

THE LIBRARY
ALL SOULS COLLEGE

EDWARD MORTIMER

CMG, MA, DLitt (Hon)

22 December 1943 – 18 June 2021

Distinguished Fellow, All Souls College, from 2013
Chief Speechwriter, then Director of Communications,
United Nations, 1998-2006
Foreign Affairs Commentator, Financial Times, 1987-1998
Prize Fellow, All Souls College, 1965-1972



Saturday, 27 November 2021 at 2.30 p.m.

Introduction
by the Warden

W.A. Mozart, Funeral March in C Minor, Kleiner Trauermarsch.

Played by Kitty Lewis

Tribute

The Chancellor

Christoph Williband Gluck, 'Che farò?' from Orfeo ed Euridice.

Played by Jonathan Katz
and sung by Elizabeth Bennett

Tribute

Patrick Cockburn

W.A. Mozart, Andante, from Sonata in A major K. 526 for piano and violin.

Played by Jonathan Katz
& Stephen Symchych

Tribute

Andrew Gilmour

J.S. Bach, Siciliano, from Sonata no. 4 in C minor for violin and piano.

Played by Dr Jonathan Katz
& Stephen Symchych

Tribute

Dame Marina Warner

J.S. Bach, Sheep May Safely Graze, transcribed for piano solo by Mary Howe.

Played by Jonathan Katz

All are invited for tea in the Hall



THE CHANCELLOR: EULOGY

Edward was about six months older than me.

I first met him at Balliol in Michaelmas term in 1962. He was the first Etonian I had ever met, indeed one of the first boys I had met who went to a boarding school. He was not entirely what I expected an Etonian to be. To borrow from the sermon in *Beyond the Fringe*, he was not a smooth man, indeed he was like Esau a decidedly hairy man. He had a great shock of then black hair crowning his tall slightly stooping frame. He was noisy, friendly, funny, charming and surprisingly clumsy (just how clumsy I was to discover later driving around America with him). And, as everyone who knew him found out very quickly, he was immensely clever, certainly the cleverest of my contemporaries with a great memory and the ability to cut to the heart of complexity in pellucid prose or very direct rather provocative questions.

As luck would have it, we did some of our tutorials together. On mediaeval history with Maurice Keene — “well Mr Patten, you’re in luck, it’s Mr Mortimer’s turn to read us an essay”. Or with Richard Cobb on the French Revolution, who was occasionally reduced by the blinding light of day, after what had clearly been a night before in which wine had been taken, to sit in the twilight under his desk before sooner or later we all repaired to the buttery for him to continue a denunciation of his customary objects of derision, Robespierre and the Master.

We also sang Victorian music hall songs together, wrote what we thought were amusing articles for a magazine called *Mesopotamia* which was regularly closed down by the proctors, and once a year we helped to write reviews based — it has to be said extremely loosely — on the plays of Aristophanes for the Balliol Players to tour schools and country houses during the long vacation. I remember that one year, performing at Shrewsbury School, where Edward’s brother Mark taught Classics for many years, Edward noted that the headmaster Mr Wright had the initials ARD. He put this to music “I’m Arnold Ronald Donald and I’m right right right”. The boys loved it. The headmaster did not love it. He wrote to the Dean of Balliol demanding a sentence without remission which earned a polite letter of apology from the Dean and a message to us noting that he got the joke but didn’t think it was very funny.

Edward invited me a couple of times for a weekend in Exeter staying of course at the Bishop's Palace. It was mostly great fun, though breakfast could be in a bit intimidating as one sat there in the midst of a terrifying fusillade of classical puns relieved occasionally by Edward's sister Kate with her throaty denunciation of classical one-upmanship. At the end of one weekend we went to evensong in the Cathedral and I remember afterwards on the way to the pub telling Edward how I envied members of the Church of England, being myself a catholic of Irish extraction, the language of the book of common prayer. He asked me to give an example and I mentioned the Nunc dimittis which we had just heard — "Lord now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace according to thy word." When we got back to the Palace we had to rummage through his father's library to find a translation of this Cantic of Simeon in the Roman breviary to ascertain to Edward's satisfaction — always check your sources — that I was correct. I could not have known then that almost 60 years later I would be recalling this at Edward's funeral.

After our finals we went off to the United States together having won what were called Coolidge Atlantic Crossing fellowships. We travelled around America anticlockwise in a series of Hertz rented Dodge Dart's. This is when I got an intimate knowledge of Edward's rather limited acquaintance with accuracy and distance in a car. We were driving through Ohio when Pres Johnson announced an increase in American forces in Vietnam. We were in Los Angeles at the time of the riots there. We were in Montgomery, Alabama, just after three students from Pennsylvania State University had been shot after taking part in civil rights demonstrations. I remember one occasion when our host, a courtly southerner, had to intervene to protect us from a group of rednecks in a milk bar assuring them that we were not from Pennsylvania but from England and therefore just like the crowd in the bar.

At about this time we got the results of our exams. Edward had got a congratulatory first, the only one awarded that year, and decided he should cut short our time in America and return to Oxford to sit the All Souls Prize Fellowship exams. I decided that I would finish my time in America and in fact went on to work in a political campaign in New York for a Republican candidate; those were the days when Republicans were both moderate and internationalist.

At that point, of course, Edward and I set off on careers which took us along different paths even though they were sometimes running in parallel. Edward joined the journalist profession, a profession to which he brought honour. I moved into politics as a rather wet Whiggish Conservative (and almost extinct

breed), a move which puzzled Edward almost as much as it surprised my wife to be.

As a journalist both for the Times and the Financial Times, Edward pursued with his customary intellectual courage and ability the protection of human rights everywhere, the defence of those beleaguered and persecuted — from Tamils to Palestinians — and the promotion of the argument that international cooperation is invariably the best way to prevent and end conflict and to confront problems which are rarely circumscribed by national boundaries.

Our careers occasionally brought us together particularly when I was a European Commissioner and Edward was working for Kofi Anam and the United Nations seeking an ethical path to the solution of global problems. For example, we found ourselves supporting the Norwegian drive for peace in Sri Lanka and taking a sceptical view of the work of the so-called quartet in its US led search for Middle East peace. We both questioned whether America's colleagues in this foursome, particularly the UN and the European Union, were doing any more than simply providing cover for whatever Washington wanted to do, which was not much. We both shared the view of Amr Moussa, the former Egyptian foreign minister, that this organisation should be called the quartet sans trois.

There are three things which for me clearly ran through Edward's distinguished life as a journalist and as a public servant. They were all fundamental parts of the man himself.

First, there was his belief in international cooperation, not least as the only way to deal with so many purportedly national problems which demanded cooperation beyond borders if they were ever to be solved. This was also the only way in which to protect underdogs effectively. He believed that it was not only states that had rights but the citizens who lived in them as well. Very often critics sneer that this is just do-gooding. The obvious response is that it's better to be a do-gooder than a do-badder. Moreover, trying to do good requires a good deal of intellectual and personal courage; it is no place for the limp and weak-kneed.

Second, Edward shared the view of identity and politics brilliantly excoriated in Amartya Sen's book on "Identity and Violence". Like Sen, Edward understood and wrote that if you took no notice of the plurality of our affiliations and the moral and political importance of reason then you were thrust inevitably towards the world of Matthew Arnold's Dover Beach — "and we are here on a darkling plain, swept with confused alarms of struggle and

flight, where ignorant armies clash by night". He had always been suspicious of the sort of nationalism, defining identity, which is inward looking and exclusive and which denies all that is best in patriotism.

Third, Edward did not see the conduct of foreign policy as obliging its agents to make a binary choice between an ethical approach on the one hand and something called, though less often defined, *realpolitik* on the other. These days the *realpolitik* too often seems like an echo of the aspirations of corporate sales departments. Edward understood and argued, without sanctimoniousness, hypocrisy or any *de haut en bas* patronising, that foreign policy is at its best and at its most successful when those who shape it understand that doing the right thing is usually the right thing to do, a point unlikely to be made by a government whose policies simply represent a variety of short-term political fixes whirling around the perimeter of a moral vacuum.

All these attitudes were simply a reflection of a man who tried to do his best without any self-delusion and who was prepared to make compromises provided they did not erode the practical and moral purpose of the task.

So, goodbye to my friend; let him depart in peace. I hope it doesn't seem slightly lame to say that I remember him principally as a good man, a good man whom I was proud to call a friend, a good husband and father, a good, decent and generous man who used his considerable talents to try to make the world a rather better and more humane place.



