



Ardent Spirits: Leaving Home, Coming Back

Reynolds Price

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In his third volume of memoir, Reynolds Price explores six crucial years of his life -- his departure from home in 1955 to spend three years as a student at Oxford University; then his return to North Carolina to begin his long career as a university teacher.

He gives often moving, and frequently comic, portraits of his great teachers in England -- such men as Lord David Cecil, Nevill Coghill, and W. H. Auden, who was the most distinguished English-language poet of those years. In London the poet and editor Stephen Spender becomes his first publisher and a generous friend who introduces him to rewarding figures like the essayist Cyril Connolly and George Orwell's encouraging widow, Sonia. He spends rich months traveling in Britain and on the Continent; and above all he undergoes the first loves of his life -- one with an Oxford colleague whom he describes as a "romantic friend" and another with an older man.

Back in the States, in his first class at Duke he meets a startlingly gifted student in the sixteen-year-old Anne Tyler; and he soon combines the difficult pleasures of teaching English composition and literature with his own hard delight in learning to write a first novel. At the end of three lonely years, he completes the novel -- *A Long and Happy Life* -- and returns to England for a fourth year before his novel appears in Britain and America and meets with a success that sets the pace for an ongoing life of fiction, poetry, plays, essays, and translations (*Ardent Spirits* is his thirty-eighth volume).

The droll memories recorded here amount to the unsurpassed -- and, again, often comical -- story of a writer's beginnings; and the young man who emerges has proven his right to stand by his fellows of whatever sex and goal. *Ardent Spirits* is a book that penetrates deeply into the life of a writer, a teacher, and a steadfast lover.



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