



## The Memory Chalet

*Tony Judt*

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## **The Memory Chalet** Tony Judt

*The Memory Chalet* is a memoir unlike any you have ever read before. Each essay charts some experience or remembrance of the past through the sieve of Tony Judt's prodigious mind. His youthful love of a particular London bus route evolves into a reflection on public civility and interwar urban planning. Memories of the 1968 student riots of Paris meander through the divergent sex politics of Europe, before concluding that his generation was a revolutionary generation, but missed the revolution. A series of road trips across America lead not just to an appreciation of American history, but to an eventual acquisition of citizenship. Foods and trains and long-lost smells all compete for Judt's attention; but for us, he has forged his reflections into an elegant arc of analysis. All as simply and beautifully arranged as a Swiss chalet—a reassuring refuge deep in the mountains of memory.

## **The Memory Chalet Details**

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Author : Tony Judt

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## From Reader Review The Memory Chalet for online ebook

### Fionnuala says

A moving, thought provoking book by a man in the final stages of a neurodegenerative disorder for whom roaming the corridors of his own mind is about the only pleasure left in life. But what wonderful reflections he leaves us as he wanders through the rooms of his personal memory chalet; thoughts about train travel, growing up in post war London, the British education system, an adolescent dalliance with Labour Zionism, life at Cambridge, revolution, living in New York, national identities versus cosmopolitanism and finally back again to trains and one particular train winding its way around a quiet mountain in remotest Switzerland which, by the end of the book, we imagine Tony Judt traveling in perpetuity.

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### Danny says

It's hard to separate the contents of this book from the circumstances in which it was written. Trapped in an increasingly immobile body, Judt composed stories (essays, really) at night to keep his mind occupied and to divert his attention from the fact that he simply couldn't move. That struggle to maintain sanity runs through the whole book and starts the whole thing off on a somber note.

And yet, I found myself frequently smiling and even laughing as I read this. This isn't a matter of a saccharine 'triumph of the human spirit'. Judt was dying as he wrote this and you never forget that as a reader. What brought joy to me as a reader was Judt's ability to spin elaborate webs of meaning from the most mundane details: a sketch of the history of London that begins the color of the bus he took to school as a child is particularly memorable. Judt's writing on trains is worth the price of admission alone as far as I'm concerned - it's telling that his idea of paradise is riding a funicular up to an isolated Swiss village. Along the way, Judt offers insights on class, 1968, the problems with French intellectuals, Zionism, food, religious identity...

I'm the ideal reader for this book in many ways: an Jew who has spent substantial time in England, a historian of Europe who studied at Cambridge, a devotee of public transportation. But there's something in this for everyone who has ever looked back on their life and tried to make sense of it all.

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### Darryl says

Tony Judt (1948-2010), one of the 21st century's leading public intellectuals, was born in postwar London to Jewish parents, educated at Cambridge and the École Normale Supérieure in Paris, and taught at several universities, most notably Cambridge, UC Berkeley and NYU. He wrote several acclaimed books on 20th century European history, including *Postwar: A History of Europe Since 1945*, *Reappraisals: Reflections on the Forgotten Twentieth Century* and *Past Imperfect: French Intellectuals, 1944-1956*, and was a frequent contributor to *The New York Review of Books*, *The New Republic* and *The London Review of Books*.

In 2008 Judt was diagnosed with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), commonly known as Lou Gehrig's disease, an incurable neurodegenerative disorder that progressively robs the sufferer of his bodily function

while allowing his mind to remain intact. Judt first wrote about his condition in a poignant and unforgettable essay in *The New York Review of Books* entitled *Night*, which he dictated to an assistant while he was still able to speak:

*"In effect, ALS constitutes progressive imprisonment without parole. First you lose the use of a digit or two; then a limb; then and almost inevitably, all four. The muscles of the torso decline into near torpor, a practical problem from the digestive point of view but also life-threatening, in that breathing becomes at first difficult and eventually impossible without external assistance in the form of a tube-and-pump apparatus. In the more extreme variants of the disease, associated with dysfunction of the upper motor neurons (the rest of the body is driven by the so-called lower motor neurons), swallowing, speaking, and even controlling the jaw and head become impossible. I do not (yet) suffer from this aspect of the disease, or else I could not dictate this text.*

*"By my present stage of decline, I am thus effectively quadriplegic. With extraordinary effort I can move my right hand a little and can adduct my left arm some six inches across my chest. My legs, although they will lock when upright long enough to allow a nurse to transfer me from one chair to another, cannot bear my weight and only one of them has any autonomous movement left in it. Thus when legs or arms are set in a given position, there they remain until someone moves them for me. The same is true of my torso, with the result that backache from inertia and pressure is a chronic irritation. Having no use of my arms, I cannot scratch an itch, adjust my spectacles, remove food particles from my teeth, or anything else that—as a moment's reflection will confirm—we all do dozens of times a day. To say the least, I am utterly and completely dependent upon the kindness of strangers (and anyone else).*

*"During the day I can at least request a scratch, an adjustment, a drink, or simply a gratuitous re-placement of my limbs—since enforced stillness for hours on end is not only physically uncomfortable but psychologically close to intolerable. It is not as though you lose the desire to stretch, to bend, to stand or lie or run or even exercise. But when the urge comes over you there is nothing—nothing—that you can do except seek some tiny substitute or else find a way to suppress the thought and the accompanying muscle memory.*

*"But then comes the night. I leave bedtime until the last possible moment compatible with my nurse's need for sleep. Once I have been "prepared" for bed I am rolled into the bedroom in the wheelchair where I have spent the past eighteen hours. With some difficulty (despite my reduced height, mass, and bulk I am still a substantial dead weight for even a strong man to shift) I am maneuvered onto my cot. I am sat upright at an angle of some 110° and wedged into place with folded towels and pillows, my left leg in particular turned out ballet-like to compensate for its propensity to collapse inward. This process requires considerable concentration. If I allow a stray limb to be misplaced, or fail to insist on having my midriff carefully aligned with legs and head, I shall suffer the agonies of the damned later in the night."*

Despite his illness, Judt continued to dictate essays for *The New York Review of Books*, which comprise most of *The Memory Chalet*. He describes his life in a touching and engaging fashion, starting with his early childhood in London; his experience living in a kibbutz in Israel and how it affected his view of Israel, Zionism and what it meant to him to be Jewish; his college years in Cambridge and Paris; and his life in the United States, including his explanation of why he preferred to teach at American universities and to live in New York City. Other essays describe his great love of travel by train, the problem of sexual harassment in the university setting, 1968 and the failure of student revolutionaries to force meaningful change in Paris and elsewhere, and Jewish identity in the 21st century.

Judt died in August 2010. However, his NYRB essays, including most of those in *The Memory Chalet*, are available to all without subscription on the Review's web site, at <http://www.nybooks.com/search/?q=tony...> I cannot adequately put into words how much I enjoyed this book, and, similar to an intimate conversation with a dear friend, it is one that I will revisit repeatedly over the years.

## Tá? a Sedláková says

dychberúca a hlavurozširujúca šleha! z ktorej keď sa spamätám, tak napíšem rozvinutú vetu. (11/1)

dop??am dojmy (13/1)

?aká ma dlhá cesta vlakom. Ke? ho zazriem v nede?ný podve?er prichádza? na ufú?anú bratislavskú stanicu, poteším sa. Predstavujem si, ako budeme v teplom kupé?ku - spolu s ostatnými prevažne vzdelávacím systémom vyhostenými a po poznaní hladujúcimi študentmi a študentkami - ako krvinky v tepne pretína? uzinené polia a lesy. Ešte iba tuším - neviem, že ma ?aká do?ítanie krásnej životnej výpovede zarámovanej do toho najvkusnejšie vybraného, podstatnými detailmi zdobeného historického rámu. Táto výpove? sa tiež vezie odniekiaľ niekam.. vo vlaku. Navždy.

Tony Judt bol britsko-americko-židovsko-aktoviešteaký(a-?o-tam-vlastne-po-tom) historik s vedomos?ami a citom pre strednú Európu a dianie v nej. Nebolo tomu tak vždy. Jeho záujem o krajinky, v ktorých priestoroch najintenzívnejšie prežívam a stávam sa za?al až v dynamickom období, keď sa tieto krajiny prebúdzali k novým podobám. O 26 rokov – celý môj doterajší život – na to, v ?ase, kedy Judt píše túto knihu, je jasné, že onedlho zomrie. Kým sa tak stane, bude prebývať v tele postihnutom vážnym neurologickým ochorením (ALS). S vedomím vlastnej absolútne beznádejnej prognózy, ?oraz v horšom stave. Nie ?ahká situácia. "Zmysluplnos? utrpenia" sklo?ovaná tak ?asto kres?anmi, ani start-up-istami, manažérmi a psychológmi frekventovane sklo?ované slovo „výzva“ tu na vysvetlenie situácie akosi, hm, tragikomicky neposta?uje.

Totíž.. to, ?o je napísané v tejto knihe presahuje slová. Je to dielo nad jazykom, dielo žitia. Existenciálna ties?ava premenená na šírú líku života, resp. spomínania na ?u. Jej vyvolávanie v chorobou znehybnenom tele. Transcendencia spomienkami. ?ítanie tejto knihy pripomína životodarné prebývanie v košatých spomienkach na rôznorodé a bezhrani?né podoby Tonyho Judta – rozh?adeného, vnímavého, sebareflektívneho a kritického, citlivo cynického a preto vzácné vtípného oby?ajného ?loveka. Kapitoly z jeho každodennosti sú skoncentrovaným významom podstatného bez zbyto?ných slov. No áno, presný opak toho, na ?o som zvyknutá z virtuálnych a iných priestorov, v ktorých sme sa my ?udia („ktorí medzi sebou komunikujeme ako sms-ky“) udomácnili. Holá výpove? o týchto živých spomienkach ma zasiahla (a myslím, že je to univerzálna schopnos? tejto knihy) do toho naj?ervenejšieho stredu ?loveka a vyburcovala vo mne zvedavos?. Chcela by som si túto knihu alebo aspo? niektoré jej ?asti pre?íta? ešte na gymplí. Napríklad namiesto tých nieko?ko ve?a školských chví?, po?as ktorých nám dejepisár ukazoval, že sa pod pyramídou dá nabrúsi? žiletka alebo roztopi? maslo. Jááj - ako ve?mi by som to chcela! Nevadí, vlak zastavil, ale iba na chví?ku.

Ke? som z vlaku vystúpila na pražskej železni?nej stanici premkol ma pocit ako ešte nikdy - jeden z tých zaznávaných pravdo-láska?ských a najhavlovských, ale o ve?a sýtejší. Cesta medzi svetom strednej Európy a svetom západu (v tom najlepšom zmysle slova a s myšlienkou na (aj) Judtové sympatie k uvedomelému odriekaniu v porovnaní s oslavou konzumu) pre m?a ešte nikdy nebola priepustnejšia. V?aka za to, že obojstranne!

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## Courtney Johnston says

A 'memory palace', Judt says in this introduction of short biographical texts, is too big, too opulent for his state of mind right now. But a memory chalet - like the small, homey place he stayed with his family as a 10-year-old on a trip to Switzerland when finances were unusually good - yes, a memory chalet he could handle.

'Memory palace' here refers to the memory trick, of laying out a speech or train of thought for later recall by pinning each point to a familiar feature of a building. It's a tool Judt has come to use and to hone over long sleepless nights. Dying of Lou Gehrig's disease - a neurological disorder which sees him first lose control of his limbs, and then, the time will come, of his diaphragm, meaning he can't push air over his vocal cords, and therefore cannot write nor speak - each night his caregiver wheels him to his cot, lays him out carefully (when you can't move, any misalignment of head to neck, neck to chest, torso to limbs, is agonising), and leaves him in the dark, not to sleep, but to remember and to write inside his head, waiting until the next day comes and he can mutter and murmur his 'writing' to a friend, who will take it down for him.

It is appalling to stand by as such a literate and literary man, a man in love with words and languages, is slowly stripped of his power to communicate. And Judt is not going gently - he describes the disease as a catastrophe. But he does not dwell on it; instead, the little histories (quite like anything he's written before, and originally never intended for publication) cast back to his childhood, his father's love of Citroen cars, his own solitary adventures on London's bus and subway networks, family holidays and ferries to France, his schooling and university years, his gradual move from the 'isms' of the 1960s to a detached reasoning type of history later in his career.

Perhaps because they were not intended to be published, but were more of a survival mechanism, the essays do not come across as at all pious or sentimental - they are not intended to help us live better lives, or meet death with a smiling face. Instead, they feel like a slow tracking of many threads: as Judt's life rapidly contracts to what is available inside his own head, he uses this material for mental exercise.

I found the meditations on contemporary Jewish identity (Judt is Jewish, but not practicing, outgrew his teenage Zionism quickly, and is bemused, even frustrated, by contemporary American Jewish attitudes towards the Middle East) particularly interesting. We have copies of Judt's history of post-World War II Europe and his 'Ill Fares the Land' on contemporary politics lying about the house. I look forward to getting further acquainted.

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### **Kay (aka) Miss Bates says**

A remarkable book from a remarkable man, written while he was dying of ALS. I highlighted, reread, and was overwhelmed at Judt's clear-sighted, articulate ability to read the tenor of our times. Every chapter is a gem of wisdom, erudition, and honesty. Some of my favourites are his account of a volatile, beloved teacher, his rejection of the isms of the day for a vision of a humanity who engages, educates, and is eager to be educated, who puts public life and introspection as goods over the market of so-called necessity, who asks us to define ourselves by our shared humanity and not the narrowness of "identity". He has much to offer in our troubled times and if you read one nonfiction book this year, it should be this one.

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### **Cindy Knoke says**

Such a haunting and beautiful book by such a brilliant man.

While dying of ALS Judt envisions heaven as a train on which he rides continuously through the Alps. This

evocative imagery has stayed with me and probably always will.

While becoming progressively “locked in” by ALS, Judt’s mind remains very much alive. He escapes into “the memory chalet,” a Swiss chalet he stayed in on holidays as a child. He recalls in his memory every room, nook and cranny, the smells, the food, the snow, the happy memories.

He does this with other memories of his life as well, and shares these memories with the reader. We are the better for it.

Judt who had made such a huge contribution to all of us through his life long scholarship, continues to make a huge contribution to us as he dies. He let’s us realize the power of our minds to help us escape from intolerable circumstances and shows us that memories can be almost as powerful as reality.

Somehow, through brutal honesty, and no-sugar coating, he makes the process of dying from something as horrific as ALS seem less terrifying. His memories provide great comfort to him and to the reader.

Highly recommend this inspiring and moving book.

I wish Judt endless sunny skies on his train as he rides through the Alps.

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## Dymbula says

Překvapivě dobré, zvláště pasáže se vzpomínkami na dětství. Chvilí mě dráždily jeho názory politické, ale pak mi došlo, že to podává upřímně, toho si cením, i když s ním třeba nesouhlasím. Nemarné čtení.

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## Guy says

Goodreads' custom of using the text from the inside of the front hardcover dust-jacket as their summary goes awry here by leaving out a critical fact (which is on the back cover): Tony Judt wrote this book while in the terminal stages of ALS (also known as Lou Gehrig's disease), a neuro-degenerative disorder that progressively paralyzes the sufferer's body while leaving the mind totally untouched. Most people who get it die within a couple of years, usually of suffocation, or of complications due to immobility or lung disfunction. It is for now incurable and untreatable. Essentially, as Judt says, it is a life sentence in which you are imprisoned in your own body.

Now, you might be thinking Dr. Johnson's Dog here, but you'd be wrong. This is a good little memoir independent of the fact that Judt had advanced ALS while he wrote it. Not tremendously profound, but nevertheless with interesting observations and insights, and successful (it seems to me) in giving one a feel for what it was that made him such an important voice. No, the reason why it is critical to mention ALS in the summary is two-fold: first, because it explains both the title and the genesis of the book, and second, because it contains as devastating and as brave a first-person description of a fatal disease as I have come across. It is worth getting the book just to read the chapter entitled "Night".

Perhaps it means more to me than it will to most people. My father has treated patients with ALS, and been active in research to understand how ALS develops and how it might be cured, for forty years. I've spoken with him about ALS, I've read research papers on it, I've even written software to help predict the likely

timeline for a patient, and yet not until I read Judt's description of what it is like to have ALS did I really understand what a terrible disease it is. The stuff of nightmares... even if you don't have claustrophobia. And out of the horror comes this calm, measured book. Respect, Tony, deep respect. I'll be reading your other books.

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### **Lauren Albert says**

Judt's tragic death from Lou Gehrig's disease was preceded by its horrifying symptoms--a creeping paralysis which makes movement and then communication impossible. While he lay in bed each night, unable to move from his bed, Judt composed these wonderful essays in his head and then dictated them the next day. After having read both this and *Ill Fares the Land*, I can only say that if one must be trapped inside a mind--unimaginable as that is--I can think of few minds it would be better to be trapped in than Tony Judt's. Articulate, compassionate, cosmopolitan, well-read and well-traveled, Judt moves through the very expansive confines of his memory chalet and shares his travels with the reader. None of the essays are simply "personal"--discussions of his love of riding trains leads to a discussion of the decline of public rail systems and what this means (something he discusses in *"Ill Fares"* as well). Memories of his education leads him to think about what a public education means and what its goals should be. A terrible loss of a writer I only just "found." I hope more people discover him as I did. I know I'll never be able to ride the railroad again without thinking of him...

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### **Jonfaith says**

**The young woman was flabbergasted: the only form of discrimination she could imagine was sexual. It had never occurred to her that I might just be an elitist.**

Allow an extra 1.25 stars for the circumstances of its origin. This is series of light pieces, incipient memory exercise that Judt steadied his mind with during the interminable nights of his terminal affliction with ALS. There is some fascinating material here, especially of an intellectual historical basis. Much appears to have been imagined in longer forms with Timothy Snyder in the *Reappraisals: Reflections on the Forgotten Twentieth Century*. This is an ideal commute book

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### **Dan says**

includes a stark insights into the world of ALS sufferers that hit home

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### **Sauli says**

I usually don't write reviews, but..

Nostalgia for something you never experienced is a curious feeling. This book tells us about a world that has disappeared. A world of arrogant French intellectuals debating abstract theories and declaring that everything must be destroyed before it can be built again. A world of old-school university teachers who didn't seem to give a damn whether their students are following them or not. A world of lengthy discussions, very erudite and very irresponsible about the latest intellectual trends. A world where it was taken for granted everyone in higher education knows the Western Canon. A world where the most gifted students would choose careers in the academia or the administration over investment banks. A world of the welfare state, of trade unions and mass politics. Finally, a world of something as exciting as the sexual revolution which ironically signalled the inevitable end of the era.

It was also a world of casual racism, a world of casual sexism. A world where homosexuality did not exist. A world where students could seriously support some of the most horrible dictatorships of history. A world where to proclaim the greatness of the Chinese cultural revolution was trendy. A world where white old men were the norm and few questioned it. A world where individuality was frowned upon and in the conflict between individuality and security, security was preferred to the point of dullness and homogeneity. A world where something as ridiculous as Paris -68 could seem important while students who claimed to be communists ignored what was going on in Prague, or indeed called those who really were fighting for real liberty revisionistic traitors.

Thus was the world of post-war modernity . For me to feel nostalgic about it is indulgent and privileged. Much has become better after that. But it was also a world of certainty, of the belief in progress, of the idea that intellectual discussion and ideas in themselves matter. That the world will improve and we humans know how to do that. It was the best of times, it was the worst of times. May the arrogance never be back. But sometimes one can't help hoping that we did not know what we know now, no matter how indulgent and selfish such a thought is.

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## **Jennifer says**

I have such mixed feelings about this book - but I am not sure whether some of those are not mixed feelings about my own motivations in choosing to read the book. He lays his cards on the table from the beginning, describing with a cool bitterness exactly what it means to have ALS. Judt's was an interesting life, shorter than it should have been, and he moves with ease between his secular Jewish upbringing in Putney, why he learned Czech, his time as a kibbutzim, driving across America and plenty more. I found the book a very engaging, intellectually satisfying yet easy read.

Yet I was also uncomfortable. A little voice kept saying to me that too much of this was Grumpy Old Men (as per TV series) rendered respectable, given gravitas, by tragedy and a forceful intellect (or way with words - he does write about whether articulacy and intelligence are the same thing).

When he writes about the current English secondary school system, he sounds remarkably like a Daily Telegraph-dependent ex-pat. Grains, maybe even the odd boulder of truth, but for a thoughtful historian a very lazy-seeming set of easy unoriginal generalisations which made me wonder about the other commentaries which lack of knowledge forces me to take at face value. There were a number of other instances of a similar nature, for example, when he talks about an elderly Swiss lady upbraiding him for putting his foot up on the opposite train seat and adds that by contrast no one in the UK would notice or care. Be too reticent or even, sadly, intimidated, yes but elderly (or honestly barely middle-aged) English women not notice or care?

Ultimately, it doesn't really matter what I think or whether some of the observations are not all that fresh, or

just not shared - if the exercise of generating this book gave a quantum of solace to Judt's lonely, immobile nights, that's enough. And as I did enjoy it, that's more than enough.

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## Kelly says

This has to be one of the sadder books I've read. It's not quite on the level of *Memories of my Melancholy Whores*, which I couldn't even bear to finish, or quite the terror that *1984* was, and doesn't have the anguish of *End of the Affair*. It was sad in a different way.

Tony Judt died last year of ALS, a degenerative disease that left him increasingly immobile- first just in fingers and toes, then entire arms and legs until he could not move at all. In the first essay of this collection, he matter-of-factly details what he goes through every day. During his daylight hours, he generally has someone to talk to, to dictate things to, he can be moved about more frequently, etc. But his problem is the nighttime- when he is put in his bed in one position that he can't move from the entire night- not even a minor adjustment. The least uncomfortable position at the particular moment he goes to bed is the best he can hope for. So in order to distract himself, since he is, understandably, unable to sleep at night, he tries out the "memory palace" mental exercise from *The Memory Palace of Matteo Ricci*. As might be implied by its name, what this involves is the mental construction of a memory "palace" that you can picture vividly and in detail in your head, with different routes through it and many different rooms. The idea is that you can attach a particular memory, or argument that you wish to make to a particular way through the palace, or put it in a series of drawers in a desk in your study, and remember it by the order in which you open them. It's a cognitive exercise that allows for much higher retention rates in many people. It was a very effective method for Judt to pass his nights and remember what he had thought through the next morning.

Judt constructs a memory "chalet", rather than a memory "palace" for himself. His "chalet" is a modest vacation spot in Switzerland he used to go with his family. A palace would have been far too much for a good social democrat like Judt. He makes quite a point of describing the small, completely unremarkable nature of this chalet, except that he remembers it in every detail over fifty years later. In order to construct his mental house, he starts at the foundation- his childhood, and dictates a series of essays that take us through his personal growth process until he reaches adulthood, and then has a further group of essays that discourse on varied topics that his background has given him strong opinions on.

It's a sad project on a number of levels, most vividly because of his construction. In his chapter about the ALS, he talks extensively about all the things he has lost- his ability to do even the most basic things for himself, and how he has had to learn to do without everything except, really, his ability to think, and his ability to slowly and painfully articulate those thoughts. His life as an academic has, fortunately, been based a great deal on these skills, but he is nonetheless sharp about telling us that there is no happiness or no gift in his increased time to think, just a momentary escape, if that.

All of his essays about his life seem to be an attempt to reclaim the functioning human being that he was before the disease completely changed the way he lived every moment. In order to be able to connect to the person he once was, he starts with a chapter on the period he was born into, Austerity Britain just after the war. This chapter allows him to reconstruct his past into a helpful foundation that seems to give him more weapons to fight the disease. If he can convince himself that he has been doing without all his life, perhaps the things he lives through will be more bearable. Thus, the themes of "Austerity," his minimal needs, scrimping and saving, and feeling uncomfortable with luxury are found in nearly all the chapters afterwards. The dark side of this house he's building is that he doesn't seem to be able to understand the parts of his life that were not about this anymore. He is unsympathetic to any frivolity, anything that is bigger than it needed

to be, anything flashy or anything fun. He is even impatient with any expressions of passion, need, or strong emotion. In one chapter that deals with his teenage dedication to the cause of Israel and the communist kibbutzes he lived on over several summers, and he dismisses his own passions as fundamentally ridiculous and concentrates instead on proving why he was right to leave the place and ultimately come to have a longstanding suspicion of both communism and Israel.

As he builds up his house from his childhood, it becomes tragically clear (at least to me) that he doesn't seem to be able to remember feeling things, or else deliberately is shutting them out. Moral rectitude, incisive reasoning, sharp denunciations of nonsense, this is what he's interested in. He wants to boil down to essentials, to get the most important stuff out because he knows that he hasn't much time left, so it feels like he builds a narrative about "austerity," that seeks to slowly show the reader what is left after the trifles are cleared away. He uses this to make wider points about socialism, social democracy, community, the purpose of the state, and what morality really means. With some striking exceptions (which I will discuss in a minute), you get the feeling like he feels like he has to hide any pleasure he once took in things that were not serious or essential or driven by clear ideas. When his family makes money, he's always careful to note that it wasn't too much, or temporary, or the fact that he didn't enjoy the fruits of it. When he describes his family's European vacations, there's a weird sort of pride in him about it, so to make up for it he has to emphasize over and over the small hotels they stayed in, the second class tickets they bought, how cheap things were in Europe, and his father's continental heritage- like otherwise he might be a poor little rich boy we wouldn't listen to. His father had a passion for cars, and he theorizes about what they meant to him, but he denies any similar feeling vehemently. It's so... guilty, I guess would be the word. It also seems to completely flatten his life out in a way that doesn't seem fair- but perhaps it is the only way he could understand it at the time. I don't know, but it's difficult not to psychoanalyze this mental exercise, which after all involves undertaking exactly the sort of diving into the past, discussions of parents, friends and lovers that a lot of psychiatry deals in.

Perhaps inevitably, it was some tiny little moments where some unexpected nostalgia, lushness, or longing broke through that were the most powerful for me. He describes the house where he grew up in London (his favorite one of the houses anyway- he hated the bigger house his parents moved to in the suburbs during a "brief interlude of prosperity"), and allows himself some lushness of description and idealization of the remnants of Victorian and Edwardian life that he finds there- the flower sellers, the last functioning stable in the city. He rigorously denies himself much nostalgia within his own life (except for morally acceptable objects that his socialist views would approve of), but he allows himself nostalgia for something he never knew, and an era he should be rights reject. He lets himself go much more towards the end in his more general, thematic essays, too. He allows himself a Victorian flourish in the chapter where he discusses how he ended up marrying his wife (which, beware, there are going to be a lot of women who won't find his views in that chapter particularly palatable- it's a whole thing about the negative, suspicious atmosphere that the fear of sexual harassment creates, and generally is one of those, "things used to be easier" articles). It ends with a, "Reader: I married her." His essay, "Edge People," (which I love), romantically illustrates bygone cosmopolitan cities as he tries to articulate his own nostalgia for cultural markers, changes, and meetings, places where things were mixed, rather than cultures where boundaries seemed to disappear and melt because of all-embracing consumerism that makes everything look the same. (An earlier essay, about people who cross the Channel for merely economic purposes- to buy things, rather than to see things, which has made changing countries and areas much less visible, foreshadows this line of thought.)

My favorite, though, is his love of trains. He's never made a secret of it, and he's written several essays on it. His great work, *Postwar* opens with him at a train station. I'm actually surprised he didn't construct a "memory train station," rather than a chalet. Usually, though, he tries to make a point about state projects, faith in the state, infrastructure and jobs, etc. In this book, he finally looks at it in a way that seems to finally explain the root of it, and makes me understand, perhaps, why he's been so strident about it all his life. It's the passion that not even his disease could take from him, the one that seems to have become stronger, if anything. It seems to get at a core of something important about him that I'd never seen expressed before,

something so sympathetic, so lovely, I can't resist reproducing the passage in full here.:

*“According to the literary theorist Rene Girard, we come to yearn for and eventually love those who are loved by others. I cannot confirm this from personal experience- I have a history of frustrated longings for objects and women who were palpably unavailable to me but of no particular interest to anyone else. But there is one sphere of my life in which implausibly, Girard's theory of mimetic desire could be perfectly adapted to my experience: if by “mimetic” we mean mutuality and symmetry, rather than mimicry and contestation, I can vouch for the credibility of this proposition. I love trains, and they have always loved me back.*

*What does it mean to be loved by a train? Love, it seems to me, is that condition in which one is most contentedly oneself. If this sounds paradoxical, remember Rilke's admonition: love consists in leaving the loved one space to be themselves while providing the security within which the self may flourish. As a child, I always felt uneasy and a little constrained around people, my family in particular. Solitude was bliss, but not easily obtained. Being always felt stressful- wherever I was there was something to do, someone to please, a duty to be completed, a role inadequately fulfilled: something amiss. Becoming, on the other hand, was relief. I was never so happy as when I was going somewhere on my own, and the longer it took to get there, the better. Walking was pleasurable, cycling enjoyable, bus journeys fun. But the train was very heaven.*

*I never bothered to explain this to parents or friends, and was thus constrained to feign objectives: places I wanted to go, people I wanted to see, things I needed to do. Lies, all of it... I took solitary tube trips around London from a very young age. If I had a goal, it was to cover the whole network, from terminus to terminus, an aspiration I came very close to achieving. What did I do when I reached the end of a line, Edgware as it might be, or Ongar? I stepped out, studied the station rather closely, glanced around me... and took the next tube back.*

*The technology, the architecture, and working practices of a railway system fascinated me from the outset- I can describe even today the peculiarities of the separate London Underground lines and their station layouts. But I was never a “trainspotter.” Even when I graduated to solitary travel on the extensive network of British Railways' Southern Region I never joined the enthusiastic bands of anorak-clad preteenage boys at the end of the platforms, assiduously noting down the numbers of passing trains. This seemed to me the most asinine of static pursuits- the point of a train was to get on it.”*

Out of the harshness, deprivation, austerity, and disillusion comes this wonderful paean to the one thing that his worldviews never necessitated that he abandon, that no amount of travel or time could get rid of. It becomes the essence of the things he has lost, and the memory that seems the true escape from his current condition.

I admit that I teared up when he came back to this, so fittingly, at the end. Even behind his comforting symbol of Right Thinking in Switzerland, was this pure, wonderful passion for trains that was his true home. His last paragraph reads:

*“There is a path of sorts that accompanies, Murren's pocket railway. Halfway along, a little café- the only stop on the line- serves the usual run of Swiss wayside fare. Ahead, the mountain falls steeply away into the rift valley below. Behind, you can clamber up to the summer barns with the cows and goats and shepherds. Or you can just wait for the next train: punctual, predictable and precise to the second. Nothing happens: it is the happiest place in the world. We cannot choose where we start out in life, but we may finish where we will. I know where I shall be: going nowhere in particular on that little train, forever and ever.”*

I try not to indulge in too many fantasies of an uncertain afterlife, but I can't help hoping that is exactly what he found. RIP, Professor Judt. You always knew what was important, and you helped me to see that, too. I wish I could have thanked you for that.

