



RICHARD SOUTHERN

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Richard William Southern 1912–2001

RICHARD WILLIAM SOUTHERN, the medieval historian, was born on 8 February 1912 in Newcastle upon Tyne, as second son of Matthew Henry Southern and his wife Eleanor. The Southern family is easily traceable back in Northumberland to *c.*1700 (when the name could be spelt ‘Sutheran’ or ‘Sutheren’, forms still found in telephone directories). Its history from then on is a case study in slow urbanisation, as sons of tenant farmers from places within a thirty mile radius of Newcastle came into the city to earn livings in related trades—corn-dealing, butchery, confectionery, and timber. Timber had been the choice of the historian’s father, Matthew Henry, who was seventeen when his own father died in 1888. Matthew Henry had then just qualified at Newcastle’s School of Science and Art, and got a job at Newcastle’s biggest firm of timber dealers, Clayton and Armstrong, on the north bank of the Tyne next to the Armstrong shipyard. In the next twenty years he rose to be depot foreman, so that at the age of thirty-seven (in 1908) he could marry, buy a house in Benwell (on the steep slope looking south over the shipyard), and hope in due course to be made a director. When this did not happen, and when in 1913 the depot moved, he put in a bid to rent part of the old site, bought secondhand machinery, and set up in business on his own.

The future historian, already called ‘Dick’, was by then two years old. He had a brother older by one year, Matthew Henry Junior (‘Harry’). Born in the house at Benwell, the historian was destined to grow in academic distinction in step with his father’s business. By the time his father died in 1947—when Dick was a Balliol don—the timber yard, now

controlled by Harry and a younger brother, Douglas, was outgrowing its predecessor's site, and in the 1960s—when Dick was professor—it was moved seven miles downstream to a bigger site on the semi-tidal mudflat known as the Jarrow Slake, a place which, by chance, had already lodged deep in Dick's historical imagination as the site of Bede's monastery.¹ When the directors took their professorial brother on a tour of the new sawmill his eyes kept wandering to the buildings a hundred yards away, and he insisted on taking them on a monastic guided tour afterwards. Finally, in 1985—when Dick was a knight, and his *Robert Grosseteste* was in press—it was the turn of the older firm, Clayton and Armstrong, to face an uncertain future, and 'M. H. Southern and Sons' bought up the business that had first employed their founder nearly a century before.

Besides two brothers Dick had a sister, Eleanor (born in 1914). All four received from their parents a strong cultural imprint. Their father had taken elocution lessons as a young man and kept a lifelong interest in acting, especially Shakespeare, and all four children would become fearless public speakers. Their mother, Elizabeth Eleanor, who came from another well-rooted Tyneside clan, the Sharps (and whom Dick was said to resemble physically), had inherited a gift for music. Three of Dick's uncles played violin or piano to professional standard.

When Dick was three years old the household moved up the hill to Fenham and bought a big house in leafy Moorside South, looking over the thousand acres of Newcastle's Town Moor. On the other side of the Moor was the Royal Grammar School. The three Southern boys would in due course be sent there, their sister to the Church High School next door. Dick entered the RGS at nine, as a junior. He enjoyed one carefree year, playing conkers, forgetting his school cap, and so on. But at the start of the next year he was woken with a jolt. He had been promoted two forms instead of one. So he was with older boys, and now had a form-master notorious for punishing boys with 'curfews': penal writings-out of lines from Gray's *Elegy*, a penalty Dick incurred at once for arriving without a health certificate. The biggest jolt of all was the arrival of a new headmaster: Dick's first glimpse of him stuck in his memory, as a menacing silhouette seen through a classroom door. He was Ebenezer Rhys Thomas, whose reign, lasting from 1922 to 1949, would increase fivefold the flow of boys from the RGS to Oxford and Cambridge. The newcomer's first act was to assemble all the boys and warn them they must

¹ See the opening of his essay on 'Bede', printed in *Medieval Humanism* (Oxford, 1970), 1. For full titles of Southern's publications until 1980 see the bibliography mentioned in n. 17 below.

work ‘till it hurt’, or be publicly shamed by receiving specially composed termly reports. Forty years later, undergraduates at St John’s College, Oxford, were to get a talk suggestively reminiscent, and with a similar bracing effect on the institution.

As a headmaster, E. R. Thomas had two qualities, then rare in grammar schools. He laid emphasis on the social aspects of education, and had a gift for finding and keeping outstanding masters. The working week would be punctuated by debates and concerts, and against penny-pinching governors Thomas insisted that all boys eat lunch together. As for outstanding masters, the senior history master was Samuel Middlebrook (the ‘Sammy’ remembered with veneration by another Fellow of the Academy, Denys Hay, four years Dick’s junior). Middlebrook was noted both for his crystal-clear exposition, and for an equally clear conviction of what history was all about: it was the story of liberty, and any boy who hinted it might be the story of anything else could expect correction. One of Dick’s essays ventured an apologia for certain aspects of Laud’s religious policy, and the script came back with a Middlebrook philippic on the back, ending ‘Laud was a martinet!’ (That Dick would, despite that, dedicate his last *magnum opus* to Laud’s memory may or may not reflect the archbishop’s unexorcised influence in the St John’s presidential Lodgings.)²

A second history master, R. F. I. Bunn, came to join Middlebrook in 1925. Ex-Oxford, ex-Artists’ Rifles, dressed in a double-breasted suit, with a handkerchief in his cuff—modes then unheard-of on Tyneside (and destined, years later, to win the heart of the daughter of the Cambridge medievalist, G. G. Coulton)—Bunn’s effect on the thirteen-year-old Dick was (Dick’s word) ‘electrifying’. Bunn’s complex mode of expression (a favourite phrase was ‘so to speak’) was such as to suggest there was always more implied in his words than showed on the surface, if you thought about it. The electrifying effect must have doubled in 1926 when the school’s weekend camps began. These were largely the invention of Bunn and another of Thomas’s prima donna appointments, Michael Roberts, a *stupor mundi* equally at ease teaching physics, mathematics, or English (he became a Faber poet), and incidentally a Communist Party official. For most summer-term weekends, Bunn and Roberts would take Dick and other boys to camp on the Northumbrian hills, where they would light fires, cook, and walk and talk with their

² *Scholastic Humanism*, vol. 1, viii. Full titles of writings published after 1980 will be found in the supplementary bibliography on pp. 441–2 below.

masters as equals. E. R. Thomas winked at occasional erosions of Monday's timetable.

For Dick, the walking and talking brought with it another and more menacing kind of erosion. Beyond living memory the Southerns had been regular members of the Church of England. For the Fenham Southerns, the parish church had been focus of, not just their Sunday worship, but also of their social activities, like music and plays. (The very far-sighted may see here a model for Dick's later view of twelfth-century humanism.) At fourteen, Dick had duly been sent to confirmation classes in Newcastle cathedral. But exposure to intellectual dare-devils older than himself, together with his voracious reading, were sowing doubts. For instance, H. G. Wells's *Outline of History* had exposed the chasm that divided the biblical account of the the world's origins from that given by modern science. Sixty-six years later, when he was eighty, Dick was to give a talk in Pusey House, Oxford, recalling the moment when religious doubt seized him, like an armed man. It was during a confirmation class in January 1927:

The canon who was taking the class had got as far as the appearance of the rainbow after the Flood bringing with it an assurance that God would not again overwhelm the world with a deluge. My newly discovered critical sense was outraged. 'No, *no*, NO. This is nonsense!' I internally exclaimed. Of course it would have been better if I had said it out loud, for there is in fact an answer to this pert reaction. But anyhow I left the class and, much to my parents' sorrow, which I now regret more than anything in the whole incident, I never went back. I stopped saying my prayers, though I would sometimes start and then rather embarrassingly remember that I no longer did that sort of thing; and of course I never went to church.

Not, that is, until long after graduating.

At school, meanwhile, as that door closed, another opened. The defining moment this time came in one of his Tuesday essay-crises. He was reading for a Middlebrook essay and arrived at the sentence: 'Henry VII was the first businessman to sit upon the English throne'. Like Alice passing through the looking glass, Dick found himself suddenly in a new world. History had until then seemed a mere configuration of data to be remembered. But he had seen his father and uncles sitting up late with their accounts, trying to make ends meet; he knew about businessmen. Henry VII must be like that. Years later he would learn that the sentence was not true, but it was too late: the new world had opened. He sank himself with all the more devotion into its discovery, and when the time came for the Higher School Certificate examination he was able to put the out-

come on paper. Or so we must suppose. For one of the examiners had been Kenneth Bell, history don at Balliol College, Oxford, and on reading Dick's papers Bell had taken a train to Newcastle, sought him out, and offered him a domus exhibition, spending the rest of the day overcoming Matthew Henry's opposition to so novel a prolongation of his son's education, and in the *South*. Dick would be headhunted again, but never with more consequence. He duly went up to Balliol in October 1929, at the then unusually young age of seventeen.

Here was another jolt. Dick's triumphant entry to Balliol did not at first bring contentment. There were two reasons. The more immediate—not uncommon with freshers coming from a broad schooling—was disappointment with the course. It all seemed to be about details of the English constitution, which was not the kind of thing Roberts and Bunn had discussed into the night. More than thirty years later, as Chichele Professor, Southern's early disenchantment would bear fruit in his initiative in changing the Oxford syllabus. But at the time the only fruit was the sour one of doubt whether he had picked the right course. To make things worse, he had to deal with the doubts on his own. At the freshers' dinner he and another seventeen-year-old historian, Geoffrey Nuttall, had met and struck up what proved a lifelong friendship. But Nuttall remembers that, while Dick would meet other Balliol freshers in his, Nuttall's, rooms, it was not often the other way round. With his family, meanwhile, Dick's relationship suggests another not-uncommon undergraduate preference: for keeping home and college separate. He would spend vacations mostly in the old way, trekking and reading, more often than not with his old schoolmaster, Bunn.

The second reason for Dick's undergraduate anxiety was on a broader stage. Within weeks of his entry to Oxford came the Wall Street crash. A Tynesider could not be insensitive to the resulting unemployment and poverty. Dick felt it the point of distraction from work, and thought of changing to the new PPE school. It promised to answer so many important questions in an Oxford where '-isms' about politics, philosophy, and economics were clamouring for the undergraduate soul, especially Roman Catholicism and Socialism. Although the former of these was espoused by the Balliol medieval tutor, F. F. ('Sligger') Urquhart, as more vocally by the Jesuits of Campion Hall, Dick's letters at the time show no trace of its having affected him. It was otherwise with Socialism. Dick read *The Manchester Guardian* ('the best paper by far') most days, and the *New Statesman* ('first-rate'), and attended socialist meetings; but he did not inhale (so to speak), thinking the Labour Party 'probably as

muddle-headed as the rest'. While he emphatically wanted workers to have decent living conditions he feared that amenities of this kind would still leave them spiritually barren, 'using the senses that could reach them to infinity for nothing more than telling the time of day'. His apparent discontent with the contemporary capitalist world, seismic enough in itself, was amplified by another factor common among undergraduates, a weaning-process, one which, in his case, cast his father's 'business values' (Dick's expression) as the natural target for a son's social conscience.

Pressure from this second, political, source of discontent was eventually eased by his reconciliation with the first, in that he was rescued from the academic doldrums by a tutor. The tutor in question was not the incumbent medievalist, Sligger. Sligger did not make high intellectual demands of tutorial pupils: when an essay had been read, he would find a particular book from his shelf, and read from its pencilled fly-leaf what *he* would have said on the subject. But there were other recommendations. Sligger himself would probably have given first place, in Dick's case, to his ability to read Southern's handwriting, not as clear then as it became later. What Southern himself recalled more gratefully (with good reason, as we shall see) was that Sligger LENT HIS BOOKS.

At the time, though, Southern's *deus ex machina* was another tutor. In early 1930, three history undergraduates, Southern among them, were sitting in a boring revision class, when a stooping stranger with bright eyes came in. He was clearly not a don ('much too alive for that'), so they imagined he must be a college scout. The stranger then distributed a reading-list on the Anglo-Saxons, a list more intriguing than they could have expected for that particular subject, and which picked out four titles as 'necessary for salvation'. The scout proved to be Vivian Galbraith, freshly back in his old college after seven years in the Public Record Office.³ Southern would come to judge Galbraith as 'the most energizing historian I have ever known,' and in a letter written when he was seventy-seven, would reflect 'but for [Galbraith] I should never have been a medieval historian, nor indeed in all probability a historian at all'. (Galbraith, meanwhile, for his part, once confided to a colleague that Southern 'frightened' him. The remark, if somewhat playful, reflected awe for Southern's character as well as his ability. Throughout life Galbraith tended to think of Southern as a yardstick, for instance, praising someone as 'as nice as Dick Southern'.)

³ Of whom Southern's own obituary can be consulted in these *Proceedings*, 64 (1978), 397-425.

At the end of Michaelmas Term, 1930, Galbraith suggested to Southern that he go home and study the select charters (recently edited in *Archaeologia Aeliana*) of Ranulf Flambard, an early twelfth-century bishop of Durham. Southern duly added the edition to the armfuls of poetry, philosophy, and history that he regularly took on holiday expeditions, and for a few days read in a desultory way about Ranulf and his times. But once more, he gradually found a world of history opening before him. He wrote that Christmas to Geoffrey Nuttall:

The whole thing becomes a greater and greater mystery: all the crimes of the reign are heaped on the broad back of a shadowy figure whom it is almost impossible to imagine—even in his beautiful youth. . . . I went to Durham to look at Ranulf's handiwork . . . and arrived on one of those murky evenings when there isn't the slightest difference between his day and ours. Even the motor car whose headlights threw my shadow up on the mist over the river seemed perfectly in place side by side with barbarity. Crowds streamed along the road like water in the gutter and the distorted street-lamps were torches held above their heads. Then when I arrived at the Cathedral they were singing the loudest part of the Messiah, giving the effect more of a Scottish clan on the march than a civilized combination of voices and strings.

Ranulf would occupy Southern for all that vacation and most of Hilary Term 1931, a time he would later describe as 'one of the most formative experiences of my life'.

Of other formative influences, some were from books. Within a few days of each other, in July 1930, Southern read J. R. Round's *Geoffrey de Mandeville*⁴ and Newman's *Idea of a University*, both probably lent by Sligger. In their different idioms, both authors taught him the same lesson, namely, how very big and very little things are connected. In Round's case, the dating of a twelfth-century charter was linked up with, and hence taught historians about, the complex of loyalties that held an entire society together. In Newman's case, the reader learned how 'the universe in all its length and breadth is so intimately knit together that we cannot separate off portion from portion, and operation from operation, except by a mental abstraction'.⁵ Southern copied that last passage down, and in his Pusey House talk of 1992 said that it was after reading Newman's book 'that the thought first came to me—it did not last long, but it was there for a moment: "Christianity is going to prove to be true after all"'.

⁴ London, 1892.

⁵ The quotation in Southern's letter joins two passages slightly separate in Newman's text; cf. J. H. Newman, *The Idea of a University*, Discourse III, §4 [*alias* §50] and §2 [§45]; ed. I. T. Ker, (Oxford, 1976), p. 57, ll. 4–6 and p. 52, l. 25 to p. 53, l. 2.

Two further books, certainly lent by Sligger and apparently read later that summer, were H. O. Taylor's *The Mediaeval Mind*⁶ and H. Adams's *Mont-Saint-Michel and Chartres*.⁷ These opened a more specifically medieval window, giving Southern his first discovery of the scholastic thought he was later to explore so fruitfully. Other influential books for his undergraduate years were English novels, indeed little less than the whole canon. Late in the long vacation of 1931 he confesses to Nuttall: 'I've never before appreciated how valuable novels were in trebling one's weight and adding years to one's experience.' At about the same time, he can write of Hardy in particular: 'he would have made one of the greatest historians who ever lived'.

Other influences came from his, still small, human circle. He and Nuttall shared digs in their second and third years. Perhaps unsurprisingly, towards the end of this time, we find each generously protesting that he has been more influenced by the other than *vice versa*. It is hard to think that Nuttall's resolute Christian observance had no effect on Southern, despite—or because of—Southern's equally resolute refusal of it. But the more palpable influence was that of Southern's old schoolmaster, Bunn, his hiking companion during vacations in various steep parts of France and Britain. Southern used Hazlitt's words on Coleridge to describe Bunn's long-term effect on him: 'that my understanding did not . . . remain dull and brutish, and at length found a language to express itself I owe to [*substitute: Bunn*]'.⁸ Years later, as professor, Southern would make an annual pilgrimage to see Bunn near Cambridge, and after Bunn died, at the age of ninety-two, Southern would dedicate to his memory the first volume of his *Scholastic Humanism*.⁹

As that assessment of Hardy suggests, Southern's early disenchantment with history had given way to a preoccupation with it. Geoffrey Nuttall recalls that he never seemed to toil at his work like many other undergraduates, and if a visitor entered the room, Dick would break off at once to give undivided attention to the newcomer. He nevertheless began to excel. At the end of his second year he won Balliol's prize for its best historian, the Kington Oliphant. We find Dick privately expressing a certain impatience with the congratulations offered by a fellow under-

⁶ 2 vols., (London, 1911); 4th edn., (Cambridge, MA, 1949).

⁷ (Boston, 1913).

⁸ W. Hazlitt, 'My First Acquaintance with the Poets', *Uncollected Essays*, 11, in P. P. Howe, ed., *The Complete Works of William Hazlitt*, vol. 17 (London; Toronto, 1933), 107.

⁹ Cf. n. 2. The volume was dedicated to the memory of Bunn, the trilogy as a whole, to that of Laud.

graduate, an impatience which suggests that his contemporaries, too, may have been a little frightened by the awesomely self-sufficient *puer senex* they had in their midst, deep with his own thoughts. His vacation letters to Nuttall reveal some of these thoughts. The most demanding were now historical, rather than political. One 'dark, wet, blowy' night in Southern's last Christmas vacation, writing from the waiting room in Penrith station (which he shares with a farm labourer who 'will keep spitting in the fire'), Southern says he has written a page on 'the theory of history', then torn it up because 'it ends in nothing'. But he goes on:

I am becoming deeply interested in the problem of time—what, what, what the hell *is* history . . . granted, that everyone always knew that there were some things finite bounded by time and space and some things infinite, I would still like to know more about what this time—not to say space—is and what its relation [is] to the timeless and spaceless.

This philosophical reflectiveness helped decide the rank the undergraduate Southern gave to the great historians of the past. Acton (he wrote about the same time) 'is more like a great man than anyone I have ever known—known intellectually'. The price for Acton's exaltation is automatically paid by Stubbs, who, for all his qualities, was in Southern's view hobbled because his conception of history 'stops at 1640'; and likewise by Maitland, who, though 'he knows the truth when Stubbs gropes for it', remains, in comparison to Acton, 'just a finely tempered brain without body or soul'. Nor should we forget that this *dévôt* of Acton, the great tracer of ideas in history, was the same undergraduate who had been energised into studying history by Galbraith, fundamentalist apostle of documents, who would never even have thought of writing a page on the theory of history, whether or not to tear up. Southern's fusion of these two contrary currents would be one factor in the fecundity of his own historical thoughts.

Among such thoughts, expressed in his later undergraduate letters and destined to endure, the most specific were about Renaissance Humanism. The ideals of Renaissance Humanism he found 'incomplete', a sort of 'fraud'. In the same last long vacation he confessed to Nuttall (even though he found Nuttall's seventeenth-century Puritanism scarcely less 'incomplete'), that a quarrel had flared up between himself and his father about the Renaissance; and Southern adds in parenthesis: 'why *quarrel* I don't know; but then it's no small matter the Renaissance'. The reading of Taylor and Adams had done its work. 'The value of the Middle Ages', he wrote at about the same time,

was the attempt to unite [the message of the Sermon on the Mount] into a complete system of man, the world and universe with classical learning and art also included. No ideal has given so much and asked so little—compare it with the society of the 18th century which rested on the poverty of those who were not included in the society. Any such society aiming exclusively at sensuous enjoyment and personal superiority seems bound to be incomplete.

That dawning discovery of scholastic humanism, as offering a more complete configuration of ideals than those of its sixteenth-century replacement, would develop and ramify in Southern's mind for all his professional life. Immediately after Finals he began to proclaim it when he and Bunn jointly lectured to a Durham Adult Education class on 'The renaissances of the twelfth and the sixteenth centuries'.

By then, in the summer of 1932, Southern had got his expected First, and the question arose what to do next. He and Nuttall had discussed careers. Nuttall's own vocation, the Congregational ministry, was not available to so firm a non-believer. Weighing the question up, Southern often thought of schoolteaching, an idea doubtless encouraged by Bunn's words and example, but which also found a rationale, for a young man as eager as Southern was to improve the world, in the reflection that a schoolmaster had a direct influence on more people than that of a don. (How many undergraduates, Southern mused in one letter, had even that best of dons, Galbraith, really touched? One per year?)

An ideal of improving the world presupposed there would still be a world to improve. In the summer of 1932, that expectation was being widely compromised by political and economic crises. Now, if ever, seemed the moment to study PPE. So Southern enrolled for a second BA, and for six months read and wrote on politics and economics. But the doldrums returned here, too. The end came one day when he asked his economics tutor to suggest a cure for unemployment. The tutor said, 'a fall in population'. Southern: 'is that not rather a long-term solution?' The tutor: 'it is a long term problem'. Southern gave up the course. But he never lost his keen consciousness of political and economic issues. From those same weeks, for instance, he would remember a walk he had from Boars Hill back to Oxford in the company of Adam von Trott, after they had lunched with Humphrey Sumner on what must have been Sunday, 5 February 1933. They were discussing the news of Hitler's appointment as German Chancellor. Southern agreed that it was very bad news, but could not quite understand then, as he did later, why to his companion it seemed like the end of the world.

Faute de mieux, Southern touched up his Ranulf essay and entered it for the Royal Historical Society's Alexander Prize. It won, and was printed in the Society's *Transactions* for 1933. It is still required reading. In a similar spirit he applied for a Junior Research Fellowship in History at Exeter College; when, at the end of that same February of 1933, he was offered it, he spent a day walking in Blenheim Park in doubt whether to accept rather than be 'a missionary'. (Southern used the word much later when recounting the episode to Brian McGuire; we can only speculate what it meant to the young agnostic at the time.) He opted for the JRF, which proved yet another pleasant surprise, ending a spell of doubt. Membership of a college, especially of one whose luminaries in those days included Marett, Balsdon, and Coghill, gave him an assurance thenceforth decisive for his choice of profession, the assurance that (as he once put it when addressing the college):

no matter what happened, the disciplined study of those subjects which increase our knowledge of humanity and our understanding of the permanent values of human life would in the end contribute more to the well-being of human life than anything else we could do.

That discovery needed matching by the more practical one of what academic work to engage in. This took longer. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s Dom André Wilmart had been editing the devotional and philosophical writings of St Anselm of Canterbury, and these sowed in Southern a seed that was to bloom later. But just then the Oxford soil was not ready. Since 1928, Oxford's Regius Professor of Modern History had been Maurice Powicke, whose seminars Southern attended. Like Galbraith, Powicke was a double product of Manchester and Balliol, and shared the orthodoxy reigning in both places that the proper subject of history was 'past politics', meaning mainly those of England. For Powicke, however, there was this difference, that since politics was conducted by individuals, and individuals were moved by emotions and ideas, these last had also to be admitted as a proper subject of history.¹⁰ Powicke's promising divergence from the norm tempted the JRF to suggest Anselm as a suitable subject for postgraduate study: Anselm was, after all, in a sense English, and in a sense political. But not English or political enough for Powicke, who deflected Southern to the Anglo-Norman baronage instead, with the consequence that, within a few months, doldrums were threatening again. In late 1933, with next-to-no approval (or even cognisance) from his

¹⁰ See Southern's obituary on Powicke in these *Proceedings*, 50 (1964), 275–304.

college, and next-to-no money, Southern decided to go off to Paris to study the reign of Charles the Bald under Ferdinand Lot and Louis Halphen. Part of the motive may have been a wish to change his historical milieu.

If so, he was frustrated again. Speaking fifty years later in praise of Michael Wallace-Hadrill's Raleigh Lecture on Charles the Bald,¹¹ Southern found he could not by then remember a single thing either Lot or Halphen had said on that king's character, as distinct from the circumstances of his reign. It was as if Paris, like Oxford, was content with externals. For all that, Southern kept lively memories of Paris, including a terrifying one of an elevator which ran up the outside wall of the block in which his poor man's digs were situated. He also learned to appreciate Halphen as a scholar of rare critical sharpness, and Lot for the great scholar he was, and in 1945, the moment war was over, he would visit Halphen with a box of chocolates. Above all, during his Paris séjour, Southern was free to slip away unseen to the Bibliothèque Nationale and read Anselm (in the same room as Marie-Thérèse d'Alverny, as it happened, though he only met her much later).

In 1935 he was to go also to Munich. A Balliol scholar two years his senior, Richard Hunt, had in 1931–2 spent a whole year in Munich as pupil of the palaeographer Paul Lehmann,¹² and Hunt's example may have fed Southern's wish to go there too. But Germany was now changing fast. Lehmann would soon be starting his lectures with a Nazi salute. Southern did not reminisce about Munich, and apparently did not stay long.¹³

On returning from Paris, Southern was more determined than before to make Anselm his JRF project. He would edit Anselm's letters. This time he was deflected not by Powicke but by the intelligence that Dom Anselm Schmitt had already begun an edition. Southern then transferred his editorial ambition to the letters of Peter of Blois. It was an ambition he would never fulfil (another scholar edited some of Peter's letters in 1993) but it began for him sixty years of engagement with a man whose identity and career had always puzzled the scholarly world, and whom Southern came to see, in the process of solving several of the puzzles, as

¹¹ *A Carolingian Renaissance Prince: the Emperor Charles the Bald*, Raleigh Lecture for 1978 in these *Proceedings*, 64 (1980), 155–84. The occasion was Southern's memorial address for Wallace-Hadrill, given in All Souls College in 1986.

¹² See Southern's obituary of Hunt in these *Proceedings*, 67 (1981), 371–97.

¹³ Of secondary authorities quoted in *The Making of the Middle Ages*, nearly two-fifths would be in French, only one-fifth in German.

an exemplar of the broadly based, practically oriented culture that he understood as scholastic humanism.

At Exeter College, Southern had also begun tutoring. The college already had a history tutor in C. T. Atkinson, remembered for his dog. But Atkinson was happy to farm out gifted undergraduates to the already much-respected JRF, to cover the period then called 'General History III: 911–1273'. Southern's first pupil was Eric Kemp. Atkinson told him to prepare by pasting blank leaves for notes in a copy of T. F. Tout's *Empire and Papacy*. Southern saw the book with consternation, waved it away, and gave out instead, for the first essay, a reading-list entirely in French (on the Capetian monarchy), and for the second, one entirely in German (on the Ottonians). It was the pupil's turn to feel he had entered a new world (one he, too, would in due course adorn as a medievalist). Graduate students, for their part, were supervised less formally in those days than later, but Southern would be on call. After seeing another future medievalist, Eleanor Rathbone, he wrote to her mentor: 'I feel dubious about encouraging anyone to look through cartularies, but if it is done it ought be done with a certain ruthlessness and simplicity of plan.' The writer was 24. If *we* had been Southern's contemporaries or his tutor, might not *we* have been a little frightened?

The year 1937 brought two changes, one public, one private. When Galbraith left for a chair in Edinburgh, Southern was elected to fill the vacant Balliol tutorial fellowship. A year later he got an Early Modern colleague in Christopher Hill, which began an association destined to last more than twenty-four years. Although Hill was a Marxist, as Southern had long before decided not to be, in fact they had much in common. Hill, like Southern, had been headhunted from a northern city school, both were appreciative pupils of Galbraith (the hunter, in Hill's case), and the two were incidentally almost twins—Hill the older by two days. Later Balliol memories would include the sight of them going like two consuls to escort a recalcitrant undergraduate to the Master, and of their making common pilgrimage to the Galbraith home in the Cotswolds, when their tutor had come back to Oxford as Regius Professor in 1947.

One reason Marxism now had no terrors for Southern was that he had undergone a second, less public change. As once his faith, so now his scepticism, was undergoing erosion. No flesh-and-blood person can be shown to have aided the process; anything suggestive of evangelism caused him to shudder. But books can. Besides Round and Newman, Southern found a specific antidote to H. G. Wells in Pascal, as the first Christian thinker able, and (unlike Newman) willing, to confront the

challenge presented to faith by major scientific discoveries. When a friend later asked him what had brought him back to Christianity, Southern thought for a while and said 'Anselm, I suppose'. Both the answer and the hesitation are significant. Many influences were at work. Perhaps the safest answer to the question was one he gave in 1964 when it was sprung on him in the middle of a broadcast discussion with Michael Foot, and he just replied 'the study of history'.¹⁴

The erosion process was outwardly imperceptible until a particular date, 25 March 1937. In his Pusey House talk, Southern recalled the date as marking another of his unexpected experiences, changing everything. He had been in Cambridge, working in the library at Corpus Christi on a sermon-manuscript of Anselm's biographer, Eadmer. He felt no religious interest in Anselm or Eadmer, only absorption in their personalities. On the evening of 24 March he handed the manuscript back to the librarian and said he looked forward to seeing him in the morning. The librarian, normally friendly, became stern and said 'You will not!' He was Edwyn Hoskyns, a strong High Churchman, and he reminded the visitor that the next day was Good Friday, a time not for work but for reflection and repentance. Vexed, but at the same time ashamed at having forgotten what week it was, Southern found himself the next day stuck in Cambridge. To pass the time he went to sit in the nearby church of St Bene't's. A powerful sermon by a German anti-Nazi pastor was followed by the *Benedictus*, at the end of which come the words: 'to give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, and to guide our feet into the way of peace'. The eighty-year-old Southern remembered: 'in that instant I found myself a Christian. Just like that. It happened without my stirring hand, foot, or mind.' He left the church not knowing what to do. Later, he was surprised that he had not gone back to tell Hoskyns, but he did not think of it then. Instinct pointed him to Newcastle. In the end, since he was about to be a Fellow of Balliol, he put himself under instruction by the Balliol chaplain, Tom Pym; and, fifteen months later, on 26 July 1938, he was confirmed in the bishop of Newcastle's chapel, in the company of others 'of about the age I would have been if I had not walked out ten years earlier'. After that, he recalled, he had never felt 'the slightest inclination or mental tendency' to be anything else than Christian.

¹⁴ A transcript of the debate was printed under the title 'Looking at History' in *Dialogue with Doubt*, introduced by G. Moir (London), 9–28, with this exchange on p. 12.

The outbreak of war on 3 September 1939 did not at first interrupt Southern's tutoring. But half way through 1940 he decided to cross Broad Street and enlist in the local infantry regiment, the 'Ox and Bucks'. He was sent to its barracks at Cowley. For a time he was still able to dine in Balliol, going back afterwards to sleep in the barrack-room, an experience (he said) that gave him some idea of life in a Cistercian monastery. But by November, soldiering had become less academic. He wrote to Richard Hunt:

The Army is not at all bad but it so happens that we have had a rather hard week. I manage to do a fair amount of reading, though it has got very scrappy lately, and I enjoy everything except the 'instruction' by the NCOs, which is unspeakable.

He was not put at this stage among the 'potential officers', for which in retrospect he was thankful, since, he wrote in another letter, he had come to share 'the habits and a lot of the prejudices of the platoon', which had above all given him an invigorating sense of collectivity:

There was a lot of brutality and animalism among the men at Cowley, but no concentration on self; and one got a deep and unselective attachment to them, so that I was surprised at the pain of it and the breach there was in leaving them. Oh, how tedious it all was, and is; but it was not wasted time, and I shall never forget Johnny Toole and Schwarzberg and Thompson with whom I carried on disjointed discussions in the evenings.

By the time he wrote this the army had changed its mind, and made him an Officer Cadet after all. In February 1941 he was moved to the Officer Cadet Training Unit at Droitwich, and soon afterwards to another in Malvern, where his brother Douglas called on him from a unit nearby, and where he would relieve underemployment by slipping out to the Worcester Public Library.

Southern was commissioned on 26 April 1941 as second lieutenant in the Durham Light Infantry, and moved north to its depot (recently relocated from a barracks half a mile from his Fenham home) in the spectacular Brancepeth Castle, near Durham. Fell-walking had given him an exceptionally strong physique, and as a subaltern he so impressed his Commanding Officer (not least by insisting on getting up to do Physical Training with the Other Ranks) that he was short-listed for a commando regiment to fight in the Western Desert. The general who was to do the choosing arrived when he was at PT, and Southern was sent for, but the sight of Southern's thin, sweating, bare-legged, figure (so he later judged), saved his life. He was sent instead as platoon commander to the nearby

DLI camp at Sedgfield, where he still tried to read, but was (he told Hunt in a letter) too busy to manage more than a few snatches of Wordsworth.

On 1 June 1942 Southern's DLI battalion metamorphosed into a tank regiment with the title 155th RAC. This meant a move to a camp near Penrith, and simultaneously made Southern a Tank Commander, in which post he gained a reputation for mechanical competence. Another letter to Hunt, of March 1943, catches his mixed reaction. He had used a spell of leave in Newcastle to read or re-read a string of medieval authors, plus *Mansfield Park*, and started back to camp with dread in his heart. But he found the reality 'not so bad':

It was a calm spring evening and, walking from the station, I suppose I met half the squadron going into the town and was surprised at the pleasure of seeing them. I had forgotten all about them till that moment and the fact that they do just make the difference between unutterable dreariness and something which is nearly happiness.

His letter does not mention his promotion to Acting Captain.

Later that year Southern was transferred to the Political Intelligence Department at the War Office in London, in a post which, besides its natural attraction for a politically minded historian, entitled him to a Personal Assistant. A lady was appointed to the post and arrived in November, in the person of a gifted linguist known for having 'caught a submarine' on her first day of Intelligence work. Her first day in the new job was less promising. She spilt glue over Southern's papers. Their rapport was immediate. She was Sheila Crichton-Miller, née Cobley, whose first husband, Campbell Crichton-Miller (five years Southern's junior at Balliol), had been an RAF hero, killed in action early in 1943, leaving her with a small baby, who had also died. Dick and Sheila were married in Oxford early in 1944 and began a long family life of wonderful harmony, settling for the rest of the war in a flat in Shaftesbury Avenue, West Harrow, where their first son, Andrew, was born in March 1945. When Southern was officially demobilised early in 1946 and went back to his post at Balliol, the family moved from West Harrow to a college property in Mansfield Road, where a second son, Peter, was born in 1947, and where they would remain until he left for All Souls in 1961.

Balliol colleagues who had known Southern before the war judged him grown 'from a boy to a man'. He was now 34, a major, and a father. Besides helping to revive the post-war college, he was as Junior Proctor, in 1948-9, to bring to the university's service a blend of 'humanity and steel' which became well known to close colleagues, though the steely part

was rarely guessed by outsiders. When Balliol dons had disciplinary dirty work to do their eyes would turn first to Southern. The war, however, had not finished with him. In late 1945 he had gone for research to post-war Rome, where sanitation was still imperfect, and in 1948 he was told he had contracted tuberculosis. Hospitals in England were full, but since TB treatment then laid emphasis on rest, Southern was sent for rest to the Osler Pavilion in Headington, where on fine days patients would be wheeled out in their beds to be left in the fresh air and allowed to read. Sheila would cycle up the hill daily, ferrying books, and by January 1950, the treatment appeared to be working. But he relapsed, and in the summer was moved to a grander establishment kept mainly for the military, the King Edward VII Hospital at Midhurst. There, medical skill was more in evidence, making up for an almost preternatural uneventfulness in ward life, far from friends and family. However, his brother Harry once called in en route for a Sussex timber conference, and in late August a *gîte* at the hospital gate was miraculously found for Sheila and the boys in a primitive cottage ('lavatory at the bottom of the garden'). About the same time a small operation ('one stitch') was performed on his chest.

Southern had let few spare moments pass even in the army without reading mediaevalia. It could hardly be otherwise in hospital, but with this difference, that the length of his convalescence, and a numbing lack of other distractions, combined to make an invitation also to write. At Midhurst Southern worked mainly on a translation of Eadmer's *Life of Anselm*, an edition of which he had undertaken for Galbraith's series, Nelson's Medieval Texts, and which would come out finally in 1962. His Midhurst letters discuss this and other projects, some related to the short-lived series, *Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, that he, Hunt, and Raymond Klibansky had conceived before the war. (Two of Southern's important articles on Anselm's circle were to appear in 1954 and 1958.) But at the Osler, Southern had written most of a first draft of a more ambitious book, following an idea suggested a year or two earlier by Powicke, for a series he edited. But Southern had, as usual, gone his own way, and although Powicke was delighted with the result, the book had to be published on its own. It was an essay of some 250 pages on the formation of western Europe between 972 and 1204, designed to portray its social and political structures, religious beliefs and cultural endeavours. Although Midhurst was out of Sheila's cycling distance from Oxford libraries, and he could not continue work on it there, he kept the work well in mind, so that on returning to Mansfield Road in mid-1951 he was ready to bring it to a conclusion. (In later life he would recall having got

the idea of how to finish his book as he was walking near the bridge in the University Parks.)

The Making of the Middle Ages came out in 1953. At last it vindicated the freshman's unease with an approach to history as 'past politics'. In it, the politics remain, but are hidden in the background behind the book's main area of interest, that is, the currents of thought and emotion which underlay the politics, and which Southern introduces by way of arresting examples, culled from years of reading: a prayer-roll from a Pyrenean monastery; a vignette of an empire-building baron; instructions on how to tell from the stars when it is the hour for prime; and so on. Southern had mastered the skills built up by the tradition that nursed him, but had adapted them to explore new fields. In this respect the impact of *The Making of the Middle Ages* resembles that of Dante's *Comedy*. Both books burst from a long-established culture into an idiom which that culture had neglected, an idiom appealing to a wider but no less intelligent readership than before. The book has been translated into twenty-seven languages, has never been out of print, and is still (to quote its present publisher) a 'steady seller'.

Southern's physique recovered slowly from his TB, if never quite to its previous level. By the autumn of 1952 he was ready to return to full-time college work, and from then until 1961 he acted as college tutor and university lecturer, as well as serving on a range of college and faculty committees. As tutor and lecturer, as in other respects, he had grown in maturity. Reading-lists were now mostly in English, and as a primer for 'General History, 919–1273' he came actually to *recommend* Tout's *Empire and Papacy*. In tutorials it paid a pupil to be interested, and even (in a college where 'working for finals' was still not the done thing) to show initiative; but those who met the test experienced the same wonder at discovery that Kemp had found at Exeter. 'It was not like being *taught* in the pedagogic sense,' Maurice Keen remembers, 'more like being guided on an expedition into unfamiliar, sometimes surprising, but endlessly interesting territory,' as his tutor burrowed under the table for a folio book to find a reference or illumination or suggested a direction in which the subject could be explored further—all of this bearing witness (Keen goes on) to the tutor's 'extraordinary knack of knowing what would stimulate and interest a particular pupil at a particular stage.' Conrad Russell, similarly, recalls that 'being taught by him was one of the best things that happened to me. I have memories of more and more ideas coming up as the tutorial went on, and more and more books coming off the shelves to check them. It was a classic example of how work ought to

be done.' Not all pupils were future stars. But even to a sportsman not even trying to get a decent degree Southern could say simply, 'your essay would get a Third' without damage to mutual regard. And if there were bubbles to be burst he could call on a gift for benign mischief which nature had given him in lieu of indignation. In another 1950s tutorial an undergraduate had reeled off a list of medievalists he was unlikely to know first hand. They included Knighton. The essay over, Southern asked: 'Who was Knighton?' The student, unabashed: 'Knighton came after Freeman and before Tout'. Southern: 'Knighton was a fourteenth-century chronicler'. No more. He was not censorious. But nor was he fooled.

By the 1950s Southern's lectures, too, were a byword. Here again he had matured. He once reassured a debutant lecturer by telling how his own first performance had ended twenty minutes early with a 'Good Morning' and hasty exit, because his prepared material had run out. By the heroic 1950s and 1960s this stage had long passed. Elegantly prepared, delivered in an urbane, silvery voice, a humane wit never far below the surface, Southern's performances on twelfth-century England regularly filled Oxford's big Examinations South School. Inevitably, he was asked also to lecture elsewhere, both in and out of Oxford. In the Academy, to which he was elected in 1960, he gave the 1962 Raleigh Lecture on 'The Place of Henry I in English History'. In universities around the kingdom, other lectures or lecture series he gave included nearly all there were to give. A list of them, together with that of the honorary degrees and other distinctions he accumulated over the years, fills a full inch of *Who's Who*. The highest of all these distinctions, which he neither asked for or knew about until it came, was the Balzan International Prize of £100,000, awarded in 1987 for the most eminent work in medieval European history. Astonished, Southern promptly, and characteristically, gave the bulk of it to endow a medieval research fellowship in honour of Galbraith, at St Hilda's College (where Galbraith's daughter, Mary Moore, was then Principal).

As a busy don, Southern found in visits to other universities one of the delights of academic life: the *mores* (he would observe) were familiar, the obligations limited. This applied not least to America, where he was Visiting Professor at Berkeley in 1972–3, and was more than once welcomed at Harvard. It was in Harvard, in 1961, that he gave the lecture series which resulted the following year in his book *Western Views of Islam in the Middle Ages*. In 1966, Harvard even tempted him to stay. He wrote confidentially to Giles Constable:

I've never been so attracted by anything. . . . It's not just that I like the place, though I found it delightful; but somehow I believe in the future of medieval studies in America more than here. . . . But in the end . . . I can't come. There are just too many things on the other side that make it impossible.

Besides lectures and visits, Southern occasionally broadcast for the BBC, twice in round-table debates on religion. A transcript of the debate with Michael Foot shows listeners were not short-changed. At one point Foot incautiously glorified the Renaissance, together with the Enlightenment and French Revolution. Together, they had destroyed medieval superstition and barbarism. Southern's reply in the transcript runs: 'You must allow me to say that what you have just been saying is such a jumble of misapprehension and error that I find it difficult to know where to begin.' He did begin, for all that, and summarised in a few eloquent sentences the message to which, twenty years later, he planned to devote three volumes. After the debate he thought it must all be over between him and Michael Foot; mistakenly, for after Dick's death, Foot wrote to Sheila recalling his sparring-partner with warmth and admiration.

The supervision of postgraduate students became formalised in the 1950s, and Southern was a natural draw. Here, too, he expected hard work, less in measured hours than in the bruising struggles needed to make sense of medieval evidence. There are professors around the world today who recall the mutual comfort they had to give each other after supervision with Southern. For all that, his graduates, like his undergraduates, knew they were learning what they could never have learnt elsewhere, and any confidence lost was recovered in group seminars, where Southern—Galbraith's pupil in this, too—treated debate as the life-blood of history, and believed 'you have to let them crawl all over you'. In the end, all his graduates became grateful friends. The editors of a *Festschrift* prepared for his seventieth birthday had to narrow its scope because, they said, if all who would, could, and should contribute were to do so the volume would be 'little less bulky than the Codex Amiatinus'.

In 1961 Southern was elected Chichele Professor of Modern History.¹⁵ He moved his study to All Souls, and his home to Sandfield Road, Headington. The election had taken slightly longer than some had expected, suggesting apprehension in some electors. If apprehension there was, the key to it must lie in Southern's inaugural lecture, *The Shape*

¹⁵ The association of this chair with medieval history was already understood, but was only formalised in 1984 by a matching adjustment in its title.

and Substance of Academic History. For most listeners the lecture was a pellucid short history of the Oxford Modern History School. For initiates, it was a preliminary barrage in a campaign for change. Peter Brown was there, and perceived, behind Southern's words, a duel between the great ghosts of the Oxford history school:

We got the message. Freeman lost out to Round. A school founded on the model of classical studies, based upon literary texts, had been taken over by German methods of archive-based scholarship. He said little more; but we heard him. By the end, we knew that he had sounded the death-knell of the Pipe Roll.

On the Faculty Board, the new professor deftly marshalled sympathisers for an amendment in course regulations, which went through in 1963. In appearance a technicality, in effect revolutionary, it dragged the noble lineage of Constitutional Documents down into a new middle class of 'options', to rub shoulders with an arriviste paper defined as 'a theme in general history (to be studied in depth)'. The final parenthesis re-echoes, almost audibly, the voices in a debate held forty years ago. In the end, as usual, the arriviste eclipsed the older lineage and laid out a new direction for Oxford's young historians into zones like late Antiquity, early Germanic Europe, and the Crusades, whose shared deficiency before then had been their lack of 'pipe rolls'.

In his first two years at All Souls, Southern finally brought to publication his twin project on Anselm, his edition of Eadmer's *Life*, and a biography, based on his 1959 Birkbeck lectures at Cambridge. Meanwhile he continued to work with Dom F. S. Schmitt on Anselm's *Memorials*, to be published by the Academy in 1969. Between lectures and reviews, he also started on his double volume (made double at his own suggestion to the publisher) for the Pelican History of the Church, and gave papers at conferences. Amid this apparent heterogeneity a single idea was beginning to emerge, and was destined to grow in clarity over the next forty years. It was expressed in his choice of title, and directly or indirectly in the contents, of his 1970 volume of reprinted essays, *Medieval Humanism and Other Studies*, dedicated to Galbraith. The dedication was particularly appropriate in the case of its most consequential essay, touched up from a paper given to the Ecclesiastical History Society in 1965. This essay, by a rigorous re-examination of the evidence à la Galbraith, undermined a belief held universally—including by himself in 1953—in a twelfth-century 'School of Chartres'. Southern's act of iconoclasm provoked a murmuring over much of the northern hemisphere, a

murmuring far from quiescent by 2000, when, in the first volume of his *Scholastic Humanism*,¹⁶ Southern repeated and amplified his earlier arguments, with an assurance one reviewer compared to that of Cyrano, disposing of twenty swordsmen in an ambush, and went on (less in the manner of Galbraith, now, more in that of Acton) to explain why the question mattered. It was only by seeing the twelfth-century scholastics in their single, Paris milieu, Southern explained, that we could appreciate the unity of the scholastic enterprise, and hence its character.

In 1969 Southern became President of St John's College, Oxford. He had refused earlier opportunities for headships, and his acceptance of St John's was not given without hesitation. But as professor he had been going home tired each evening to Headington. He missed undergraduates. His main professorial tasks were achieved. Great as his influence was, as professor, it was not that of a supremo, such as might have made it harder for another to fill his place while he was nearby. Again, Southern's very approach to history, with its sensitivity to individuals and their relationships, and the unpredictable patterns these relationships form, found its natural soil in a college, especially in one like St John's, where history was strong, and where its new-look variety was represented by his former Balliol pupil, Keith Thomas. Not least, the move would bring Sheila and home back into the heart of Oxford.

During his twelve-year presidency, St John's became acknowledged as outstanding in its academic standards. (*Inter alia* it reached the top of the 'Norrington table', the device for comparing the Finals results of colleges.) One reason commonly agreed was the opening of the Thomas White Building, a project Southern inherited and helped nurse to completion in 1975, and which drew gifted applicants by offering three years' undergraduate residence. Another was the President's authority and character. His first presidential act, perhaps modelled on that of his former headmaster, had been to gather the second- and third-year undergraduates in hall, and address them for a full hour in the presence of the dean, senior tutor, and chaplain. As he walked round the hall, Southern spoke of the history of the college, pausing under each portrait to explain its sitter's distinction and observing, too, that the college's relative wealth robbed slackers of any excuse for poor performance. His first remark to Sheila on returning to the Lodgings was to tell her to start packing their bags to go: the college would no longer want him as President. But they

¹⁶ pp. 58–101, with all references.

did, and all the more so as they got used to seeing a light shining at the end of the Long Gallery, where they knew the President had contrived a study (shown in the portrait by Margaret Foreman now hanging in the college) and was himself working away. When Southern was knighted in 1974, the college as a whole felt honoured. The President himself remained as careful as before to remain accessible, especially to the vulnerable. A note he sent to freshers in 1976 marks the appropriate adjustment of tone:

Dear Freshman,

I have written this brief account of the College as an introduction for you. It's important that we should all know what the College does and what it stands for.

It's also important that we should all know one another and be able to talk frankly to one another.

As a beginning it will be a help—to me at least, since my eyes are better than my ears—if you will write your name (and initials or first name, whichever you prefer) clearly on the enclosed name-card and wear it at the Freshman's Dinner, when I hope we shall meet. Yours sincerely,

[handwritten] R. W. Southern

Southern's deafness, serious by 1976, would become all but absolute by the 1980s. Its cause almost certainly lay in an overdosing with streptomycin in his treatment for TB. (In the 1950s, doctors had been unaware of the danger, and there were similar cases.) The cure had saved his life, but at this delayed cost. In his last years in the Lodgings there was still music he could hear, played on an illustrious successor to the gramophone of his youth, especially—remarkably enough, and a source of the deepest pleasure—the quartets that Beethoven wrote when he, Beethoven, was himself going deaf.

By the end of the academic year in 1981 Southern had become sixty-nine, and retired. Or rather, he left St John's, and looked forward to retiring one day when he had completed certain tasks he still saw ahead. Dick had often found his own private dreams wandering back north to Newcastle—'its sights, its smells, its people'—and he and Sheila also made a brief tour of rural retreats nearer Oxford. But in the end reality ruled. They knew he had to be near Oxford's libraries, and they settled in 40 St John Street. Although a mere three hundred yards from the college it felt, they said, like another world. Dick reconstructed a study on the top floor, and for the first time became expert in word-processing, while Sheila followed suit on the floor below, to translate Verbruggen's book on medieval war from Dutch, and to correct and prepare Dick's copy for the publishers. Below the industrial zone their ground-floor living room

became a focus for pilgrim scholars, young and old, from many parts of the world, as well as a venue for their much-loved grandchildren. In conversation with Dick, visitors learned to write their contributions on scraps of paper while he watched, smiling, impatient for the chance to read, and to fire off his reply as the scraps of paper accumulated on table and floor.

Amid a relentless flow of requests for lectures, for chapters in collective volumes, and for an ever-growing number of memorial addresses, Southern saw two tasks directly ahead: the finishing of his book on Grosseteste, and a revision of his first book on Anselm. *Robert Grosseteste: the Growth of an English Mind in Medieval Europe* appeared in 1986. It bore the message that Grosseteste's much-debated contribution to the birth of modern science was conceived, not as an exception to, but in the context of, his theology of creation, incarnation, and redemption. It was a message whose demonstration entailed the re-locating of Grosseteste's academic experience to a milieu entirely English, and the re-dating or re-ascription of many items in his vast putative oeuvre, with the help of technical arguments Southern had to defend in a long note to a second edition in 1992. As to Anselm, Southern's views on him had never been set in stone. And when Cambridge University Press suggested a new edition of the 1963 book, he revised and revised, until he had written a new book, with a new title: *Saint Anselm: a Portrait in a Landscape*, in 1990. To quote Christopher Brooke's apt summary of the difference: 'a portrait by Rembrandt replaced one by Holbein'.

The biggest task of all still remained. Conceived over several decades, it was to be an exposition in three volumes of the core of his historical vision. The title he settled on was *Scholastic Humanism and the Unification of Europe*. If that title demands a moment's too much thought to count as 'catchpenny', this is because it accurately represents a radical thesis, which Southern had incubated over the years and now planned to set out in full. By lifting the historian's gaze from past politics to past thought, the thesis had the corollary, among others (as an obituarist in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* was to remark with pardonable nostalgia) of displacing the fulcrum of ancient European unity from Germany to France, at whose nerve-centre, Paris, Southern explained, scholars simultaneously devout, thoughtful, and practical, devised the blueprint from which a distinctive European intellectual culture would develop. The first volume of his trilogy appeared in 2000 under the title *Foundations*, the second in 2001, as *The Heroic Age*. This latter title was all too appropriate for a book finished in its author's eighty-ninth year,

and with the help, proving more necessary by the week, of two former pupils, Lesley Smith and Benedicta Ward. Despite flecks of repetition in the second volume, reflecting the labour of its completion, both volumes remain, for enquirers into the character of twelfth- and thirteenth-century learning, necessary for salvation.

Some of Southern's life and private thoughts in these last years are revealed by his correspondence with Geoffrey Nuttall, which had begun again, and in the 1980s resumed its earlier closeness as Southern became deaf: it was better to write than to visit, he explained, since he could not hear a word any visitor said. In return for his friend's professional comments on his drafts, Southern would, as long before, send vignettes of his own life and thinking.

[1989] In the night I read much Virgil, and at last get a sense of really *feeling* the Latin language in the blood—a very strange and grand experience which I've never had before, and I find Cyril Bailey was right after all: he's full of religion. . . . [I mean] he was filled with the sense of an eternal world impinging on this one at every point, and making (as M. Arnold said) 'for righteousness', though in ways so mysterious as to be past finding out. . . . I still read and think about [the Aeneid] for perhaps an hour in the middle of most nights. I sit up surrounded by dictionaries and commentaries and gently try to penetrate [Virgil's] meaning . . . sometimes I do the same with the New Testament which, conversely I find 'filled with history'. . . . So my nights go; and in the days I work, shop, and do my stint of housework, which indeed I greatly enjoy, especially washing up—though alas we are now aided in this task by a dishwasher which Sheila greatly loves and I somewhat deplore. . . . Anselm tears me in different directions all the time.

[1993] [My] long search for a pen . . . [is] merely a symptom of my addiction to the machine at which I sit doggedly from day to day. . . . I think very much of the past, both personal and cosmic and that gives me on the whole very great pleasure.

[1994] . . . as for poetry I have read in the last year quite a lot of Byron whom I had never read before with any pleasure, and somehow his personality, his problems, and the problems of his time, are now very absorbing to me, and then I read Wordsworth, Coleridge [and] Tennyson and reflect on their problems and persons. . . . I feel awfully weak these days—seldom walk further than the Codrington Library, which I enjoy. . . .

[1997] I lost your letter in the sea of chaos with which I am surrounded on my top floor of books, papers, drafts, files and I know not what. I think I promised and never did send you a copy of vol. 1 [*Foundations*] of the work which lies at the root of, or aims to be the fruit of all this chaos.

Communicants at St Giles' in these years would get used to seeing Southern among them, his gaze intent on a rite he knew by heart though

they knew he could not hear the words. In the afternoons he would spend an hour or so, as he put it, ‘tottering round the parks and admiring the clouds, which give me quite intense pleasure. They speak to me more clearly than anything for, as far as ears go, I’m now almost totally deaf.’ At other times it was the trees he looked at, or, quite as often, people. Walking with a young colleague in the parks one day he paused to run his gaze round the human scene—a hockey match, a couple, a mother with a pram—and murmured almost to himself: ‘as I get older, I come to love the human race more and more’.

Although he knew Chapman’s Homer well, Southern did not need it to tell him that ghosts have to taste blood before they will speak. To a graduate who exclaimed at the difficulty of writing history well—a fact the youngster had just discovered—the ex-officer muttered in assent, ‘it tears your guts out’. For Southern, the effort was that of the artist. His 1970 presidential lecture to the Royal Historical Society described the historian’s goal as the creation of ‘works of art’, which he defined as works ‘emotionally and intellectually satisfying, that combine a clear unity of conception with a vivacity of detail, and portray people whose actions are intelligible within the framework of their circumstances and character’. None of Southern’s readers would deny his success in reaching the goal he defined thus. But many of them, because the result makes such easy reading, would not guess at the toll its achievement took on him. It was a toll which grew heavier as he got older; perversely, because he said, and not altogether playfully (his own *curriculum vitae* half-illustrates the rule), that academics should write their books not while teaching but in retirement, when they knew what they were going to know, and had time. But then—experience would have to add—because we are older, the toll is greater. Southern found it so. ‘It really has been very hard work for the last six months, and I suddenly felt much older when it was finished,’ he told Nuttall in 1989, on finishing the second Anselm book. But two more books—volumes I and II of *Scholastic Humanism*—were still to come; and as he worked on the second he still spoke of a third, if with a conviction that faded with his physical strength. As *The Heroic Age* went to press, Sheila and his close associates could see he was exhausted. He rested, sleeping at times, happily aware when *The Heroic Age* appeared in the New Year of 2001. But the energy was spent. On the evening of 7 February, members of his family were summoned, he received communion with them, and died around 2 a.m. next morning.

People with a logical turn of mind say that the history of the world can be summarised in a sentence. A précis of Southern’s work made in

that spirit would identify two characteristics, one housed inside the other, and both quite apart from the question of its quality as a work of art. The first is Southern's sympathy for a particular kind of medieval churchman, a kind who combined deep thought about faith with practical action. Anselm and Grosseteste are the obvious illustrations. But the same applies in different degrees to the other schoolmen he wrote about like Hugh of St Victor, Aquinas, or Eckhart. Indeed it applies to 'scholastic humanism' as a whole. That was its point. Faith was to be understood in the light of the world of flesh and blood; and so understood, it returned dividend in the form of principles for decisive action; whence the explosive vigour of twelfth- and thirteenth-century Europe. It is no accident that the two paragons of this double principle, Anselm and Grosseteste, should have devoted their own deepest thoughts to the mystery of the incarnation; that is, to ruminating, in their different ways (set out lucidly in Southern's biographies), on the question why, independently as it were of Scripture or Church authority, God *had* to become man, in order to be truly God. Once this—essentially incarnational—theme has been discerned as one running through all Southern's writings on the scholastics, it does not take rare powers of perception to see its consonance with Southern's own character, with its combination of searching thought and a capacity to command tanks and colleges.

This characteristic fits inside another, touching Southern's historical vision as a whole. Its genesis is traceable to those few seconds in his 'teens when he 'quarrelled' with his father about the Renaissance. The intuition that moved him to do so became a historical *fides quaerens intellectum*. By way of his undergraduate reading of well-chosen secondary authorities, and later directly of Anselm and his associates, Southern nursed this historical faith to maturity and, from the moment he began publishing, built up piece by piece what became an objectively persuasive portrait, accurately represented in his last, unfinished symphony, as the scholastic humanism which unified Europe. By creating this portrait, with a skill corresponding to his own ambitious canon of history as a work of art, Southern put his readers in more direct contact with these great medieval thinkers than they could otherwise have enjoyed. In doing so he broke a barrier of misrepresentation which the sixteenth-century Renaissance and its progeny had erected for their own purposes, and added 400 years to Europe's recognisable cultural ancestry. But it was not just a matter of addition. The addition entailed a readjustment of balance, through the rediscovery of a humanism whose root was in Christian faith, whose soil was the Church, and which is now better than ever recognisable as

ancestor of our modern culture. What Southern achieved was in this sense to *unmake* the Middle Ages, by restoring to the intimate acquaintance of our own time an ancestry estranged by that very term, as well as by the inveterate technical difficulties that lie behind it; an ancestry whose identification brings light into lost areas of ourselves.

Reflection on Southern's life work therefore leaves us with more than a sense of admiration, as for a cricketer who has scored a lot of runs. It leaves us with an example of the service a historian can perform for his contemporary world, as a truer self-perception seeps into the common consciousness by way of a lifetime of teaching and writing, spreading out through the world (all Southern's books were translated into one or more foreign language). For all our modern Information Technology, this process must necessarily be invisible and unmeasurable. But a consideration of the work of this particular life shows it can happen, and be as effectual in the world as are the slow and invisible movements of the earth's plates. The changes in perception I refer to were not of course Southern's achievement alone. People read his writings because there was a general apprehension that the pre-fifteenth-century ancestry of modern civilisation had been depreciated and misunderstood. And if Southern had died in the Western Desert, or of TB, a score of medievalists could be named who would have done a similar job, and indeed have done. For all his artist's individualism, Southern knew he was one of a fraternity, and, with a collegiate sense which went far beyond stone walls, rejoiced in being so; a fraternity of various ages, loosely-knit, to its inestimable advantage, spread over the globe, and united only in its wish and capacity to rediscover, in mutual co-operation and for the good of its fellow human beings, those lost and encrusted medieval perceptions. Among this fraternity Southern was nevertheless the one whose vision of scholastic humanism was most coherent and enduring, and hence gave his words most power. He was its poet.

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