

1967

I'm writing these notes on the occasion of the fortieth anniversary of our wedding so as to record what I remember of the feelings and motives attaching to the events. My idea is not to labour the point with too much detail, nor to embarrass either myself or Anna or our children who might read this, but simply to write down things which nowadays seem hard to believe. It's hard to believe that we could have behaved so irresponsibly, and harder still to believe that a marriage that had such an inauspicious prologue should have survived for forty years.

The first thing to remember as an extenuating circumstance is that both Anna and I were very young. I was just eighteen when we met and *got engaged* in 1965 and Anna was twenty. I don't know whether people use that phrase nowadays. It was the natural expression to use then. There was another stage prior to *getting engaged*, which I had not come across until I talked about these things with Anna. This was being *unofficially engaged*. Engagement was something which typically involved families, permission, announcements and a ring; unofficial engagement was something that was talked about only among friends and was consecrated by less expensive but often more precious tokens. Unofficial engagement had something of make believe about it, something of playing at grown-ups. People drifted in and out of unofficial engagements, no doubt with much temporary pain and stress, but without scandal. One's parents would not take it too seriously. Engagement was another matter, partly because it might involve some present-giving and some official contact between the two families. You were making a demand upon the world by announcing an engagement. If you were young and poor, people would talk ominously about *long engagements*, their dangers and disadvantages. I suppose what was at the back of their minds was the thought that two young people committed to each other would find it hard not to want to sleep together, and wanting to, would find it hard not to do so. I never heard this thought articulated, but the question, *Do you believe in long engagements?* was something one heard debated, much as one might ask, *Do you believe in fox-hunting, or in working mothers?* I had never known anyone who was engaged, apart from my sister Jennifer who had been engaged twice, the first time while still in her teens, and had then married someone else altogether. You heard of people getting engaged at an early age, but marriage at such an early age was less common, particularly in the middle-classes. The assumption would be, if people married in their teens, that they *had to get married*, which was another phrase that one heard a lot of in those days.

Pre-marital sex was something else on which opinion was canvassed. It was an issue that could be tackled from many sides, religious, moral, social, practical, and jocular. One of my parents' friends said of Jennifer's marriage that it meant she could count the months with impunity, a remark which, at sixteen, left me baffled, although I couldn't forget it and saw that it was a joke, much as at the age of five I had recognised that the story of the camel and the wrong straw was a joke, only to see the point years later. Like many favourite questions it was one which could be made to turn on a preposition. *Extra-marital sex*, which suggested adultery, was undoubtedly bad; *pre-marital sex* might be less bad, provided that there was the intention of marrying. By the mid-sixties it was a question that pre-occupied the *Any Questions* listening generation - it would be

interesting to know when and by whom the issue was first explicitly raised on *Any Questions* – probably sometime in the late fifties and by someone like Mary Stocks. Although I don't have first hand recollections of it, I suspect that the question *Would you or wouldn't you ...* was one which adolescent girls often asked each other. The only comparable question that I ever heard my sisters ask was when Imogen and a friend discussed whether they would ever bare their bosoms in the cause of art. My friend Derek asked me when I first told him about Anna whether I wanted to marry her or go to bed with her, to which I priggishly replied that I wouldn't want one without the other, although I did not, so far as I recall the conversation (which took place on the top of a number 3 bus), specify the order of the two events.

I was struck not by the fact that Derek asked me that question, but by a feeling that he was somewhat diffident about asking it, which was uncharacteristic, because he was generally outspoken. There was something about his perception of me which inhibited him. Undoubtedly, adolescent males think about sex endlessly, and most of them talk about it among themselves. But I didn't talk about it. I can recall only one other occasion when a schoolfriend spoke seriously about sex to me, and this was when Tony told me solicitously that I surely must realise that sex was not only for creating babies – solicitously because he felt, I suppose, that it was a truth that I needed to understand for my own health and happiness. I thought about sex a great deal, but I never spoke about it to friends or to my family. I rather disliked the casual coarseness of boys' conversation. I suppose I was ashamed in some way about my sexual fantasies, but I'm not sure what sort of shame it was. Perhaps it was something like what Pip feels when he returns from his first visit to Satis House, a sense that he cannot bear to expose Miss Havisham and Estella to the gaze of his sister; instead he invents absurd stories of dogs and carriages and veal cutlets. But whatever it was that made me reticent about sex, it was something which my friends caught on to, something they recognised in me and, eventually, were prepared to accept. Perhaps it would have been better for me in the long run if they had forced me to break down this barrier, and to change the way I viewed myself.

This brings me to something which might qualify the impression that at eighteen I was ridiculously young to be getting engaged, and at not quite twenty ridiculously young to be getting married. I had always regarded myself and usually been regarded by others as old for my years. My school reports regularly emphasised my maturity, and I believed them. The idea compensated for the difficulties I had in dealing with people of my own age, but it also prevented me from confronting and dealing with the difficulties. It was something I could hide behind. I should say that even before my schoolmasters remarked upon it, the idea that I was old for my age had already taken root. My father liked to say that I had been born middle-aged, because I had sedate tastes and unenergetic pursuits. I tended to identify with my older sisters, and expected to be treated like them, to discuss the things they discussed, and to have my opinion valued. The faint residue of some customary respect for the son and heir may have tended to make my family accept this valuation of myself, but they did not accept it totally. There was a natural tendency on the part of my sisters to deflate my self-importance, which was the cause of much anger and unhappiness for me. I don't know how far this dynamic was understood by our parents. The upshot was that throughout my schooldays my chief motive was the desire to seek approval from the adult world and

emphasise the difference between myself and other boys. In other words I was a Pharisee and a prig. I don't want to suggest that I was a hypocrite in everything I did. Quite genuinely, my tastes and motives were in advance of my years. I was studious and thought seriously about politics and moral questions. I was impatient with what I saw as the provisional and unserious quality of childhood and adolescence and keen to move on to real life. I suppose this is a common enough feeling, even now, but I sense that nowadays adolescents are more comfortable with themselves than I ever was.

I think Anna also felt uneasy with her contemporaries, but being less arrogant than me she reacted to it differently. Though two years older than me at an age when that was a significant difference, she seemed in some respects less mature. I don't know whether I thought at the time that she was less mature than me; if I did it would have been because of her habitually low opinion of herself. Looking back I suspect that the important point was that she was further than I was from coping with the problem of her parents. But whether she was mature or not, by modern standards she was very young to be thinking of marriage. In those days, however, it was expected that girls would marry in their early twenties. Jennifer was told at twenty-three that she had to beware of being left *on the shelf*.

The fact remains, whatever we might say about it, that we were children, and this must be taken into account when trying to understand both our irresponsibility and our equally surprising willingness to do as we were told. Given that we persisted in our determination to marry in the face of strong opposition from our families and some of our friends, it may seem odd to claim that we did as we were told, but it's true that in almost everything apart from the single main point of getting married we put ourselves in other people's hands and allowed them to tell us what to do. Our extreme youth might be sufficient explanation for our frightening irresponsibility, but although we were young we were neither stupid nor thoughtless, and we were undoubtedly influenced by other things. Of all the inducements to marriage I suppose the strongest is the hormonal drive to procreate. Since this is pretty constant over the ages, I daresay I needn't say anything about that. Then there is the fetishistic aspect of the matter, the individual quirks and habits which must enter into any intimate relationship, and these are probably too embarrassing to mention, so (with one exception later on) I shall pass over them. There remains what might be called the ideological background, the system of spoken and unspoken beliefs which form the framework within which decisions are taken and justified. This is probably worth describing in some detail, both as a contribution to sociology, and because I suspect that Anna and I, as studious and conscientious children, were unduly influenced by ideology, more influenced than other young people might have been.

In order to understand the ideology, it is first necessary to see the geographical background and have a brief summary of the events. In the summer of 1965 I was living with my parents in Blackheath, or rather in the Blackheath postal area, but in fact in an indeterminate area on the Shooters Hill Road, nearer to Charlton than to Blackheath Village. I had a second home in Charlton with Mrs Denny. Her house was about half an hour's walk away, on the other side of Shooters Hill Road, through a council estate called the Cherry Orchard. I call Mrs Denny's house my second home because I had stayed there for six months in 1963 while my parents were in America, and I used to go

there to get away from the stresses of home life. I believed that Mrs Denny understood me better than my own parents. In a sense this was true. Anna's parents were living in Antwerp at the time. Anna had just finished her first year at University in St Andrews, where she had met Michael Wills. Unwilling to return home to Antwerp she spent the summer with Michael, Tony and their Scottish Granny in Beckenham. The Wills' parents were away for the summer in America. My parents were on holiday in Greece, and one of the odd things about the summer was that friends of theirs kept turning up at the house, having been told that they could stay there. The journey from our house to Beckenham involved a bus to Lewisham and a train from Lewisham to Beckenham Junction and then a walk to Copers Cope Road where the Wills family lived. It took about ninety minutes, depending on how long you had to wait for the train. I can't think of any particular way in which these details were particularly significant or had any influence on events, but I can't separate the events from the dim, respectable suburbs in which they took place. I was still a child and the place where these things happened was the place where I had always lived, the only place I really knew.

Shooters Hill Road was already a busy main road. I had grown up with the noise of traffic always in the background, but there was nothing like the density that you would find there now. Lying awake at night you could hear a single car approaching from a distance, the sound gradually building up and then fading away. This was quite different from the steady roar of nowadays. You had to be careful crossing the road at busy times, but you didn't need traffic lights as you do now. There was a zebra crossing about half a mile down the road, beside the shops. In childhood you invest the places round about you with meaning, like mediaeval cosmologists. To me the order of the streets that the 89 bus passed on its way to the Heath had not been laid down by Victorian speculative builders so much as ordained by divine decree. To think that now I can't remember for certain which came first, Kidbrooke Park Road with its black tarmac or Kidbrooke Grove, tawny yellow. Beckenham was a place I had always known about, but until I visited Tony during my last couple of years at school I had never been there. It remained on the edge of our little suburban world. It didn't have a London postal number. Beckenham, Kent, it was. No doubt its inhabitants were proud of this; it was the sort of thing people cared about in those days, or at least the sort of people who care about such things cared about it. One thing that made it exotic to my mind was the fact that you took the train from Lewisham. Our usual station was Blackheath. In fact to take a train anywhere but up to town was unusual. For the best part of a year now I had been taking the train to London every day, to my job on the corner of Gower Street and the Euston Road.

On 12 August, when I went to spend the evening with Tony, I didn't travel from Lewisham but took the train direct from Charing Cross to Beckenham. The list of stations on the Beckenham Line was familiar from countless station announcements, but it was also unfamiliar, not the usual litany that accompanied me home to Blackheath. Travelling to Beckenham had a different rhythm. I think what I want to convey is the cocoon-like familiarity of the world I was living in. Like the endless suburban streets that we inhabited, familiarity hemmed me in wherever I went. A journey seemed an adventure if it took me through a different sequence of stations.

I don't remember now whether Tony had told me in advance that I was to meet his brother and a girl who was staying with his brother. Probably not; Tony didn't volunteer personal information. I was in any case uncertain about the visit. Tony had just returned from his travels around the Mediterranean. I was not sure whether the sophistication he must have gained in the course of his travels would outweigh the fact that while he had left school at Christmas, I had left a whole term earlier and had been working in London for almost a year. In the event we fell easily into our old relationship, and these comparisons didn't arise. I listened to him with respect and unquestioning belief; he listened to me with amused contempt; but the important thing was that we listened to each other. Michael, who had been to boarding-school in Scotland and was at University in Scotland, at a place called St Andrews that I had never heard of, surprised me by accepting me. Of course I now know that Michael will accept almost anyone and almost anything, and make the best of them. After a little while, Anna came in. There was a bit of confusion over my name, which became a joke between us. In fact I also misheard her name and thought she was called Hannah, but because I didn't address her by name the mistake was not noticed.

Anna had bought a record of Rodrigo's guitar concerto, and she played it to us. I had never heard it before, had in fact heard very little music. It had not yet achieved the popularity that came later, and it seemed very romantic and exciting. I was also impressed that she had bought it for herself. Since I had been working I had bought one or two records, but it had not yet become a matter of course. In our family on the whole you didn't buy things for yourself. You waited in the hope that someone would give them to you, or until an excuse for buying them came along. Books were different, I never felt guilty over buying books as I did over other things. The next day I bought myself a copy of the guitar concerto. There were several record shops that I passed on my walk from Gower Street to Charing Cross, and I suppose I must have gone into one of those. I think I must even at that early stage have had an idea that we had a future together, because it occurred to me that it might be an unnecessary extravagance for us each to have our own copy of the record.

When I invited Tony to visit the following weekend, I hesitantly asked if Michael and Anna would come as well. They came over on the Sunday morning. We went for a walk in the woods at the top of Shooters Hill, supposed to be very ancient woodland. Anna sang *En passant par la Lorraine* and a Spanish song about three *muleros* as we walked, and as darkness fell. We watched the stars and the shooting stars. It was too late for them to go back to Beckenham, so they stayed the night. In the morning I had to go to work and leave them to make their way home.

Visits back and forth between Beckenham and Blackheath continued through the rest of August. A colleague of my father, Harold Rottesman, was staying in the house. He was a gentle, melancholy man who was about to take up a teaching post at Eltham Green Comprehensive. I hesitantly exposed to him my excitement over these new friends, this newly discovered friendship. Most people would have been bored by this, but Harold was interested, I'm not sure why. As a schoolmaster he may have been interested in the emotional development of adolescents, and in my case the sudden loss of shyness and reserve had been dramatic. At all events, I was flattered by Harold's interest, which undoubtedly helped to increase my sense that things could never be the same again.

Among the things I told Harold was that the Willses were extremely rich. I believed this because Tony had told me so while we were at school. I was very gullible, but Tony did not expect me to believe that millionaires would be living in a middle-sized house in Beckenham. It didn't need much social insight to see that 93 Copers Cope Road was exactly the sort of house that a hard-working and prosperous suburban solicitor would inhabit. Tony's explanation was that the money did not belong to his parents, but had been left to the three brothers. I don't recall how much it was, but I think they each had a quarter of a million, which was a lot of money in the early sixties, when Tony told me about it, and was still a lot in 1965 when I told Harold about it. I mention that I told Harold about the Willses' riches because if I had not done so, and if he had not been so intrigued by it, I think I might have entertained more doubts about Tony's claims, in which case my actions later would have been different.

I was ready for something to happen. A year earlier I had left school and refused to apply for a place at Oxford. I saw myself as a rebel, but the fact is that this one colossal act of rebellion had left me exhausted. Also, I was too timid to be a successful rebel. As a result I found that I had hardly moved on. The grey suburbs still enclosed me as they had when I was at school. My life still turned upon the axis of the 89 bus route. My one escape was still to walk through the Cherry Orchard (the Estate, that is – there was not a single cherry tree left, and hardly any trees at all) to Mrs Denny's house. My mind was full of theories of freedom, I speculated on different possible lives in my diary and in my novel, but when it came to doing anything I was timid and lonely and afraid of being laughed at. Shy people often make such a fuss about everyday social activities that they end up doing precisely what they want to avoid, drawing attention to themselves by some outrageous behaviour. We got engaged by letter after Anna had gone back eventually to Antwerp. I was shy about having a girlfriend, but instead of hiding it I inflated the event by making it a grand affair, or at any rate an engagement.

The ideology contributed to the inflation. First there was Lawrence and Freud: we believed that sex was liberating and ennobling, that restraint and convention were crippling. Add to this the existentialist obligation to make yourself the hero of your own life, and the Marxist doctrine of alienation and false consciousness. These European ideas were naturalised under the names of honesty and sincerity, virtues always held to be important in England, where hypocrisy has, since Victorian times, been regarded as the supreme national vice. Almost every novel of the fifties and sixties has its obligatory sex scene, more or less explicit depending on the intended audience and on whether it came before or after the great Chatterley watershed of 1961. Why not, one might say; if you write about life you must write about sex. If you are writing about young lives (as most novelists were in those days) then certainly you must write about sex. But there was more to it than that; there was the sense that sex was life *par excellence*; that honesty *equalled* honesty about sex. Sex, for our generation, teemed with significance. It was the battleground (or, to be less melodramatic, the chessboard) on which we worked out our relationship with God, as in Graham Greene, or with Society, as in Kingsley Amis, or with the Good, as in Iris Murdoch. From this it followed that sex was an obligation and had nothing to do with hedonism. The difference between this attitude and the hedonistic view of sex can be illustrated by a parallel with coffee. Coffee for our generation was something deeply significant, not in the making of it, about which we knew little, but in the part it played in our lives. It was strong, bad for us, gulped down

with a grimace. It went with black jerseys and high seriousness. This ideology of coffee affected even those like me who hardly ever tasted it, and I can't help looking with disbelief when I go past Starbucks with their advertisements for coffee made with cinnamon, marshmallows or butterscotch – they have turned this supremely adult thing into a sweetie. I feel somewhat the same about jeans, and certainly about sex. We knew that we were witnessing, or even in our small way participating in, a sexual revolution. Its purpose was certainly not so that working class men could gawp at topless models in the Sun, nor that scantily dressed teenage girls could vamp it up on the television. I suppose we took ourselves much too seriously. When we called it a sexual revolution we were not thinking only of the extent of the changes; as in the real revolution, there was a definite enemy – the old, the stuffy, the repressive element in society. We thought about sex in terms of duty and destiny. It is very unlikely that this ideology was the motive force behind my overpowering wish to sleep with Anna, but it coloured the way I thought about it, and by turning it into a duty made it seem possible.

But there were inconsistencies in all this. For one thing, why were we intent on getting married? In theory we were determined to defy convention, and to stand up as free agents in the face of destiny; in practice we were timid and anxious about the eyes and tongues of our little middle-class world. If that wasn't enough to inhibit us, we were also thinking of becoming Catholics.

Anna's incipient Catholicism (she was taking instruction from the Catholic chaplain in St Andrews) was one of the things that drew me to her. My family had, I think, some residual belief in God, but of a very vague sort which did not impinge on life or decisions. Had I been asked in those days I would have said my mother was agnostic and my father atheist, and I was surprised to learn, towards the end of their lives, that it was not so, in fact rather the other way around, and my father was at the believing end of the agnostic spectrum and my mother at the unbelieving end. At all events, they had little time for organized religion. When younger they had been under the influence of a modernist Congregationalist minister in Blackheath called Thomas Wigley, but by the time I became interested in these things they had, it seemed to me, become disillusioned and uninterested. All my friends, without exception, were agnostic or atheist. In this environment I wanted to believe in God. It had occurred to me that many of my favourite writers at the time (Belloc, Chesterton, Waugh, Greene) were Catholic; it did not occur to me with quite so much force that many of them weren't. I had been struck by something I had picked up from the biography of Belloc, that he lived his life as a devout and convinced Catholic but had never had anything that could be called a religious experience, no revelation, no glimpse of God or eternity. If the absence of religious experience was no bar for Belloc, it needn't be a bar for me. I should add that I was not persuaded by any of the rational arguments for the existence of God, nor was I particularly convinced that the doctrines of the catholic faith necessarily followed even if the existence of God were allowed. I had no grounds either in reason or in revelation, but nonetheless I would believe. My friends disagreed with me, and I now think they were right, but at the time the position I adopted did not appear even to those who disagreed with me to be entirely ridiculous. It was roughly speaking the position of the Catholic branch of existentialism. If it had not been for Anna I don't think I should ever have seriously thought of becoming a convert. She was attracted by the ritual, art and music, and in her discussions with Fr Gillan in St Andrews she had gone further than I

would have gone on my own. I had bought a rosary in the Oxfam shop; it was rather beautiful, but I had not troubled to learn the prayers that went with it. In fact prayers were a bit of a sticking point with me altogether. I should say that there was a certain nostalgia and snobbery about all this. If you read people like Belloc and Waugh, you could easily come away with the feeling that all the finest gentlemen in England were members of the old faith. My friend Mrs Denny did not discourage our plans. She was a devout member of the church of England, but she believed that everyone had to make their own way to God. I'm sure she didn't expect me to become a Catholic, but she saw it as a quest, a process, and she would not have wanted to be discouraging. She will have known people who converted to Catholicism between the wars, and she said something which revealing: that if we were going to convert we should take instruction with a first rate Jesuit, not some priest from the Irish bogs.

What did our parents think of all this? Anna's parents were horrified, saw it as a sort of treason, as going over to the enemy. Anglicanism was a badge for them, essential to their group identity. This may have been based only on their experience in the British expatriate communities in France, Belgium and Spain, where the English church provided a centre for social life; being socially unsure of themselves they were afraid of losing their hold. Or perhaps their feeling about Catholicism went back further, to their confused Irish origins. I don't know how far they suspected that Anna's movement Romewards was a rejection of them. As for my parents, I doubt if they believed for one minute that I would ever become a catholic convert. My mother was always interested in and perhaps envious of other people's experiences, but her curiosity about Catholicism was limited; my father said little about it, except that he thought Catholic wives risked being worn out with child-bearing. Their main concern at this point was lest we should have a baby, which would be harmful for the child and disastrous for us, and they regarded the catholic element in the story as something that could be either a good or a bad thing – good if it prevented our sleeping together, bad if it only stopped us using contraceptives.

It will be apparent that we have now got beyond our first meetings in 1965. A lot happened in that time. That summer Rowwy had been away staying I think with the Bartholomews or with our grandparents near Eastbourne, while our parents were still in Greece. When she came home I told her that I had met a girl. I kept up the pretence that she was Michael's girlfriend, but probably gave away the secret that I hoped she might become mine. Other friends of my parents turned up: the Lowsons who were dismissive of my hints at a great romance; Ed Wilson, who was kinder and listened respectfully when I played him the Rodrigo. When my parents came back they were clearly anxious about other things and I didn't tell them much of what had happened. They were angry with me for having given away some money. Their news was that they were to sell the house in Blackheath and move to Farnham. (In fact this may have been decided before the summer – if not the business must have been very quickly transacted, because the removal took place in September or October.) This meant that I would move back to Mrs Denny's house in Charlton, a milieu more sympathetic to our romance than my parents' house.

I met Anna in London on her way from Plymouth to St Andrews. We had a day wandering the streets together; we took a boat to Greenwich and ate apples beside

General Wolfe's statue. Otherwise we ate only a rather horrid chocolate cake that I had made. The plan was that I would take Anna to Kings Cross for the night train; in the event I travelled up to St Andrews with her. Anna said to Mike that she had news to tell him (meaning that we were engaged) and he said, 'I suppose you've passed your re-sits.'

It was on my first visit to Mount Pleasant, which must have been in the autumn of 1965, that I told my parents that I was engaged. It was the first they knew about Anna. My mother's view had been that I would never get a girlfriend because I refused to do anything about my spots and my teeth. I don't know whether she subscribed to Mrs Denny's opinion that I was queer. There was no quarrel with my parents, and they accepted and welcomed Anna. I think they had given up all hope of influencing me, and I thought I had given up all hope of satisfying them.

I don't propose to trace in detail the events between our engagement and our marriage. It would be embarrassing. The scene was divided between Charlton, Farnham and St Andrews, with a couple of visits to Barcelona where Anna's parents now lived (they also had moved house in late 1965). The second visit to Barcelona culminated in a particularly grisly visit to friends of Anna's parents in Marseille. On the way home from one of these trips we read in the British newspapers of the divorce of the Queen's cousin the Earl of Harewood. I don't know why that has stuck in my mind. I had always admired Lord Harewood because of his opposition to the death penalty, which, with the recent election of a Labour government, was about to be abolished. On the second visit I was reading a book by a theologian-philosopher called Paul Tillich. I was in my first year of studying philosophy and I was preparing an essay heavily influenced by Tillich. It was not well received. It was the end of my interest in existentialism, as I fell under the spell of academic British philosophy.

Our interest in Catholicism had disappeared before that. While we were still expecting to become converts we were nonetheless committing mortal sin by sleeping together. However we were not compounding the sin by employing contraceptive devices. This is barely credible. I have to confess that even irrespective of the Pope at that time I thought contraception was wrong. Our situation was precarious. We were still juggling with our catholic aspirations, our determination to sleep together, the hope of getting married, the hostility of Anna's parents, and our shortage of money. Mrs Denny said we had a tough row to hoe, but she thought we would win through, I'm not sure why or how. One reason why we were so short of money was that I had given away all the savings from my job during the year previous to my meeting with Anna. This condition was bound to continue, because I did not propose to have a job, because I was determined to be a novelist, and Anna was determined that our being together should not interfere with this ambition. I also believed that it was wrong to earn more than the minimum manual worker's wage. None of this makes sense, but it shows how naïve and thoughtless we were about money.

Meanwhile Tony, in his character as heir to an American millionaire, used to send us five pound notes and promises of financial support, which I believed. At one point Michael got wind of the fact that we were failing to use contraceptives and that we had accepted money and promises of money from Tony, and he sent me a very angry letter. His ground for doing so was that he believed that we were expecting him as well as

Tony to subsidise us, which I don't think was the case, but whatever the grounds the advice he sent was probably our salvation. I immediately recognised Tony's stories of untold wealth as fabrications. The Willses were undoubtedly better off than the Crowes, but not so much better off as to justify (if anything could justify) my taking money from Tony. Michael also made me see through the nonsense about not using contraception. I don't think I revised even then my view that on the whole contraception was wrong, but I saw that the only basis on which I could act on such a view would be a life of celibacy, and there were reasons, both theoretical and practical, for rejecting that.

It will seem that we took a very sombre view of things, and it was true. At the time I met Anna I was living my life always in opposition, denial, refusal. I felt myself beleaguered. In some ways this was a difficult role to maintain, as my family, though irritated with me from time to time, was on the whole affectionate and supportive. It became easier to maintain this role with regard to Anna's parents. Anna wanted an ally against her parents, and I wanted an enemy. We certainly tended to dramatize things, because we were, after all, very young, and the war between the generations was, in those days, much more bitter than it is now. Our friends tended to assume that things would end badly, one way or another. I would say that our affair started off in tragic mode. However, as time went on, it swung round into comic mode, not all at once, but gradually the comic began to predominate over the tragic.

There was the cat, for instance. The November day when I arrived in Scotland to visit Anna, we went to collect a cat from somewhere on the outskirts of Edinburgh. It was due to a misunderstanding. She thought Philip wanted a cat, and she had heard of a cat that had had kittens, so she went to fetch it for him. It was half manx, with a stubby half-tail. We called it Amethyst, after the engagement ring that we bought the same day. It turned out, however, that although Philip did want a cat, his landlord was allergic and so he couldn't have one. We were desperate to find a home for the wretched Amethyst, and in the end persuaded one of Anna's lecturers to take her in. He didn't like the name Amethyst so re-christened her Owl, because of a certain owl-like quality in her face. At the end of term we had to take her down to Farnham where we were staying for Christmas. My mother already had two bad tempered cats there and refused to take Amethyst. In the end the long-suffering Mrs Denny agreed to take her on. She rejected both names and called the cat Feather. (Feather remained with Mrs Denny for a few years until she developed bad ulcers and was put to sleep.) This was Christmas 1965, early on in our affair, when we were still trying to play in tragic mode, but it should have warned us that it would end in comedy.

During the summer of 1966, which we divided between Charlton and Farnham, Anna and I went for a walk up to the woods on Shooters Hill, where we had spent the magical night with the Willses the previous summer. On the way down we went into a pub called The Fox under the Hill, and had a meat pie and a glass of beer. Then, on an impulse, I took Anna to meet Bernard's parents in Woolacombe Road. I liked Chris and Bessie; they listened to me and argued with me seriously in a way that my parents didn't. They took to Anna immediately, and she to them. My parents and Mrs Denny were slightly patronising in their view of the Barkers. They dismissed Bessie as an amateur painter who took herself too seriously, and they didn't notice the depths that there were in Chris, regarded him as a decent, good-hearted chap, but a bit opinionated.

It was the common patronising attitude of the expensively educated towards the autodidact. Knowing Chris and Bessie as I did, I found this attitude embarrassing. I don't know if Chris and Bessie were aware of it; if so they ignored it. In our conflict with our parents Chris and Bessie were allies. They saw nothing untoward in our engagement, probably because they assumed we would be prudent, wait until we were established in life, and then get married. And so it was that the pristine romance of our affair became compromised. We could hold out in our self-destructive defiance of convention when this meant defying our parents, but not when it meant defying Chris and Bessie. I suppose this explains the continuity of conventional morality from generation to generation. Only the most perverse amongst the young will reject everything and despise everyone from the generation before. If not your parents then someone amongst your parents' contemporaries will engage your sympathies and bind you to the conventions that you think you should be cutting free from.

This happened also on Anna's parents' side. On one of our visits to Barcelona the main point, our marriage, had been accepted and the conflict centred on whether to have a church wedding. Anna and I had swung from Catholicism to a rejection of all religion (or possibly all organized religion and orthodox theology, I can't now remember which), and were determined not to have a church wedding. There was a young couple called Grande, the wife English and the husband Catalan, who were part of the British community, and someone, whether Anna's mother herself or one of their friends who had heard of the trouble we were causing, commissioned them to have a word with us. An excuse was made to get us to call on them and stay to dinner. They had a business making fluffy toys. This was in Franco's time and although Sr Grande was bitterly opposed to the government he had evidently decided to reach an accommodation so that he could carry on his business. We discussed politics, and he took an interest in what we said - this was rare enough to be flattering. We had been given some anti-Franco leaflets on the French side of the border, and he asked if he could keep them for his collection. I don't know whether he did this because he really wanted them, or whether he felt it was dangerous for me to carry them around and intended to destroy them after we were gone. The Grandes described their wedding in England. It seemed that the wife was the daughter of a bishop and they had been persuaded to have a wedding in church with all the family. They laughed at it, but said it had been a harmless concession to please the bride's family. Gradually it came to appear that by holding out for the sort of wedding we wanted, quiet and non-religious, we were being harsh, unreasonable and selfish. 'You don't really see the need for a wedding at all,' they said in effect, 'but you recognise that it has to be gone through. Having made that concession, why not do the whole thing properly?' It would be so easy to defy social convention if it only meant defying the ogres; it was harder to hold out against such nice, intelligent people who were not much older than we were. We never saw nor heard again of the Grandes. Whether Anna's mother knew of the service they had done her, I'm not sure. When we asked after them some time later she seemed hardly to remember them.

The system of concessions and compromises that we went through can be summarised as follows. In order to live together as students in St Andrews we would have to be married. We intended to marry in 1966, but Anna's parents said we must wait until Anna had graduated, which would in the event mean postponing it by three years; so

we postponed it by one year and were married in 1967. We wanted a secular wedding, Anna's parents a church wedding; so we compromised by having a Quaker wedding. The wedding was to be in England, and since Anna's family lived in Spain it meant having it where my family lived, in Farnham. It needed to be organized, and Anna's parents were not there to organize it, so it fell to my mother, which meant the reception took place at the Bush Hotel. It caused my mother a lot of trouble and anxiety, because while she was doing the ordering, Anna's parents would be paying, and she had no idea what they would be prepared to pay. Since she believed that all people who lived abroad were very rich, she might have been tempted to order the most expensive of everything, but fortunately did not, perhaps because she also believed that most rich people were mean. Having conceded the idea of a big wedding Anna and I wanted as many of our friends to come as possible, to make up for not having the small gathering of just our friends which we had originally hoped for. It wasn't always easy to remember that we were pleased and excited to be getting married. As many couples do we felt that the whole thing had been taken out of our hands; what made it worse was that it had been taken over by people who didn't want it to happen at all.

Weddings, as I now realise, need a lot of organizing, and no-one really took on the job of managing ours, so it was a bit of a shambles. I'm not entirely convinced that the printer was ever paid for the invitations. My father and his friend Ben decided that it was the groom's family's job to organize the transport, and they set about planning who was to travel in which car from the Friends' Meeting House to the Bush. One of their games was to pretend that they were in the Army, and they approached the problem as though they were sergeant majors. On the spur of the moment I persuaded Michael Callaghan to help, because he is very tall and I thought this would be an asset in marshalling the troops. We gave almost no thought to the matter of presents. I can't remember now whether the institution of the wedding present list had been invented in those days; if it had, I'm sure I would have disapproved of it on the same grounds that I had disapproved of birth control. Anyway, we were taken by surprise at being asked what we wanted, and told everyone that we wanted a cooking pot. Fortunately not everyone took us at our word, but we ended up with eight or nine cooking pots, three of which we are still using. Because the Quaker ceremony did not require anyone to hold the ring, there seemed no need to have a best man, and we were not aware of the other duties usually carried out by a best man. Doing without a best man saved me having to choose which of my friends should be asked to take the role. Neither Anna nor I had been to many weddings - we were the first of our friends to be married - and we had no idea what was required. The thought of getting a book to tell us didn't enter our head. In any case, the Quaker side of the business was causing us enough trouble.

Once the idea of the Quaker compromise had taken hold, Anna and I started attending the Quaker Meeting in St Andrews. The Meeting was dominated by two Friends, a socialist French lecturer called Jonathan Dale, and a very pious Danish woman called Inge Nelson - this is a shocking thing to say, since Quaker meetings should not be dominated by anyone, but there is was. We discovered later that Jonathan's influence in particular made the Meeting untypical. What Mrs Denny referred to as my religious searching was still active, and I was pleased enough to come to rest for a while in the St Andrews meeting. We continued members all through our time as students and became quite active in the Meeting. Our commitment didn't survive going away from St

Andrews, however, when we came across more typical Meetings. We still have friends whom we met as Friends, Mary Collier and Jo Tudor-Hart, and we kept up a friendship with Ralph Marshall until shortly before he died. I sometimes regret devoting so much of my student life to what turned out to be a blind alley, but I'm sure we gained more than we lost from the connection.

Because we attended the St Andrews Meeting and were to be married in Farnham, we had to be released by the Monthly Meeting to which St Andrews belonged. Although it was called a Monthly Meeting, it did not happen every month, and so there was some urgency about getting the necessary documents signed and passed down from Aberdeen to Godalming. If this had not been completed by the end of April, a marriage on 1 July would not be possible. To complicate matters further the Clerk of the East of Scotland Monthly Meeting, a man called Hamish Milne, was ill at the time. When the Surrey Clerk reported that he had heard nothing by Easter, I became anxious, and visited Friends' House in Euston Road. There, after telling my story to several people who shook their heads and could see no way out, an experienced friend who happened to be attending a conference at Friends' House came out of his meeting to speak to me. With enormous patience, and consulting the book of rules, he worked out a plan, the details of which I don't think I ever understood and have now forgotten. It worked and all the preliminary formalities were in place in time for the wedding. The humour, commonsense, seriousness, patience and kindness of this unknown Friend impressed me and have remained with me after most of my other recollections of Quakerism have been lost.

Because so much of the wedding was now taken over by others who were unsympathetic to the proceedings, we were particularly grateful to friends who were supportive, and particularly willing to take their advice. Anna, for example, took Mrs Denny's advice about buying her wedding outfit, something she almost immediately regretted. Mrs Denny was a great believer in things being good – good quality, good value, a good make, from a good shop. She persuaded Anna to go to a little dress shop in Blackheath, later notorious for being where a famous bank-robber hid out, but at that time the sort of place patronised by the comfortably off middle-aged ladies of Blackheath. Anna bought a good quality dress and coat. It was a pity, because 1967 was a year when women's clothes were very pretty, and this dress and coat were not particularly pretty, and were more expensive than we could really afford. My father expressed his annoyance at Mrs Denny's interference. It was so rare for him to make such a comment that it stuck in my mind. The argument in favour of the dress and coat was that they would be useful for some time to come, but in fact I don't think we got our money's worth.

I went to a barber to have my hair cut in preparation for the wedding, but it was universally agreed that he made a terrible mess of it. This was the occasion when Mrs Barker took my hair in hand and showed Anna how to cut it.

Anna had no choice but to have her hair done on the morning of the wedding. She went to the hairdresser that my mother patronised in Farnham and had an elaborate coiffure. It meant she was out of the way for the various low level bickering that went on during the morning. The night before the wedding my mother had suddenly announced that the wedding presents had to be displayed, so I spent some of the morning laying them

out, cooking-pots and other things, on the dining-room table. I think this was for the benefit of my great aunts Mabel and Suzanne who were staying in the house; Mabel had contributed the star gift, a set of Stourbridge crystal glasses and jug. I should say that our most frequently used wedding gift over the years was from Anna's parents, who gave us the Shorter Oxford Dictionary.

My clothes should have been more straightforward than Anna's. I had been sent off to Burtons to buy a suit, and since I had bought one a couple of years previously I knew what to do. It was more expensive than the earlier one (it cost about ten pounds), but otherwise identical. It emerged on the morning of the wedding that I did not have a white shirt and was proposing to wear a pink shirt which I rather liked. It was a perfectly good shirt, not frayed or anything, but pink. I was sent into the town to buy a white shirt. It then emerged that I was proposing to wear a rather nice tie I had bought at the Oxfam shop. My mother didn't like this at all and told me to wear my Greek striped tie, which at least had the virtue of being reasonably clean.

This raised a difficulty. I mentioned at the beginning that I would avoid the embarrassment of describing the fetishistic side of our relationship, with one exception. This is the exception. I had read in Homer of the belt or girdle of Aphrodite. The Greek for it is the word that gives us our prosaic word zone, but I found it far from prosaic. It excited me enormously and I pictured Anna with my Greek tie round her waist. Now and then she humoured me by wearing it. We had agreed that she would wear it under her dress during the wedding. I think we did this in order to salvage something secret and personal, everything else having been taken from us, as it seemed. Anyway, when I explained why I could not wear the Greek tie, it was brushed aside and I was told that Anna could find something else to hold her knickers up. So I wore the Greek tie.

I think that that was the last ghastly thing that happened before the wedding. The ceremony in the Meeting House went smoothly. The bride and groom have some lovely words to say, which we had to learn by heart, because although as in all Quaker Meetings one waits on the spirit moving one to speak, if the spirit doesn't move one to say the right words the marriage doesn't come off. After our exchange of promises, various members of the Friends Meeting made appropriate contributions – the spirit seems to have been in favour of the wedding on this occasion. At the end everyone present signed a certificate. This is the Quaker tradition, but it is not the legal marriage certificate – that is prepared separately by the appointed member of the Meeting, and is almost identical to the civil marriage certificate, requiring just two witnesses. We had failed to explain all this to Anna's father and he understandably enough wondered aloud whether the proceedings were legally binding. The Friends took this, as they took everything else, in high good humour.

After the ceremony in the Meeting House the company moved on to the Bush. My principal memory of this part of the wedding is of friends of Anna's parents coming up to me and holding me either with their watering eyes or more literally in a tight grip, and telling me how fond they were of Anna and that they hoped I would look after her. I didn't know what to say in reply, and didn't realise at the time that I didn't need to say anything. We knew enough about weddings to know that at this point someone should make a speech. No-one had told me that I would have to make a speech myself. By far the wittiest person we knew was Chris Barker, and we had asked him to speak, and he

came prepared. Unfortunately Anna's parents, without telling us, had asked an old friend of the family, Vin Croxon, to speak as the oldest friend of the bride. The only part of his longish speech that I recall was about not letting the sun go down on your wrath. Someone, I think Bernard's fiancée Ann, said she assumed that it meant that if you have a quarrel you should go to bed early to make it up. I then made a faltering 60 second response, which was good naturedly heckled by my Uncle Alan. By that time it emerged that Chris and Bessie had left, because they had come in the car with Mrs Denny, who had to get home in a hurry. I have sometimes wondered what would have been in Chris's speech. Chris and Bessie said they would much have preferred to come by train, and only accepted Mrs Denny's offer of a lift so as not to offend her.

Because Anna's wedding dress was an ordinary everyday dress she didn't have to change before we went away. So we just slipped away from the Bush up to the station to catch a train back to London. My aunt Heather and cousin Glenda were on the platform, and my schoolfriend Derek. Heather suggested that we should find a carriage on our own, but we said it was fine if we all travelled together. Derek kept us amused the whole way up to town. I'm not sure what Heather and Glenda made of him. He had a pocketful of cigarettes picked up from the Bush. We separated at Waterloo, Anna and I making for Chelsea where our honeymoon treat was to see Joseph Losey's film *The Servant* at the Classic. On the train back to Charlton I unpicked Anna's expensive hair-do. If it hadn't been for Heather, Glenda and Derek, I would probably have done this on the train from Farnham.

Marriage made no immediate difference. I went to work on the Monday, and when asked how I liked marriage replied that I found it had taken a lot out of me. This was interpreted as a crude double entendre but wasn't intended as such. The effort of getting married, which had been my main occupation for the past couple of years, had certainly taken a lot out of me. All I wanted was to live with Anna. It had been made very difficult. The rest of the summer was divided, as the previous one had been, between Charlton and Farnham, until I developed appendicitis and was admitted to Farnham hospital. While I was in hospital Anna must have had a difficult time with my family. They liked her, and she liked them, but she found them a bit baffling at times. Rowwy had a French pen-friend who didn't have much aptitude for English, so Anna's French must have come in useful. When Anna was asked at the hospital who was my next of kin, she said my father.

After a brief convalescence we went to Plymouth to spend our real honeymoon at Whitsands. Misunderstanding came in here as well, and we found that Anna's grandparents were to accompany us, and later on Aunty Ella and cousin Peter as well. I don't think Anna's grandmother liked me, but I got on well with her grandfather who was a great card-player, and taught us euchre. He was very protective towards me as a convalescent. I think it was a disappointment for Anna; Whitsands meant a lot to her and she had been looking forward to sharing it with me. She was still able to do so, but it was clearly not as she had hoped and expected. We spent a few days staying with Anna's other grandmother down in Milbrook. She made a point of approving of me and our marriage, which we found a relief after so much spoken and unspoken opposition. We realised later, if not at the time, that her approval was mainly due to her habit of opposition to Anna's parents and other grandparents.

Two things have recently reminded me of our honeymoon. First there was an old lady in Milbrook village whom we visited a couple of times. She was a devotee of the theatre and an admirer of John Gielgud. She spoke of this admiration with a fierce defiance which struck me but which I did not understand. It was only in the last few months that I understood why Gielgud must have seemed a controversial figure. When reading about the anti-homosexual drive of the fifties I learned that Gielgud had been convicted of indecency in a magistrates court. The second memory is of our walk down to Milbrook when we passed a field with an excited bull who was dismantling the hedge with his horns. We went into the farm to tell them about it. I remembered this incident when we were in Ireland recently and became concerned about a lamb separated from its mother; we found it hard to interest the locals in this drama. I remembered the bull, and there seemed to be a pattern. As town-bred intellectuals we find the country too random and disorganized and want to tidy it up. It is good to remember our distant honeymoon in ways that have nothing to do with the passion and irritation that occupied us while we were in the thick of it. These points of contact between what we are now and what we were then are our way of escaping the passage of time.

I would not recommend marrying as young as we did. It is hard enough making your entrance into the world at University and after; it involves endless adjustment of ideas and aspirations, and you don't really know what sort of person you will be at the end of it all. If you are two people doing it together it becomes more difficult still. It is better to be established in life before coming together. The trick is to decide when you are ready. At some point Anna's parents wrote to mine asking them to put a stop to our marriage, as I was under-age. My father replied saying that he agreed we were too young, but that people married at twenty-five without causing a stir, and that was too young as well. Everyone was too young to be married, he said. (He also very wisely pointed out that it was pointless forbidding me to get married, because we lived half the year in Scotland where I could marry without parental consent.) But we made it. People who knew us, or thought they knew us, believed that we were right for each other. I'm not sure exactly what that means, but it seems that in all the changes that have come upon us there has not yet been anything too drastic for us to digest and accommodate. We were children together, we were parents together, we've been middle-aged together and now we shall be old together. It's not a universal recipe for happiness, but I suppose it's been all right for us. Respect, affection and love have survived. First they survived the two years leading up to our wedding day, and then the forty years following it. I'm not sure which survival is the more surprising; both were touch and go at times.