

We all, I think, become haunted houses. If we are lucky, that is. I mean nothing fearsome by this. But if our lives have been rich at all in friendship, the chambers of our memory tend to fill up in age with good and ghostly tenants - obligingly repeating for us after death their best moments in our lives. Such moments are not usually those when they triumphed most distinctly - were applauded for their skills, occupied stages or walked up happily to receive awards: though in the case of Andrea Velis these scenes were also his - but more likely the smallest moments, almost insignificant to outside viewers, when they were themselves. When they betrayed the tiniest gestures of affection or inner strength, whose recall on the screen of the mind's eye can assure us, over and over, of the best part of existence.

I was thinking of Andrea a morning or so ago, sitting in the Argo Restaurant on West 89th Street where he and I often met to eat our plates of tuna fish in pita-bread, amidst the effluvium of disinfectant rising from the floor: an unluxurious lunch which both our heart-conditions prescribed - - although, truth to tell, I tended to defy that prescription in favour of hamburger much more often than he did. As I sat I saw him quite clearly, wearing his flat cap, his contained and ordered shape bespeaking the order in his life: the order which enabled him to fulfill so exactly in this increasingly chaotic nursery we all inhabit, the ambitions of a mature gentleman.

That is indeed who Andrea was: a mature artist and a gentle man.

Gentleness seemed to me to be the element in which he lived: gentleness and culture. This last word often sounds inadequate to me - it emits an over-refined, and rather precious signal, almost prissy. But there was nothing remotely precious about Andrea. First and foremost he was a working man:

the best thing for anyone to be. A working man who served an art. He moved through life in a palpable cloak of urbanity: a mysterious garment which almost concealed the intensity of his dedication. Only when you spoke with him did they quietly emerge - the depths of his addiction to music; the certainties of his hard-won and long-loved knowledge; his sweetly inexorable standards of excellence. I respected him for these above all - because the love you feel for a man's dedication binds you to him in a very pure admiration which enlarges the admirer.

Andrea was given to me, as it were, almost like a present. He was perhaps the oldest and best friend of my own dearest companion, Robert Leonard. Robert must surely have been known to some of you here as a vastly talented voice-teacher, life-enhancing and life-creating: qualities which would attract Andrea most strongly of all, as they attracted and fuelled me endlessly, over fourteen marvellous years with him. It was Robert who took me up to Caramoor to hear Andrea sing in Curlew River, that brilliant Church Parable of Benjamin Britten. I liked him immediately - not least because he sang so devoted the astonishing cadences of a composer I revere more than any other contemporary. As I came to know him better he revealed to me, almost shyly but with obvious pride, that Britten had corresponded with him, and sent him words of great encouragement. I told him how I myself years before had lurked outside Britten's house on the shingle-strewn sea-front at Aldeburgh. Hoping for a glimpse of this genius as other youngsters my age might stand waiting to see a pop-singer pass or a film star. He understood immediately and only two summers ago in England I remembered all this when I watched Andrea sitting in the opera house at Glyndebourne becoming transported by the cold-washed interlude

of dawn which begins Peter Grimes. In this sense - a constant experience of transport - music was the staple of his life: as his performances of it, always prepared and delivered with such high intelligence and self-submission, became a staple of life here in this house, which was his second home. He knew music. He breathed it. He revered it. And he made it.

I sat in that restaurant and thought how marvellous to be so defined. To have an avocation so connected with absolute glory - because music is surely the most absolute of arts - and yet so demanding in its practicality. His public life was all practicality - people who had studied with him told me how practical he was; how clearly and simply he used his own vast experience to coach others - and his performance (like Justice is supposed to be, but seldom is ) was always, in the great phrase, seen to be done! Theory and practice were one. Theory, practice, and service. And all of them, were informed with that unflinching shy kindness which I shall remember best of all.

I said that I felt I had received Andrea as a present. It seems to me the perfect word. After my dear Robert died, Andrea entered my life more and more - and old as I was, and strange to say, in some palpable way he assumed what was for me the infinitely gratifying role of a kind of Guardian to me. There was always a denied father, or uncle, or even mother in Andrea. At least once a week I would find myself walking from the river side where I lived up 89th Street to spend the evening dining in the cabinet of wonders otherwise known as his apartment. Indeed on occasion he would show me his own "wunderkabinett" - an astonishing array of small antique objects. Treasures of all kinds collected through his working life, always displayed, it seems to me in memory, in a jewelled and amber light - he himself smiling like the Prospero of the cave, conjuring sights for my delectation. And the truth was that among all these prized things unwrapped from lacquered boxes

and silk handkerchiefs, there was always one treasure on view much larger: he himself. He was, may I remind you, a Treasure himself. He was called this by no less an authoritative oracle than New York Magazine when it listed in an article the ten most cherishable treasures of our City. From that moment he was known to me, and I'm sure many others, as "Tresh". It delighted him - hard as he might try to look degagé, and off-hand. He wore the appellation like a chain of office - and kept it in the cabinet of his own heart.

What a heart it was! I shall always see him padding around the room - he was a padder, Andrea- almost slyly pouring too much white wine into your glass, or spooning too much exquisite rissotto on to your plate, and then sitting at the head of his table in the hall that served as his endearing little dining-room, watching his guests with secret pleasure.

One time he passed to me down the table a photograph of himself as The Duchess of Crackenthorp in The Daughter of the Regiment, and then with seeming irrelevance asked me what play I was working on now. I mentioned the idea of one I was thinking of writing. "And tell me", he said, in the clarion tones of the Dowager Duchess, "do you think there could be a part in it for an older woman?"

Someone said to me last week that the trouble with memorial services is that the people who speak at them do so only about themselves. This of course is vainglorious, and trying. But in one serious sense it is inescapable - because those who speak tributes to the dead must seek to prove in some way that isn't egotistical that they are actually worthy not only to have been

their friends in the past but now to be their representatives. The dead can only live through us: we have to be their conjurers. They can only speak through us: we have to be their voices. We have above all, to live for them now that they can no longer do so for themselves. And I would like just now to finish with one word to the most concerned person in this room - Andrea's dearest companion Faber Donoughe.

Faber, I know that now - at this moment - life must seem unreal, numbing and inexplicable, and painful beyond measure. But I can assure you of one thing - abstract as it will appear to you at this moment. You are very lucky. Even in your pain you are very lucky. "Blessed are the mourners" is not just a pious phrase: it is a good, real truth. Lucky are the mourners. Because the very misery you are feeling now is the exact measure of the tremendous fortune you have had. Think of all the arid lives around us - arid because of the lack of what you had in abundance - and indeed gave in abundance. You made each other. Your life now must exult in that. Lucky Faber, to have had Andrea.

And lucky me, too, in a smaller way, to have known him too. A couple of years ago when I showed you both a little of the English countryside I enjoyed, I watched you standing together in a circle of prehistoric stones at Avebury, watching a white peacock spread its shivering tail and shake what seemed to be pearls into a beam of sunlight. That beam embraced you both - and it is as I see you - joined in your love of beauty, both of you, and of myth and legend, and of whatever startles meaning out of the bushes of ordinary existence. In fact, in your love for each other, I might say, you now are the custodian of that love. His guardian.

God bless you always, Andrea, for having been my friend. And the friend of so many here.