AND YOU, MY FATHER...

by Ros Tennyson

“And you, my father, there on the sad heights,

Curse, bless me now with your fierce tears, I pray

Do not go gentle into that good night

Rage, rage against the dying of the light”

Dylan Thomas

PROLOGUE (2006)

When I saw my father's body in the hospital mortuary shortly after his death, complete with discreet white bandage covering the smashed up side of his face and his punctured neck, I had two overwhelming responses. The first was relief: that he had been spared what he dreaded more than anything, the indignity of growing old (a rather wry thought, given that he was 85 and so already, by most standards, an old man). The second was fury: that he had allowed his life to end in this appalling way, leaving his friends, ex-partners, children and adoring grandchildren abandoned and devastated.

I was so angry that, if he had been alive, I would have shaken him.

These two responses to his brutal murder fought with each other in my head for days, almost crowding out my own horror and grief throughout that awful Christmas in 2005. Slowly, however, I found myself seeing things differently: allowing myself to be truly enraged with his killer and to properly mourn a man I deeply loved and profoundly miss.

As I slowly read through his published and unpublished works, the many letters from him and about him, together with innumerable (and sometimes inscrutable) jottings and journals, I began to piece together his complex life. It was not that I was finding things out about him for the first time, I doubt if there have been many father: daughter relationships with fewer secrets, but I was, perhaps for the first time, penetrating his personality as a whole rather than as a number of contradictory fragments.

On reflection, however, perhaps the fragments were not so contradictory. In his autobiography *The Haunted Mind* (published in 1984 when he was 65) he reviewed the 'fragments' and saw, somewhat to his surprise, considerable coherence, as the quote overleaf illustrates.

" Under the restless scatter of interests and the elusive, fragmentary sense of self that seems to characterize me, there is a strong underlying consistency. It was common for the introspective young to be socialist and pacifist in the 1930s, and I am very much a child of that decade, but unlike many of my contemporaries I have never retreated from these positions.

Consistent too is my thirty-year commitment to nuclear disarmament, my forty-year endurance of insomnia and my life-long passion for books. The reconciliation of sensuality with the life of the spirit; of powerful sexual urges with decent human relations; of socialism with the need to earn money in an acquisitive society; of Englishness with being a citizen of the world; of homosexuality with a passionate affection for women; of solitude with an acute sensitivity to social pressure." [1]

[1] All quotes are from Hallam's autobiography *The Haunted Mind* unless otherwise attributed

My father was courageous and cowardly; generous and selfish; gregarious and solitary; careful and careless; faithful and faithless. He was renowned for his thoughtfulness and yet could be stunningly thoughtless. He was passionate about truth but lied with impunity. And, as both his life and his death testify, he sought out the sublime and the brutal with equal dedication. These Faustian extremes meant that he lived his life with an intensity that most of us can scarcely imagine. However, aren't all human beings extraordinarily complex? And isn't it possible that Hallam was no more complex than anyone else? Don't we all have the potential for such extremes within us? The only difference being that, unlike Hallam who increasingly chose to live his extremes to the full, the rest of us choose to contain them within more socially acceptable boundaries. Perhaps we are happier. Perhaps we are not.

Few who came will forget his memorial service: nearly 100 people drawn together in spite of - perhaps because of - the shock of his untimely death and the seamy revelations in the newspapers. They came whether linked to him though his work in the BBC; his time in India; the bridge club; his compulsive tennis-playing; as past time-share owners in his house in Umbria; as long-standing family friends (often spanning three or more generations); because they were his 'protegees' or because they were erstwhile lovers. Several others who had hardly known him came simply out of love for us, his bereft children and grandchildren.

Hallam died within hours of the new civil partnership law coming into force that allows gay couples to formally register as partners in a ceremony akin to a marriage (though not dignified with that name). Barely disguised, there were renewed rumblings of homophobia in the London air. So two family liaison officers from the Metropolitan Police were there too, just in case the tabloid press turned up or there were any ugly scenes. But they didn't, and there weren't.

It was a gathering of quiet dignity with white roses and a single candle in place of an altar in the centre of the room, around which we all sat. Those who chose to speak did so out of a deepening silence. It seemed utterly appropriate: being together in the simple setting of a Quaker Meeting House whilst 'the light failed on a winter's afternoon' - to quote the wonderful words of TS Eliot's *Four Quartets* (one of Hallam's and my many shared literary loves). As someone remarked to me afterwards, it was a deeply spiritual experience without being the least bit religious.

One person after another shared their individual experiences of Hallam whether in terms of their appreciation of his deep connection with music, literature or language; his relish of the idiosyncrasies of human personality; simple anecdotes about a lovingly remembered car journey, or his reason for giving up being an umpire at Wimbledon: *I got fed up being shouted at by millionaires.*

It was whilst I heard people speaking that I began to understand more clearly what it was that made him special. He was brilliant, eccentric and non-conformist but he was special, I believe, not for these attributes but for his quite remarkable capacity for empathy with other human beings: whatever their age, cultural background or chosen lifestyle. People loved Hallam because he was able to enter so fully into who they were. He could, right up to the end of his life and quite unselfconsciously, get inside the skin of others, and was able to do this in such a way that it gave those who knew him the sense of being truly recognised, understood and accepted.

When the dust has settled, I believe it is my father's loving humanity that is remembered by all those of us who had the very good fortune to know him

IN THE SHADOW OF OTHERS

Hallam was the youngest of three boys, although it is probably significant that another child, the first born who died shortly after birth, was a girl. This puts his mother's wish for Hallam to have been a girl into context. Undoubtedly Hallam's mother Ivy was a remarkable woman, feted by Bertrand Russell and Lloyd George before her marriage when she had become the first General Secretary of the Free Trade Union. By the time of Hallam's birth, however, it seems that her formidable strength of character and magnetic appeal had become rather less attractive in the form of a domineering wife ruling her home with a hen-pecked husband who had become totally submissive to her demands.

It is clear that his mother had a profound influence on Hallam, not least because she consciously cultivated the emotional and demonstrative side of his nature: he describes getting into her bed one morning as a 6-year old and giving her 365 kisses, one for each day of the year. She also relished looking after him when he was ill, and perhaps was guilty of encouraging him to be ill as a legitimate excuse for him not taking up the 'masculine' pursuits typical of his peers. She certainly pampered him when, at the age of 10, he had a year off from school whilst suffering from a mysterious childhood illness which necessitated being moved around in a wheelchair *I was happy during my illness. Not only was I the centre of attention, which was thoroughly satisfying, but I was also quite aware of being thought of as a 'model patient'. This reputation struck me as being easily achieved, for I was fundamentally doing exactly as I liked.*

Hallam's memories of his mother as he was growing up convey an uneasy balance between love and fear. This, to my mind, formed the early pattern of his personal relationships that in due course became an even more uneasy balance: between ecstasy and danger

“The most important element in my life, and one that has obtruded on it to a degree which I can scarcely exaggerate, is the realisation that my parents had hoped that I would be a girl. I was once handing round a tray of cucumber sandwiches... to the guests at my mother's bridge table when someone passed a comment on my nature and my looks. My mother replied: 'Yes, he's just like a daughter to me'.

The words were probably uttered while she was arranging cards in her hand with typical speed and neatness, and I truly believe that she suffered scarcely a moment's pang of regret for the sex with which I had actually been endowed. Yet, they were the first words of hers that I was to remember.”

But his mother was not the only person who dominated Hallam's early life. Equally in the category of 'significant others' were his two brothers. The older, Penrose (known as 'Pen') was widely admired for his fine and original creativity as a filmmaker (described as the most brilliant of his generation, having worked in the Ealing Studios and made a film with Paul Robeson when still in his early '20s). As a teenager, Pen exercised quite a spell over Hallam who was 8 years his junior as the exotic, cavalier and slightly remote oldest of the trio: *Pen had become my masculine ideal and I was more than half in love with him.*

The middle son, Julian (nicknamed 'Dooley' because Hallam couldn't pronounce his name properly as a young child), was also idolised by Hallam as a young boy, , a feeling that was clearly reciprocated: *Dooley at that stage showered me with unending humour, affection and concern. I was his last link with childhood in which he seemed exceptionally happy and from which, perhaps, he dreaded tearing himself away.* Dooley's talents were more introverted than Pen's, his love of rural England and his gift for writing took him down a different creative path and his book *Suffolk Scenes* is still regarded as a classic of its kind.

By his own description, Hallam's regard for his brothers was little short of hero worship and he loved nothing more than to be allowed into their world - characterised most vividly by their joint invention of a whole country called 'Darminland' which included the creation of a special language that only the three of them could speak. Into this world, others were not admitted.

Hallam's late adolescence was undoubtedly coloured by his brothers' successes and the way both were heralded as amongst the most talented young men of their time. There is no question that both their deaths during World War Two were devastating for Hallam and left him with a permanent sense of guilt that he had survived as, in his words, *the least talented of the three.*

It is hard not to see parallels between the intense affection of these three young men and their counterparts in the life of Hallam's great grandfather, the poet Alfred, Lord Tennyson. The 'Apostles' (as Tennyson and his group of friends were known when they were students at Cambridge) were devastated by the untimely death of Arthur Hallam, whom the poet immortalised in his poem 'In Memoriam'. And of course, we must not forget that Hallam was given his name as a tribute to his great uncle (the poet's first born son) who had himself been named after Arthur Hallam. The associations that came with the name must have cast its own shadow.

Arthur Hallam was, by all accounts, a brilliantly talented and utterly engaging personality in the presence of whom everyone felt awed. Some scholars argue that the poet never fully recovered from Arthur Hallam's sudden death and felt unworthy to have survived in spite of his own towering achievements. I believe something of this is true of my father: that he never really got over the devastating loss of his brothers, particularly Dooley, and that their ghosts remained with him throughout his life providing a kind of 'benchmark' against which all others were subsequently measured.

Whatever its cause, Hallam had a marked tendency to look for role models throughout his life, whether in the form of a saint, an idealist or a genius. In its earliest form, the focus was on the 'saint'. This is clear in Hallam's account of his first meeting with Mahatma Gandhi, possibly the single most important meeting of Hallam's life, which took place in the first year of his marriage to my mother (of which more later). They went to live and work in West Bengal and got caught up in the Hindu-Muslim riots in Calcutta in the summer of 1946, which Hallam described in one of his books as *the first portent of the catastrophe that was to split India in two.* [2]

[2] *Talking of Gandhi*, 1969

“ For a whole fortnight the country's premier city had been a living nightmare – as if an atom bomb had paralysed its municipal nerve-centre at the height of a deadly plague. The paralysis was due to indecision. Those in authority were committed to one side or the other, and while they quarrelled with their consciences, assassins took over and patrolled the streets like packs of ravening wolves.

On one corner that we passed daily in our ambulance we had seen the corpse of a water buffalo swell to a hideous size with putrefaction, but on another, desolate and deserted since the fighting had passed over it, all the dead had been meticulously scoured to the bone by successive flocks of vultures. The sewers were overflowing: they had been blocked with the bodies of the murdered.”

Saint on the March

Margot and Hallam travelled to Gandhi's ashram hoping to stay for some months to experience community life as developed by the world's greatest pacifist before they returned to England. As it happened, they were the first people to reach the ashram following the Calcutta riots and, according to Hallam's autobiography, they arrived with quite a sense of self-importance that they would be able to report what they had witnessed first-hand.

When they were introduced to him, Gandhi solemnly read through the letter of introduction they had sent in advance and then proceeded to ask them nothing about the riots. I will let Hallam tell the story from here:

> *"It was not until we had left his hut an hour later that we realised that he had not mentioned the riots. Instead he had prompted us to talk about ourselves. To him, getting to know two ordinary visitors was more important than any news we might be bringing of events in which we had only accidentally been involved. That incident taught us more about the essential greatness of the man than we learnt from his writings and speeches. He lavished an extraordinary affection on people. Not the cool charity cultivated by saints nor the eager-heartedness of the good mixer – both of whom perhaps pride themselves on treating everyone the same – but a personal ardour and interest that meant he treated everyone as a unique individual."*

Hallam and Margot were back in Calcutta when Gandhi was assassinated and recalled for the rest of their lives how the normally bustling city became completely silent as thousands of people made their way to the river and its tributaries to float flowers in his honour.

Hallam returned to India to walk with Gandhi's disciple, Vinoba Bhave, barefoot and wearing little more than a simple dhoti for several months going from village to village gathering support for peaceful resistance to the British and for the redistribution of land. My mother told me that Hallam was regarded as quite saintly in the village in Bihar where they lived for two years and it is clear from his diaries from this time that he seriously considered the path of meditation and solitude as a way of sublimating the aspects of his nature that he found difficult.

The sub-continent also produced Hallam's next inspirational figure, Rabindranath Tagore. Although he never met him in person, Hallam was very drawn to Shantiniketan the community Tagore founded based on social concern, education and the arts. Tagore had been famously called 'The Great Teacher' by Gandhi, and Hallam also revered him as such. Though not cut out for community living, Hallam did admire it as an ideal all his life. I believe he would have loved to live in an essentially altruistic and creative social environment, without the burden of having to join the rat race (as he saw it) to earn a living. Having to let go of this ideal may have left him with a sense of being smaller and less noble than his younger self had aspired to be.

It was not only saintly figures who cast their shadows, Hallam was deeply attracted to the personality of genius – someone whose intellectual or, more often, artistic gifts were of such magnitude that they carried those they touched into a more spiritual realm. Claiming to be without faith of any kind, Hallam nevertheless had a deep capacity for immersion in words and music perhaps best characterised by T.S Eliot when he writes of: *music heard so deeply that it is not heard at all, but one is the music whilst the music lasts.*[3]

[3] From *The Four Quartets* and quoted by Hallam in a letter to me in relation to a radio programme he was making about the poet Gerard Manley Hopkins

“ I have always been bad at learning by heart and yet remember lines of Rilke perfectly. Why? Rilke’s fifty-four sonnets came to him in a tumultuous and visionary period of three days. They sprang into his mind complete in all their complex metrical variety. Strangely my translation of his last sonnet also came to me when I was quite unprepared for it. It came, in fact, in my sleep and when I awoke in the tiny flat in Bethnal Green I wrote it down as if by dictation from some unseen power. Rilke’s words, even when I was only in my twenties, formed part of my own ‘inscape’.” [4]

[4] A concept developed by Gerard Manley Hopkins

Rilke and Hopkins were Hallam's favourite poets, and it is interesting that in both cases it is their capacity for conveying mystical experiences that attracted him so deeply.

However, even with his deep feeling for words it is music that stirred him most profoundly. He loved the subtleties of Mozart and the emotional climaxes of Verdi, but it was Beethoven who became a towering presence in Hallam's later life – almost to the point of obsession. He found the range and drama of Beethoven's music, together with his understanding of the composer's fatally flawed personality entirely compelling. Hallam's last major attempt to write was a play about Beethoven's desperation at becoming stone deaf and, in Hallam's words, *the catastrophe of his relationship to his nephew, Karl.*[5]

The greatness of Gandhi, Bhave, Tagore, Rilke, Hopkins and Beethoven was deeply inspirational for Hallam, but it is equally clear from his autobiography that it was also deeply intimidating.

A more obvious shadow in Hallam's life might have been that of his own great grandfather, Alfred, Lord Tennyson, but the fact that he was a direct descendant of a renowned poet does not feature strongly in Hallam's autobiography. So how much of an influence or a shadow was the poet?

It is quite hard for us to imagine in the 21st Century quite how famous Tennyson was during his own lifetime and for some decades thereafter: a veritable Victorian institution, and almost as famous in the English-speaking world as Queen Victoria herself. His work is no longer widely taught in schools (except in English-medium schools in India) and his style of poetry has fallen out of fashion, but there remains a hard core of Tennyson devotees who every year place a wreath on his grave in Westminster Abbey and make pilgrimages

[5] Beethoven fought a bitter custody battle to become guardian to his nephew after his brother died and forced the child from a young age to be a pianist for which he had neither talent or inclination. Karl tried, unsuccessfully, to kill himself. When questioned by the police, Karl said: *"my uncle has tormented me too much".* Eventually, and much against his uncle's wishes, he joined the army. Beethoven felt his 'desertion' deeply for the rest of his life.

to sites around the country associated with his life and work. The Tennyson Society was established under the influence of Hallam's father, the poet's grandson, Charles, in 1960.

The immediate descendants of genius are inevitably impacted. Charles, who was thirteen when Tennyson died, spent time as a child in the poet's household so remembered him well. First I and then my brother were told the story of how our grandfather bent to kiss the poet's gnarled hand as he came ceremoniously down the staircase every morning. And there were several more such anecdotes! So it was always clear to us that our grandfather's relationship to the poet bred a deep sense of awe. Charles simply believed that by comparison to the poet he was nothing special This, despite his first-class honours degree in Classics from King's College, Cambridge, which led to him reading Latin and Greek in bed every morning until his dying day; his knighthood for services to industry; his later role as the poet's biographer and advocate, as well as the huge number of admirers who simply adored his modesty, kindness and fine mind. He lived a genuinely humble yet noble life until his death at the age of 97.

Hallam's relationship to Tennyson had a different and less direct impact. He rebelled at what he saw as a life of unearned privilege: living in a series of more than comfortable homes; being brought up largely by a nanny; going to Eton at the age of 11 and to Oxford at the early age of 16. Whilst at university, he joined the communist party (as did many other intellectuals in the 1930's); became a conscientious objector at the start of the 2nd world war; was a committed vegetarian decades before the environmental imperative to be one (for a time only wearing plastic shoes) and chose to live and work in the East End of London as a community worker and researcher rather than adopt a more conventional profession. He consciously and conscientiously rejected his immediate family (and, by default, his ancestry) and sought to carve out quite a different niche for himself.

This changed in the mid-1950s when he joined the BBC World Service where his surname may have had some helpful influence, although this proved to be a mixed blessing. Sometime in the 1980s, for example, Hallam wrote and produced a series of programmes for Radio 4 called *The Other Victorians*. This was an exposé of the seamier side of life in Britain in the late 19th Century: the appalling treatment of servants; rampant venereal disease amongst the upper classes as well as the cruel exploitation of women and children in factories and more. The BBC was inundated with complaints couched in terms of how shocking it was that someone descended from Tennyson should so disgrace his ancestor's name. Hallam, of course, thought all this righteous indignation was hugely amusing.

So how profound was the impact of being descended from someone so famous? I believe it was far less profound than the more immediate emotional impact of others: his mother, his brothers and, at a later stage, his father.

When Hallam was a child and young man, Charles made comparatively little impression on him. This may be because in day-to-day family life his mother's presence was so much more forceful. However, many years later after his wife died, Charles came to live with us until his own death at the age of 97 and during these final years Hallam developed a deep respect and love for him.

The importance of Charles's quiet presence in our household as my brother Jonny and I were growing up is incalculable. During our childhood, our mother suffered from mental illness that meant she was hospitalised for quite long periods and was often in states that ranged from mania to deep gloom when she was at home. My father found it very hard to deal with and it was our grandfather who provided the constancy and stability that we would otherwise have lacked. Listening to his improvised stories (about a little girl called Enouka and

her three monkey friends) whilst sitting on the end of his bed in the mornings was a regular feature. So were the monthly trips to the 'Nish' (the National Gallery) or joining him trespassing on private land on many a countryside walk when he would calmly assert: *I don't think they'll mind if we just….*

Charles was one of the kindest, most erudite and least judgemental people I have ever known – and it is clear that Hallam felt that too:

> *"His self-discipline was bred in him by his boyhood intercourse with the great. He felt he owed it to his inheritance not to fall short of the highest standards of which he was capable. It was his self-discipline that allowed him to develop his abilities to their best advantage. Scholar, writer, businessman, teacher, talker, golfer, lawyer, art-lover he fulfilled all these roles successfully. But in one role he was more than successful, he was outstanding: he became a great human being. Through some mystery of circumstance and chemistry his whole personality has grown as the years passed to become greater than the sum of its parts."*

In his autobiography Hallam describes how his father pleaded with him not to leave Margot and break up his marriage. Not, I believe, out of distaste for Hallam's sexual preference for men, but more because he felt it would be deeply wrong of Hallam to abandon someone who had suffered as a victim of Nazism. In other words, Charles believed that the moral issue was entirely about human responsibility, not social norms. It must have been excruciating for Hallam to hurt his father in this way, but then it may also have been excruciating to live on a day-to-day basis with another human who, from his own description quoted above, radiated such goodness when his own inner turmoil was so barely contained.

The point here is that whilst his own father grew immensely in stature as he aged, Hallam experienced a considerable sense of shame that he was unable to attain such a degree of selflessness. In fact, in stark

contrast to his father's, Hallam's old age became in many respects ever more self-obsessed and degenerate. I think his sense of falling short of his best self (what I have described as walking in the shadow of others) was so hard for Hallam to acknowledge that he is being less than honest when in the closing words of his autobiography he writes: *In touch once more with these commanding presences my mind goes back through the crowded and vanishing years to other memories: but wholly without nostalgia, wholly without regret.* I don't actually believe that this is true, by the end of his life Hallam was deeply nostalgic and full of regrets.

1. OUR FAMILY LIFE

Hallam's early life with my mother, Margot, involved many journeys. She had arrived in England as a young Jewish refugee, having escaped Nazi Germany on a maid's visa just a few months before war was declared. They met at Toynbee Hall, a community project in the East End of London and established an almost immediate rapport but, shortly after their meeting, Hallam was posted first to Italy and then to Egypt as a driver with the Friends Ambulance Unit. The next four-years of their relationship was therefore conducted entirely by correspondence.

This was the start of a pattern of journeys once the war ended and they were married. First India, from 1946 to 1948, where they lived in a small village as development workers. Then Yugoslavia in 1953, where Margot ran an international seminar and Hallam wrote a book about Tito. It seems that the excitement of travelling and learning how to cope in different contexts gave them an external focus that enabled them to ignore early indications of underlying challenges in their relationship.

Let me start an exploration of our family life, and Hallam's role as husband and father, with an extract from his book: *Tito Lifts the Curtain* because it captures very succinctly the difference between their two natures.

"To travel is to shed illusions and perhaps to gain new ones. This is why the elderly are nervous of travel, for there is an age limit beyond which we dislike having to revise our ideas. When I first knew that we were to go to Yugoslavia illusory ideas – geographical, political, linguistic or just plain silly – invaded my peace of mind. During the weeks of preparation I provided myself with a concrete object that both expressed and supported my strenuous state of mind. The object I chose was not romantic: it was, in fact, a plain, black bicycle. I had heard a great deal about the inaccessibility of rural Yugoslavia, about its lack of public transport or asphalt roads, and I was determined to travel freely. I looked to my bicycle to get me around. I cleaned and oiled it carefully, fitted a three speed gear, bought tools, torches, batteries, spare pumps, even a small pennant for company.

My wife, who was to accompany me, watched all this activity with suspicious tolerance. She opened the map and suggested that perhaps the country was larger than I realised and that as it was both mountainous and sparsely populated, travelling by bicycle would be far more than I could hope to accomplish."

As Hallam goes on to remark: *Such raw intrusions of reality worried me very little. My visions seemed clearer and more exalted than the petty accuracies of any map.*

Margot was always practical, rational and business-like, as befits the daughter of a successful business man which her father had been in pre-Nazi Germany, whilst Hallam was always preoccupied with his head in some cloud or other, as befits his up-bringing in a household dedicated to intellectual and cultural pursuits. But my mother was also highly creative, determined and independent-minded. There cannot be many small town German children who developed a passion for the poetry and values of Tagore by the age of ten. She discovered a great gift for sculpture and fabric printing in later life, and undoubtedly had a sense of design and artistic flair that my father completely lacked.

It is also clear, from their many letters written to Hallam's parents when they were in India, that Margot was far more at ease in their simple rural setting than Hallam, and she showed considerable fortitude when things were difficult and when Hallam's confidence wavered – which it did quite regularly. It is largely his recognition of her strength of character that fuelled Hallam's admiration for Margot when he first met her, particularly her personal courage as a young woman alone in London having lost almost her entire extended family in the holocaust.

"We first became conscious of each other, I think, around a bonfire on Guy Fawkes night. She loves bonfires and the flames made her cheeks glow and her eyes sparkle. It is almost impossible to convey the vitality and courage that Margot radiated. She was living on her own in a strange country on no more than a few shillings a week, having lost everything, but she was cheerful yet serious, confident and yet willing to learn.

When she rang me up for my birthday a month after we had met, I suppose I realised that she was in love with me. I was flattered, no one had shown me such feelings before."

So that is how their relationship started. With hindsight they were clearly building an over-idealised view of each other that was largely based on meeting their strong individual needs. As it turned out, their needs and what they were able to provide for each other became increasingly incompatible. Margot was desperate to find a replacement for her lost home and parents, so what better than to marry into a well-established, upper class family with a sense of history and permanence. Hallam was desperate to escape from his over-bearing (and, as it turned out, anti-Semitic) mother and the constraints of conventional family life, so what better than to marry a refugee who was unencumbered by any family constraints.

It is clear now that a major reason for going to India so soon after they were married was because Hallam's mother was repeatedly unsympathetic and unkind to Margot in the early days of their relationship. In a rather touching letter written by Hallam to his best friend from his school days, he asks his friend to let him know whether *there is any improvement on the home front* implying that if there is not, they will simply stay away.

Hallam may have married Margot as a reaction to his up-bringing, but there is no question that he was also genuinely drawn to her: *She has one of the most expressive and vivid faces I have ever known, and it changes like a barometer with her mood. When she is relaxed her beautiful shaped eyebrows, strong mouth, dark colouring and naturally wavy hair all combine to make her a very handsome woman.*

The picture that arises suggests a genuine attraction and admiration, but it differs very significantly from the acute observations of the physical characteristics of the men to whom he was later attracted. It strikes me reading this description of my mother that his tone is more objective and respectful than emotionally engaged. As he saw, with hindsight: *We were two strangers who had morally committed themselves to their idealised visions of the other.*

Of course, many marriages that endure and blossom have been built on shaky foundations, so a breakdown in their relationship was not inevitable. And if Hallam was over optimistic about the capacities of his spouse, he was also well aware of his own weaknesses and how, without her, he would have been far more fragile and unstable. Whilst the following extract is from one of his short stories, it feels as if the character is speaking of his wife with Hallam's voice:

> *"There was only one person who could help him. At least he could find his way to this last refuge. But what if she was exhausted and she needed the strength that he could no longer supply? No, he believed in her robustness, her vitality, her power, as he believed in the earth, the water and the sky. If he gave her faith in herself, if he filled her with his own belief in her, she would not falter. This at least he could do. And then as naturally as the earth, the sky and the water, she would fulfil the laws of the universe and, clasping his nature to hers, would carry it forward once more in the rhythm that it had lost"* [6]

Perhaps this hope of moving forward together in a complementary rhythm might have been fulfilled if it hadn't been for her post-traumatic mental illness and / or his increasing recognition of his homosexuality. Certainly their early years together convey a sense of two souls in real harmony – she practical, courageous and determined and he romantic, sensitive and idealistic. In a letter to Margot written from Egypt in 1944, he explores this:

[6] Short story entitled *Armistice* published in *The Wall of Dust*

"My beloved Margot, I love you so much as I think of you tonight and am looking to the future with such deep serenity of mind. I am particularly thinking – will this seem strange to you? – of the extraordinary differences between us. The very different talents applied to the same end that you spoke about.

In superficial things there is almost a continent between us. Your gestures, the way you stand with your hands folded in front of you, the way you walk into a room… all show a source of life utterly different from mine. How exciting it all is. But I know that I am only thinking of this strange and unaccustomed element that we find in each other's natures because thinking of it seems to increase the sense of fundamental unity which we have both felt so strongly from the beginning"

This positive picture of their future life together was, alas, painted before Margot's suppressed anguish at what she had suffered under Nazism burst through and overwhelmed her. Hallam's optimism about Margot's capacity to carry him through his own unresolved difficulties had completely failed to take account of her increasingly desperate need to be carried by him through her own. As he wrote: *I was deeply impressed by a woman who had grown up in the full glare of life and who seemed to have survived it unharmed… but Margot would eventually demonstrate that no one can survive a very painful early life without damage. Margot was to pay dearly for her precocious achievement of maturity by becoming subject some years later to a series of serious depressions.*

The sense of having found each other as soul mates in the early days of their marriage was a powerful bond that was confirmed and consolidated by my birth. They were both (according to Hallam) *demented with joy* at being parents – though hearing of their antics around my cot, it seems to me that their wonder and adulation bordered on the ridiculous! But then, unlike my mother, I have not known what it is to be stripped of family, home, culture, language and community and, unlike my father, I have not had to grapple with the identity crisis and despair that can come from being outside the prevailing social norms.

In those early days, prior to our trip to Yugoslavia in 1953, we lived in a form of genteel poverty in a tiny cottage in Sussex. Hallam was trying to earn a living as a writer by building on the success of his first volume of short stories[7] and Margot was putting into practice the spinning and weaving skills she had learnt in India and the tailoring training she had been given in Germany when, at the age of 10, she was banned from going to school by the Nazi authorities. So they were both at home and, as far as I can tell, had very little time apart from each other. I benefitted from not just their delight at being parents but also from their undivided attention.

[7] *The Wall of Dust* pub. 1948

When Jonny, my brother, was born five years later, the domestic landscape had completely changed. Hallam, having decided he could not, after all, support a family on the unsteady income from writing, had started working for the BBC which gave him and us financial security. Despite having what, by most standards would be regarded a good career in broadcasting, he always saw this move as an admission of his failure to make it as a writer. As a result of the increased financial security, instead of living in the Sussex cottage or the tenement flat in Bethnal Green (which we moved to on returning from Yugoslavia) we were able move to Hertfordshire living in considerably greater comfort in one side of a large farmhouse that we shared with another family. Close family intimacy (2 adults and one child) had been replaced by a quite different sense of co-housing (4 adults and soon-to-be 4 children).

Hallam was actually on a lecture tour in America when Jonny was born. No dancing round the cot in an ecstasy of delight at the wonders of creation, no spinning wheels gently whirring in the front room, no longer needing to do everything together. To misquote Churchill, was this the end of the beginning or the beginning of the end?

In the year after Jonny's birth, Margot suffered her first mental breakdown which required hospitalisation for nearly six months. Shared living suddenly came into its own, as Jonny and I were immediately absorbed into the other family, thereby enabling Hallam to commute daily to central London for his work. This coincided with Hallam's first forays into infidelity (always with men). Which of these two things came first? I suspect that Margot's illness was a major contribution to the breakdown in their sexual relationship – when depressed, she was unable to take care of her appearance or even her personal hygiene and pleaded for constant attention in ways that were frighteningly claustrophobic and unattractive.

Hallam was undoubtedly very distressed by Margot's illness and by his seeming inability to prevent her breakdowns or to be strong enough to meet her needs when the breakdowns came – which they did relentlessly, over a period of more than 20 years. I have many memories of finding him weeping in despair at his inadequacies when I must have been between 10 and 12 years old. This, I now see, led to me taking on more responsibility for my father as well as my mother than was appropriate at my age.

My distress at his unhappiness was quite a feature of my adolescence and was a key element in building our very close relationship. I remember feeling proud that he turned to me for support and I realise now that I became quite over-protective, in the strange reversal of roles that occurs when children become carers for their parents.

From the beginning, Hallam's relationship to Jonny was quite different to his relationship with me. No less devoted, but always more reserved in its expression. Was this because of the changes to our family life in the five years between us? Was it an ambivalence to Jonny because he was male? It is a fact that, whilst I inherited my mother's dark colouring, Jonny, with his white blonde hair, inherited the Tennyson features. As a youngster, Jonny looked remarkably like Dooley, Hallam's adored older brother. Perhaps Jonny's childhood took Hallam back too painfully to his own lost childhood in a household of boys.

Hallam was always in awe of Jonny's extraordinary mix of equilibrium and intelligence – both as an endearing child and as he achieved academic distinction in the field of astrophysics. As he described so vividly: *Already at ten Jonny was, we knew, an original. At twelve he chided me for climbing over a five-bar gate in a remote part of the Yorkshire Dales. Why weaken the hinges, he asked, when with a little patience the knots in the rope could be undone and the gate navigated in the way its makers intended? Ten years later, when he was living on a miserable student grant, he wrote me a cheque to cover the cost when I came to his rooms having done his weekend shopping.*

During my teenage years, and once we had moved from the extended family scenario in Hertfordshire into a more conventional family home in London, I saw it as my duty to provide the stability and order to our family life that neither of my parents seemed able to provide. This included my grandfather who was in his 80's and was living with us. Hallam came to rely on my common sense and willingness to hold the family together and to manage the domestic routines – just as, in later years, he relied on my unconditional acceptance of his homosexuality (even though this did not include accepting his increasing risk-taking and promiscuity).

Despite all of this, we still had some very happy times as a family, particularly during holidays in Scotland, France and Italy in a series of somewhat unreliable camper vans. During long car journeys, Jonny and Hallam would play ever more obtuse versions of 'I-spy' alternating with Hallam and I singing through our repertoire of songs that included *The Marriage of Figaro, Porgy and Bess, The Mikado, West Side Story* and Benjamin Britten's *Saint Nicholas Cantata*!

At other times, Jonny and Hallam had several successful expeditions doing 'boyish' things (including climbing, pot-holing and archaeological digs) whilst Hallam and I would indulge our shared love of 'cultural' things (including regular theatre and opera trips – often in Paris). Hallam and I also shared a voracious appetite for reading: under his influence I had read most of the, not terribly well translated, works of Chekhov, Tolstoy and Dostoevsky by the time I was 14.

“Ros is air and fire where Jonny is earth and water. She has the merriment and enthusiasm so characteristic of her mother when I first knew her. But she also has an important capacity for reflection and withdrawal and can go suddenly, disconcertingly, quiet. We share the language of the heart.

Both Ros and Jonny can be intolerant, he of opinions and she of people. I am rather glad about this, it betokens a kind of inner confidence that I conspicuously lack.”

Whilst Hallam's summary of our different personal qualities is (almost hurtfully) superficial, his last point is true: both Jonny and I have always had a level of self-confidence that both our parents conspicuously lacked. He was inordinately proud of our achievements as we were growing up: Jonny's formidable exam results and my professional performances as a child singer.[8] He watched with interest and, he would say with some relief, as we ventured into our own relationships with, in both cases, the opposite sex. Relief, because as a parent he wanted an easier life for us without the intense internal struggles he had experienced. He also applauded the beliefs Jonny and I shared – despite being so very different in our capabilities – which included a strong interest in inclusive communities, campaigning for social justice and putting values above earnings in our respective lists of personal priorities.

And in genetic terms, we have both undoubtedly benefitted from Hallam and Margot's 'mixed race' marriage: Christian spiritual aspiration mixed with Jewish passion of the soul; English understatement mixed with German forthrightness; the intellectual mixed with the creative and the romantic idealised world view mixed with the practical and down to earth.

Which brings me back to the bicycle that did indeed travel with us to Yugoslavia in 1953, despite my mother's irritation with the whole idea, and actually returned with us more or less still functioning. Hallam's closing paragraph in his book about Tito[9] seems to me to be a fitting metaphor for the closing years of his marriage.

[8] Between the ages of 12 and 14 I sang with the Finchley Children's Music Group which led to solo parts in mainstream concerts and productions of Benjamin Britten's *Noye's Fludde* and *Let's Make an Opera* (the latter on stage in London's West End and in a BBC TV production)
[9] *Tito Lifts the Curtain* pub.1955

“I had not found Utopia then, I had even shed (as predicted) illusions, and yet I came back with something important still intact. My bicycle. I thought: after all that has happened I have still kept that. And I imagined myself setting off up Victoria Street with the bedraggled basket tangling itself in the back wheel, and loose spokes tapping the asphalt.

There was something Chaplinesque in the finale, it seemed. Faith battered but burning. Honour assailed but undismayed.

One has a tendency to symbolism when it is well past midnight.”

2. PANDORA'S BOX

The real challenge of my father's life had, I believe, far less to do with his sexuality and more to do with his deep sense of failure at not being a successful writer. He may well have been justified in his literary expectations of himself since his early publications caused quite a stir, as reviews of his books at the time suggest:

" This book will introduce American readers to a talented young English writer whose work has received considerable attention in the past year. The stories have a common thread – they all concern an individual, or a small group, suddenly transported into a foreign land or culture. These stories luxuriate in the exotic and strange, but never gratuitously, never against the point. The author has a full grasp of his form as each story moves roundly but surely to its climax."[10]

"This is a book in which history, travel political and social insight are blended together with a rare humour, humanity and descriptive power. This is not only an exciting and important work of reportage, it is also a delightfully personal book. No one who wants to understand the complexities of our twentieth century world should miss it." [11]

"This is a tremendously exciting book: it comes like a sudden revelation of good news. What refreshment to the spirit of a man in the age of the hydrogen bomb." [12]

[10] Review of *The Wall of Dust* pub. 1948
[11] Review of *Tito Lifts the Curtain* pub.1955
[12] Review of *Saint on the March* pub. 1955

Hallam undoubtedly felt an enduring disappointment about what he saw as his stalled career as a creative writer. He was, in fact, regarded by his colleagues in the BBC as an exceptional adaptor of novels into radio plays (his adaptations of *Tom Jones* and *Middlemarch* are still hot favourites some forty years later) and as one of the BBC's most admired radio drama producers (directing new plays by Beckett, Pinter and Stoppard as well as Shakespeare and other classics). He was also a regular guest on Radio 4's cultural talk shows and a documentary writer (compiling a biographical piece on Verdi, for example, for Radio 3).

It wasn't until the publication of his autobiography, *The Haunted Mind*, edited by the remarkable Diana Athill[13] that he once again saw himself first and foremost as a writer. The book caused quite a stir and, as well as being was reviewed on Radio 4, it was serialised in The Sunday Times. This was a determined effort by Hallam to sweep absolutely nothing under the carpet and, to this day, despite having completely supported his right to write the book and having read and commented on multiple early versions, I cannot decide whether it was an act of spectacular courage or less-than-spectacular self-indulgence.

Perhaps, in the end, it was both.

In his autobiography, Hallam seeks to explore the tension between his deep attachment to, and respect for, women and his uncontrollable sexual longing for men. He suggests that this was the central theme of his life. But, as mentioned above, I actually disagree. Why?. Because I think it is too obvious, I believe he found it easier to blame his rampant sexual drive for his life challenges because it was less painful than facing his sense of failure as a writer. Whether or not I am correct in this, it is important to understand the force of his sexual nature since it was such a feature of his later life and, ultimately, the cause of his death.

[13] Diana Athill was herself to become widely recognised as an author in her own right when she was in her 80s.

"I am forced to the conclusion that my sex drive is above average. I say this in order to identify a complicating factor in an already complicated equation. Why should I have pursued the psychic security of sex with such passion and energy for so long in spite of disappointment, danger and distress, are still questions that baffle me.

Of course, I sometimes wish my constitution had been different, and yet much of the time I rejoice in it. If my sex drive had been less vehement I might never have married. Without the twenty six years of partnership with Margot, together with the intense happiness I have derived from parenthood, my life would have been greatly impoverished."

Nowhere, in either his published or unpublished material, can I find any descriptions of women, however affectionate and heartfelt, that come near to his capacity for close observation of the physical characteristics of men. His attention to men was of such intensity that it seems to have heightened his capacity to register every tiny physical detail in a way that is entirely absent from his descriptions of women – even of Margot in the earliest and most ardent years of their relationship. This acuteness of observation of the male physique is characterised well in *Armistice,* one of his early short stories published in *The Wall of Dust*:

> *"He moved closer. The young man's eyes were light grey. They were almond-shaped and sloped slightly upwards, giving his face an extraordinary delicacy. They were fringed by long, dark lashes. His slightly oriental appearance was further emphasised by high and prominent cheek bones from which the flesh fell away into deep hollows on either side of his mouth. Hi hair was long and lustreless. His shoulders were covered with scurf. His hands, between his knees, were fiercely tearing bark from a stick.*
>
> *He offered him a cigarette. Leaning forward to light it he noticed that the man's hand trembled, that the fingernails were bitten to the quick and the prominence of the knuckles on the thin fingers. The skin on the wrist and the back of the hand was glossy and scored with innumerable fine wrinkles, as if the tougher layers of the epidermis had gone, leaving exposed the flaky, fragile substance beneath it. The smooth surface of his forehead had this same transparency. He could smell his hair, it was as sweet and musty as hay. He drew back sharply and threw away the match. Why was he suddenly overwhelmed by tenderness? By such a desperate yearning to protect this stranger with his physical touch?"*

When my father left my mother, his homosexuality was not something new to either of them. He had known he was attracted to men from his early teens and had enjoyed, if his retrospective guilt can be equated with enjoyment, a number of physical encounters with men prior to his marriage about which he had been entirely frank with Margot during their long years of engagement. Indeed, when a doctor suggested to them both that Hallam should take a course of aversion therapy, a not untypical response to homosexuals in the 1940's, the sexual licence of the Bloomsbury Group notwithstanding, it was Margot who argued passionately against it. She feared that such an intervention might change Hallam's essential nature, which was a possible outcome she refused to countenance.

For some years Hallam was entirely faithful to Margot and they enjoyed an active and apparently satisfactory sexual relationship. But then he fell in love (possibly for the first time) with a man: *To me the psychic root of sensuality is that for a few magic moments self-doubt, insecurity, fears of rejection are put to rest. One's selfhood is confirmed at the same time as it is paradoxically transcended. This is the total reality, the validation of the very depth of being, which D.H. Lawrence strove so laboriously to describe. It is the most powerful aspect of the condition known as 'being in love'.*

Throughout our childhoods, I don't think either Jonny or I ever felt that Hallam was anything less than a devoted, inspiring and supportive father, so when, in 1971, he fell in love with Miguel[14] and made the decision to leave his marriage and our home to live openly in a homosexual relationship, it was quite a surprise. I was 21 and Jonny was 16.

I had watched my father's growing sense of helplessness at my mother's continuing illness – indeed, his evident unhappiness had caused me considerable grief over many years. So I remember being positively pleased that he was getting out of what had become a terminally bad situation. I was very glad he seemed to be moving into a more

[14] This name has been changed.

fulfilling relationship and a happier life. And from my experiences at drama school where my four closest friends (three men and a woman) were all gay, I was quite at ease with the idea of him being gay. In fact, as I wrote in my diary the day I found out, I might have been quite jealous if his new partner had been female. So whilst his declaration of homosexuality was entirely unexpected, it wasn't any kind of trauma.

For Jonny it was somewhat different. He was younger, he was male and, having been away at boarding school since the age of 11, was perhaps less aware of the deteriorating situation at home and the breakdown in the relationship between our parents. Although he hasn't ever talked much about it, Hallam's life choices never dinted Jonny's loyalty and love. In fact, several times when I was really angry at some particularly aberrant behaviour of our father's, it would be Jonny's patient acceptance that pulled me back from the brink of exploding.

At the start of his new life, Hallam adopted a staunch political stance and an exuberant zeal for supporting gay causes. In many of these I joined him – for example, speaking as a double act to many gay support groups on our relationship as a gay parent and non-gay daughter. He championed for better protection for homosexuals in prison, became a counsellor for the Terence Higgins Trust, and marched with energy in the burgeoning number of Gay Pride events.

Despite considerable financial hardship as he had arguably been over generous in his divorce settlement with Margot, and a degree of isolation as long-term friends were less than supportive, he did for a while become more at peace with himself. Sadly, however, this sense of renewal was not to last, and I watched with increasing frustration as his activities began to take on exactly the same pattern of self-denigration and the neglect of his own needs in trying to meet those of others that had characterised the later period of his marriage to Margot. As he wrote: *It has always seemed to me that the point of the story about Oedipus is not so much that he slept with his mother, as that in trying to escape the prophecies of the oracle, he was drawn irresistibly to fulfil them.*

Over the years – and he had more than 30 of them after his divorce – he moved from serial monogamy to rampant promiscuity, which he describes in his autobiography in considerable, and sometimes unpalatably graphic, detail. And as his taste for fleeting, sordid and sometimes violent encounters grew, so did his efforts to cover his tracks with his family, friends and work colleagues. His double life became ever more reminiscent of Goethe's Faust: *Alas two souls within my breast do dwell, the one to Heaven's heights aspires, the other filled with base desires.*

So began the years of evasiveness, lying and memory loss. The latter may have been the result of his regular intake of sleeping pills to combat life-long insomnia as much as the stress of having to manage his various and often conflicting stories about where he was or wasn't on any particular day. But his mental state may also have been the result of some level of drug-taking in the late 1980s and early 1990s. If this is true, it is quite surprising since, as he describes it in his autobiography, his first experience of marijuana was so unpleasant that he vowed at the time (early 1970s) never to touch drugs again.

> *"At about 11.30 I felt a slight sweating and nausea, and now John's laugh and sideways look seemed sinister, even demonic. I developed an obsession about noise. Later I became certain that John had given me a deliberate overdose aiming to get me in a helpless condition so that he could rob or assault me. By now I was rigid with tension: talking to myself, thoughts racing, limbs twitching. I tried to be still but I felt a kind of poison spreading through my system and gradually control got weaker: I rocked backwards and forwards… then I started walking compulsively up and down, since otherwise I feared I would fall prey to madness."*

Hallam's life was not easy during this period, though most of the indignities that he suffered were largely of his own making and I often felt they could have been avoided if he had really wished to avoid them. But is this true, or is it that he was actually driven by forces out of his control? If so, these forces drove him to the brink more than once. In fact, his autobiography written 20 years before his death describes in chilling detail a sustained assault so similar to the one that killed him, it seems as if his attraction to violent bullies was on the edge of pathological.

The self-destructive episodes are too numerous to mention. However, one in particular stands out and goes some way to conveying the rest.

I got a frantic phone call in the early hours from Sam[15] to tell me that Hallam was in hospital following a near-fatal overdose of alcohol and aspirins. His partner of more than eight years, Sam had found him in bed with a man he had claimed, for more than two years, he had not been having an affair with. The overdose was apparently the result of remorse, but was it a serious attempt to kill himself or was it a desperate ploy to convince Sam that he was sorry and win him back?

Suddenly Hallam's requests to me in the preceding months that I tell Sam he had been with me on certain evenings *because Sam is so insanely jealous* began to make a different kind of sense. In a fit of righteous indignation at having been used in this way, I stormed to the hospital. There, of course, anger gave way to distress as I looked at my father's ashen face and blackened lips. But this in turn gave way to indignation when I got to his flat to pick up his dressing gown and slippers and found the empty bottles and a suicide note. The note struck me then, and still does, as a piece of self-conscious theatricality far more than a genuine apology (*I ask those of you who can to forgive me).*

[15] Name has been changed

Having said that, I am also aware that Hallam had many periods of genuine despair throughout his life which I know were deeply painful – well captured in one of his short stories:

> *"The idea of suicide seemed to break the logical sequence of thoughts. A precipice of self-accusation and despair gaped within him. His whole being trembled on the edge, enthralled by the gloom and chaos beneath. At the bottom, in the dark mist, some danger that he recognised and yet could not fully understand seemed to have been dragged from the profoundest depths of his being. Was it linked to a previous incident in his life? With something he thought had passed? With an illness he had conquered in his childhood? With a vice that had secretly afflicted him of which he had been deeply ashamed? He felt weary, wasted, anaemic. He gripped his hands and fiercely pressed the skin over his temples as if trying to squeeze out his thoughts. He must do something to bring this torture to an end. It was useless to let himself go on like this."* [16]

Eventually I did come to accept that I was probably never going to understand what drove him so regularly into situations of such emotional and physical risk. I gave up my attempts to challenge or change his behaviour – he was, after all, my parent and not my child. In subsequent years I determinedly kept our meetings and conversations within the boundaries of safer and more palatable topics. And I am glad that I did, since this enabled him to build a very close and loving relationship with my children.

[16] From *Armistice* a short story published in *The Wall of Dust*

After his death, I found a letter that I had to him in 2004, just two years before his death. By this time I had been living in Wales for 12 years so our relationship had increasingly been conducted by phone calls and correspondence rather than face to face meetings):

> *"I realise that you are now the last of your generation left in my life and it seems important to make the most of whatever time we have left. Can we build on the foundations of the many, many things we share – or perhaps, more accurately, the many things I have inherited from you that have been the jumping off points for my own development? These shared things include our: commitments to social action; passionate love of reading; willingness to engage in a whole range of ways with people and projects and, perhaps above all, our love of classical music? Did you ever think when I was a child that I would be able to listen to the whole of Parsifal[17] in one sitting and grow to deeply love it? Or that I would feel as moved as you do by Rigoletto? Or that I would explore Britten's discordant harmonies with such enthusiasm? I guess my real reason for wanting us to write to each other more regularly is the hope that we might reignite a deeper and more meaningful relationship. It seems just too sad to think that our relationship with all its history, loyalty and intimacy might come to an end without having reminded ourselves of its true value."*[18]

We did return to something of the openness we had known decades earlier, but, of course, despite our renewed closeness which meant a great deal to us both, our relationship could never compensate for not having found the ultimate partner:

[17] This is an interesting reference as Hallam really did not enjoy Wagner so it was not actually a shared love!
[18] Letter from Ros to Hallam written in 2004 (two years before his death)

"For most of my life I have been in relentless pursuit. Of what? Of partners? I would like to put that in the singular: a partner. For behind the throng of shadowy bodies and faces, there is one shadow more real, yet even more insubstantial than the rest: the potential acceptor, who would have cherished, strengthened and sustained me. What could I give in return? Everything I conceivably could. Each encounter, however unpromising the circumstances, began with the hope of affection."

So his life-long search remained unfulfilled and he all too often ended up in situations as far away from his ideal of the perfect partnership as it is possible to be. I made clumsy attempts to help him face the difficulties his chosen way of life gave him and us, his children and grandchildren. It was tough to tell him that I could no longer let my young children stay overnight with him (which they had loved to do) as I couldn't be sure who would turn up at his front door. Despite the fact these conversations had no impact on his behaviour, I am grateful that he understood my good intentions and realised how much I continued to value and love him.

Sometime after his death, I found a letter he must have sent me many years before in which he said: *My darling Ros, Nothing can express the gratitude I feel for your love and kindness to me over so many years. The wonderful thing is that to really know me and don't have any illusions about what your mother used to call my 'dark side' and yet you still love me. WOW!*

I end this chapter with an extract from his autobiography that confirms my view that he allowed his sexual needs and his pursuit of the perfect (male) partner to obliterate his even deeper need for original, creative authorship.

“And of course there has inevitably been a good deal of waste.

Instead of spending hours haunting public lavatories, or other pick up points, I might have read several books as long as War & Peace.

I might even have written one.”

3. COMING TO THE END

Few people at any age have the capacity for deep and loyal friendship that remained true for Hallam throughout his life. And suddenly, in the final 6 years of his life, he found himself unblocked and able to write once again. In a flurry of productivity he produced a number of short stories and plays. IN addition, he took pride in his remarkable physical fitness: though he kept threatening to give up tennis, he never did, playing a game of singles on the morning of his death. He also never lost his sense of adventure and continued to enjoy travelling to interesting places including Hawaii, the Canary Islands, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Romania, Turkey, the Caribbean, Scandinavia and America between the ages of 75 and 85.

His enthusiasm for testing himself and tackling new intellectual challenges also continued to the end of his life: until his death. He read an average of five books a week and was an avid user of public lending libraries. He remembered his Bengali from his time with Margot in India and would fervently practice whenever we went out to our favourite Bangladeshi restaurant. He still read Primo Levi in the original Italian, having become virtually bi-lingual whilst driving an ambulance in Italy during the 2nd World War. And at the age of 82 he decided to teach himself Japanese.

As he grew older he seemed more willing to take on the mantle of a more conventional grandfather, organising many trips to plays or exhibitions with one or other grandchild. He spent two weeks each summer with either my family or with Jonny's. These were truly happy times, when he seemed to relish simple domestic pleasures and the straightforward fun of playing games, particularly the infamous 'Racing Demons', which he determinedly played to win even against his youngest grandchild. He was a good cook and enjoyed preparing, and eating, meals at family gatherings. All his grandchildren remember these holidays with unmitigated delight.

On one of these holidays – a week's break in Italy in June 2005, with my oldest son Ricky and myself. During this time he wrote a monograph of his friend Peter Benenson[19] with extraordinary fluency. The success of this brief holiday prompted Hallam to propose in a subsequent letter that he come and live with us in Wales:

> *"London has begun to lose its lustre. I am too deaf to enjoy its social advantages, too old to benefit from its cultural ones (no self-pity!) and no longer mentally strong enough to work satisfactorily at my writing in this roller-coaster atmosphere. Does this suggest I should complete my term in Wales? To do this satisfactorily would require a certain degree of self-discipline! Are you surprised, alarmed, sceptical at this suggestion? It is, I assure you, a serious one."*[20]

Whilst we were all deeply touched that this was his intention, and I responded to this letter with enthusiasm and warmth, I was realistic enough to recognise that life for my father in rural Wales would not have lived up to his expectations and may have been quite unsustainable and unsuitable for him. I was well aware that he would have found it impossibly hard to muster the self-discipline it would have taken. Sadly, but perhaps for the best, the idea was never put to the test.

At his 85th birthday party (December 10th) guests joked about his next big party being his 100th (a not unrealistic proposition, given his robust good health and youthful vitality). On December 16th I went to see him at his flat so we could exchange Christmas presents since he was planning to stay in London over Christmas. Adie, my younger son, and I had selected a gift from Oxfam for him: two latrines to be built in an Indian village. In the accompanying

[19] The founder of Amnesty International with whose family we had shared the house in Hertfordshire in the 1950s.
[20] Letter to Ros sent in 2005 (15 months before his death)

card, along with more traditional Christmas greetings, I had written: *All oblique references to Joe Orton[21] fully intended.* I don't know whether I am sorry or relieved that he never read this card, but I do know that it would have made him smile.

It was the first Christmas for years that Hallam had bought and wrapped every single present more than a week ahead of schedule. He was clearly in thoughtful and considerate mode. We sat and chatted over cups of coffee and slightly stale croissants before I set off on the long journey back to Wales. Hallam was glowing from the pleasure of his birthday party and every surface of his sitting room was festooned with cards from well-wishers.

His last letter to me, which arrived two days before his murder was a brief one, largely to do with his will:

> *"Darling Ros, I am facing the deadly process of will-making – do I hope for the last time, or do I hope for others? First of all you will need to repay my equity release mortgage otherwise they will very quickly step in to sell my flat as soon as I pop my clogs…"*

This was a strange letter to receive. Did he in some psychic way anticipate that his imminent death? And, if so, how did he feel about his own mortality? Once again, I turn to his autobiography for an answer to that question:

[21] Joe Orton, the flamboyantly gay playwright, was known to frequent public toilets in search of sexual encounters. With typical wit, Hallam once joked that the Greater London Council should have placed a blue plaque in a particular facility near King's Cross saying: *Joe Orton came here.*

"Sometimes when I think of my extinction, all the particles inside me become inflated like footballs and my mind is paralysed by a mixture of vanity and fear. Few things equal the human ego in its greedy longing to survive. Kali[22] points to the destruction of this ego, so that when the chopper falls there is nothing exclusively ours to which we need to cling. Christ teaches its transformation through love.

By being attentive to either teaching one can chip away a few fragments from the separating envelope and achieve moments of tranquillity and release. Yet I tend to view such a process as dependent less on the human will than on shifts in the secret caverns of the soul.

I am reminded of the hymn to Kali that I inserted into my novel set in Bengal[23]: Mother protect me at the gates of death. When the time comes, I can hardly ask for more and will probably not have the courage to ask for less."

[22] Kali is a Hindu goddess associated with the passing of time, doomsday and death.
[23] *The Dark Goddess*, 1956.

EPILOGUE (2023)

"The colourful, gay lifestyle of the great grandson of Alfred Lord Tennyson was being investigated by police last night, after he was found stabbed to death in bed. Relatives described Mr Tennyson, who has two children and seven grandchildren, as a 'colourful character' whose behaviour caused concern for his family." [24]

When Hallam died, Jonny and I received a huge number of letters of condolence and appreciation. It is tempting to quote from many, but to avoid this monograph becoming completely maudlin, let an extract from one suffice:

"Forty years ago, when I lived with your family, I called Hallam 'my English father' because he was everything I hoped a father would be. I was very young then, but over the years I have always regarded him as a marvellous person – full of energy and full of love. Even though it is now more than three months since he died, never a day goes past without a thought of him. I had not realised how deeply he was in my heart."

Perhaps none of us who knew him realised quite how deeply Hallam was embedded in all our hearts. He was, in spite of everything, a truly endearing human being. Perhaps it was his frailties together with his determination to live life to the full that made him so. In other words, he wasn't endearing despite his weaknesses but because of them.

[24] *The Times* December 23, 2003

For me, it always was (and still is) a question of proportion or perspective. But I still, nearly 20 years later, grapple with the question of why his urge for dangerous sexual encounters so much stronger than his love for his grandchildren? Perhaps I just find it too difficult to understand the nature of addiction or perhaps I was never able to accept that it was actually addiction that he was suffering from. As I had tried to explain to him in a letter some years earlier:

> *"It is my deep appreciation of your fine mind and emotional depth that makes the seamier aspects of your life so distressing. This is not to do with your homosexuality per se, that has never been an issue for me as you well know. But there is a big difference for me between accepting your sexual orientation and accepting with equal equanimity either your promiscuity and search for high-risk liaisons or you willingness to subordinate yourself to your latest lover."*

My intention when I started to write this, shortly after his death, was to create a fitting tribute to Hallam for his grandchildren: Sandra, Ricky, Alex, Matthew, Adie, Freddy and Eleanor. I hoped that if I could capture his qualities and personality vividly enough it would help them to remember what they loved so much about him and to lessen the shock of his terrible ending, the sensationalised newspaper coverage and the seemingly endless police enquiry. But when it came to it, I couldn't just sanitise his story. He was who he was and it felt important to be true to it all. So I wrote it and gave copies to the older children and kept copies for the younger ones to read when the time was right.

Although I didn't consciously write it as a therapeutic outlet for my own sense of shock and loss, this did prove to be an additional and welcome outcome. When I finished it I did feel that I was less angry with the world and that my father was no longer lost.

So why do I return to it now, so many years later?

I deeply dislike the cult of personality and resist the idea of positioning Hallam as someone more special than anyone else. However, because he wrote so much about his feelings and lived his complexity so openly, one has the opportunity to understand so much more than is usually possible about another human being. There is so much in the many writings he left behind it would have felt like a dreadful waste simply to set the project aside.

In Hallam's story, there are so many themes for our time: his lifelong struggle between the 'good' and 'evil' sides of his nature; his determination to be an individual in an increasingly homogenised world; the emergence of a remarkable and unique personality from out of the shadows of others; the tension between his strong and often conflicting emotional and sexual drives; the challenges he faced as a homosexual when it was still illegal; his feeling that, although he relished both roles, as a gay man he didn't quite deserve to be a parent or grandparent. There may be others for whom his story has resonance.

Alongside everything else, my father had a wry sense of humour and was capable of great wit and self-mockery. Imagine my delight when working on the sad task of organising his papers once the police had deemed his flat no longer a crime scene, I came across this wonderful piece of doggerel – written when he was 84!

"The reason I want to be Jewish

I've never been able to find.

My mother was anti-Semitic

Whilst my father was cautious but kind.

It has nothing to do with my foreskin

And nothing to do with my nose

And yet this peculiar feeling

Continually grows and grows.

So can somebody find me a Rabbi

Who'll accept with a semblance of joy

A randy old octogenarian

Who's gay as well as a goy?" [25]

[25] Goy is a Yiddish term for people who are not Jews.

SOURCES

Published work:

Our East London: A Study in Diversity (1938/9)

The Wall of Dust (1948)

Tito Lifts the Curtain (1955)

Saint on the March: Vinoba's Revolution by Love (1955)

The Dark Goddess (1956)

Talking of Gandhi (with Francis Watson) (1969)

Studies in Tennyson (ed.) (1981)

The Haunted Mind (1984)

Unpublished work:

Wimbledon Vampires

Beethoven's Trouser Button

Monograph on Peter Benenson

Other short stories

Personal papers:

Diaries

Writing notebooks

Letters from India (1945-7)

Letters to and from Ros

Letters to Ros and Jonny after Hallam's death

Warmest thanks are due to Vartin Melkonian for permission to use his portrait of Hallam on the cover of this monograph. This painting brilliantly captures Hallam's piercing gaze revealing both his sharp intelligence and his ever-enquiring mind..