldn't be called handsome. His eyes were a clear, light blue; and now that he could no longer see he had abandoned his spectacles. As I led him by the river I felt his hand, small, long-fingered, the skin brown and already ill-fitting, like a loose glove, warm on my arm. I wanted to shake him off, to run away. I had an impulse to lose him, to allow him to wander off, hopelessly among the trams.

We passed a procession of British Fascists on the march. The Public Order Act forbade them to wear their black shirts which they carried solemnly on coat-hangers, as if bringing them home from the cleaners. In those days we were all waiting for the war with the concealed impatience with which those saying 'good-bye' on station platforms secretly long for the start of the train removing them from their nearest and dearest. I was trying to decide if I should sign on as a conscientious objector or join the RAF. Embarrassed by the blind man publicly attached to my arm, I decided to say whatever was best calculated to make him leave me in disapproval and rage.

'I think I'll be an objector.'

'A what?'

'I think I'll go into a Quaker Medical Corps or something.'

'Oh, you mean a conchy!' My father dropped the mask of bewilderment. 'I once shared diggings with one of those. In Chiswick. Do you really think you're brave enough for that?'

'What do you mean?'

'I think in your case,' my father turned his unblinking eyes to where he thought I might be, 'I should avoid the temptation to do anything heroic.'

Eyesight was a problem for both of us. Up to the age of five I enjoyed the privileges of myopia, seeing the world in a glorious haze like an Impressionist painting. My contemporaries appeared blurred and attractive, grown-ups loomed in vague magnificence. I went daily to school and kept my eyes politely on the blackboard where I could see only chalky confusion. After a year of this my mother noticed that my education was at a standstill and sent me to the oculist: the world sprang at me in hideous reality, full of people with open pores, blackheads and impetigo. A deep-focus moustache appeared on an art mistress whom I had considered beautiful. Flinching from this unusual clarity I went to school and sat in my usual place at the morning assembly, unrecognizable in a nose-pinching pair of wire-framed specs. The headmaster, whose awareness of his pupils was always somewhat vague, thought that this bespectacled intruder was a new boy. As I was too shy to disillusion him, I was put back in the bottom class to restart my unpromising academic career. I suppose I had become a new person, one who looked on life and actually saw it; but when faced with anything I am really reluctant to see, a pornographic film in the course of business, or an animal killed and plastered across the road, I still have the defence of taking off my glasses and returning the world to the safe blur of childhood.

In the years before I could see clearly my father was not yet blind.

Although I now feel I knew him so well he was remote to me then, a hard-working barrister with a flourishing practice in the Probate, Divorce and Admiralty Division of the High Court. There was nothing he enjoyed more than a good old-fashioned battle as to whether or not adultery had taken place. Often he would tell me of his triumphs and I must have been very young when he said, 'Remarkable win today, old boy. Only evidence of adultery we had was a pair of footprints upside down on the dashboard of an Austin Seven parked in Hampstead Garden Suburb.'

But if Divorce was my father's daily bread, Probate was his special treat. Before I was born he had sat up night after night writing in lucid prose what became a standard textbook on the validity of Wills. When respectable relatives, red in tooth and claw, met to prove or disprove the sanity of an aged uncle who had left his entire fortune to the Matron of some doubtful nursing home, when it was a question of due execution, or partial revocation, or lucid intervals, whenever greed or disappointment and old family ill-will led middle-aged children to abuse each other in Court, *Mortimer on Probate* was the Bible by which the Judge regulated their ambitions and decided their disputes. When Wills were written, as Wills so often were, on blown duck eggs or in minute handwriting on the tails of kites, my father was there with an appropriate precedent. When testators were perfectly sensible, as testators often were, on every subject except for their nightly chats with the late Emperor Napoleon the Third, my father was there with his long experience of monomania and the lucid interval. He was good on Divorce, but at Probate he became unbeatable. It was only when the Wills and incriminating hotel bills were put away, when nautical charts were unrolled and old Sea Dogs came clumping into the witness-box, when the Anchor was hung behind the Judge's chair and the Admiralty Court was in session, that my father discreetly withdrew. He knew absolutely nothing about ships.

Busily engaged on his legal practice my father seemed, no doubt understandably, anxious to postpone his complete introduction to me, his only child. It's true that I saw him occasionally, when he got me to rub his tobacco and pretend it was Indian 'pemmican', a game which had an element of mystery as I had no idea what 'pemmican' might be; but in those early days he was a remote figure. His clerk came to drive him to the Law Courts each morning, tucking a rug around his legs and removing him in a large, hearse-like Morris Oxford. My father's clerk was called

'Leonard', which was not his name. It is true that my father had once had a clerk called 'Leonard' who, tragically, had been killed on the Somme, after which my father called all clerks 'Leonard', although the one I remember, who was to be his clerk for many years, was undoubtedly a secret William.

William's wife Elsie was my nurse, governess and friend, and with her I spent my life. Even when we went on holidays, usually to such exotic resorts as Eastbourne or Littlehampton, my father was reluctant to stay with me, and while he and my mother put up at a four-star hotel the nurse and I were billeted in some boarding-house at the far end of the promenade. I have a memory of being taken to see my father in an Eastbourne hotel; it was late in the morning but he was lying in an ornate bed, placed on a sort of dais and covered with a canopy, and he was sucking his handkerchief. I do not remember his being particularly pleased to see me, and the visit was a short one.

Those years seem populated by governesses and filled with the smell of maids' bedrooms, a curious, pungent odour compounded, I suppose, of sweat and face-powder and Woolworth's perfume, the smell of my childhood which I haven't encountered for half a century. The maids were invariably kind and seemed, to my short-sighted eyes, beautiful. One I remember received me in her bedroom and chatted as she squatted on a large, rose-patterned chamber-pot; another made me a Highland costume out of kitchen paper. A new governess escorted me each morning to Sloane Square on the Underground when the time came to begin my formal education. In my fantasies I always hoped that she would kidnap me and take me home to her husband whom I imagined to be a burglar living in Shepherd's Bush, which I had somehow heard of as an area of ill repute. However nothing of the sort occurred and I was delivered safely to the exclusive, no doubt ruinously expensive, Sloane Square school where I was put down to the bottom of the form for wearing glasses.

Square Wolf Cubs, an elite corps of which I was a junior member. She was a woman built on generous lines and when she turned out in an immense khaki skirt and wide-brimmed scouting hat, with her whistle on a lanyard and her long-service decorations, she made a formidable figure. Miss Boustead's ideas on Cub training were single-minded and resulted in one activity only. She formed up her platoon at Sloane Square Underground Station and led us, by public transport, to Wimbledon Common. Once out in open country Miss Boustead would choose some suitable clearing or glen and stand in it with her legs akimbo. She would then give the order, 'Cubs, scatter!' Ours was not to reason why, and each loyal Cub rushed into the middle distance and flung himself into the undergrowth. It was then a Cub's task to advance, squirming on his belly, taking advantage of every bit of ground cover, daring a dash in full view whenever the Commander's head was turned, towards the bulky figure in the clearing. The rules were simple. The Cub who got between Miss Boustead's legs before she spotted him was awarded the box of Cadbury's Assorted. I shall always feel grateful to Miss Boustead for organizing the only form of competitive sport I have ever enjoyed.

The past is like a collection of photographs: some are familiar and on constant display, others need searching for in dusty drawers. Some have faded entirely, and some have been taken so amateurishly and on a day so dark that the subjects are seen like ghosts in a high wind and are impossible to identify. Assembled they can be called anything you like: illustrations of the vanished professional, middle-class world of England between the wars; or the snapshots of an only child who had, in those slow-moving days, much time to notice things.


image
not
available

So at Oxford after Dunkirk the fashion was to be homosexual. It seems that it was only after the war, with the return of the military, that heterosexuality came to be completely tolerated. As it was, my sporadic adventures with WAAFs and girls from St Hilda's, my grandly titled engagement to a student of book illustration at the Slade, were subjects I preferred not to discuss with Tommy Motte-Smith when he invited me and my friend Oliver for a five-shilling blow-out at the George.

The high life of Oxford was something I never encountered when I first moved into my rooms in Meadow Buildings. To my dismay I found I was sharing them with Parsons, a tall man with bicycle-clips and a pronounced Adam's apple, who tried to lure me into the Bible Society. One night Oliver and I boiled up Algerian wine, college sherry and a bottle of Bols he had stolen from his mother's flat, in Parson's electric kettle. When I recovered from the draught I found Parsons wearing cycle-clips and kneeling over me in prayer. I also heard, coming from down the corridor, the sound of Brahms's Fourth Symphony like music from some remote paradise.

In fact my memory of Oxford seems, looking back over a vast distance, to consist almost entirely of Brahms's Fourth Symphony, a piece of music of which I have become decreasingly fond, as I have lost the taste for bow-ties, Balkan Sobranie cigarettes and sherry and Bols boiled up in an electric kettle. But that music came from someone who did affect my view of the world, and of whom I still think with gratitude and bewilderment when I remember his serene life and extraordinary death.

My father, to whom I owe so much, never told me the difference between right and wrong: now, I think that's why I remain so greatly in his debt. But Henry Winter, who slowly and with enormous care sharpened a thorn needle to play Brahms on

his huge gramophone, became a kind of yardstick not of taste, but of moral behaviour. He had no doubts whatever about war, he knew that killing people was wrong. He looked forward with amused calm to the call-up, the refusal to put on uniform, the arguments before the tribunals and the final consignment to Pentonville or the Fire Service. He read Classics, and read them in the way I read Isherwood or Julien Green. He would sit in a squeaking basket chair, smoking a pipe and giving me his version of chunks of Homer and Euripides which, up to then, I had been trained to regard as almost insoluble crossword puzzles or grammarians' equations with no recognizable human content. I was born of tone-deaf parents, and in the school songs had been instructed to open my mouth soundlessly so that no emergent discord might mar the occasion. Yet Winter slowly, painstakingly introduced me to music, and the pleasure I take in it now is due entirely to him.

Winter's rejection of violence, and what seemed to me the extraordinarily gentle firmness of his moral stance, was the result of no religious conviction. He was courageously sceptical, fearlessly agnostic, open and reasonable with none of the tormented Christianity of my ex-room-mate. Parsons had applied for a transfer after the desecration of his electric kettle and left me in solitary possession of a huge Gothic sitting-room and a bedroom almost the size of the waiting-room at St Pancras Station, with a chipped washbasin in which I kept a smoked salmon, caught by my Aunt Daisy in Devon in defiance of rationing.

I suppose Oxford's greatest gift is friendship, for which there is all the time in the world. After Oxford there are love affairs, marriages, working relationships, manipulations, lifelong enemies, but even then, in rationed, blacked-out Oxford, there were limitless hours for talking, drinking, staying up all night, going for walks with a friend. Winter and I were emerging from the chrysalis of schoolboy homosexuality. At first the girls we loved were tennis-