

Walter Fraser Oakeshott 1903–1987

I

WALTER OAKESHOTT died at his home at Eynsham, near Oxford on 13 October 1987: he was eighty-four. He had had a very remarkable career. He was High Master of St. Paul's 1939–46, Headmaster of Winchester 1946–54, Rector of Lincoln College 1954–72, and Vice-Chancellor of Oxford 1962–4. He was Master of the Skinners' Company 1960–1, and served on their court for a number of years, was a long-standing Trustee of the Pilgrim Trust, a member of the Roxburghe Club, and President of the Bibliographical Society 1966–8. He also wrote with high erudition on a very wide variety of subjects. He was one of the principal joint authors of the report which in 1938 presented the findings of the inquiry into unemployment sponsored by the Pilgrim Trust. He wrote on medieval cosmography, on sixteenth-century exploration, on literature and politics at the court of Elizabeth I, and on medieval art and sculpture, above all on the art and artists of the Winchester Bible, his most abiding academic interest.

Two things stand out about the man from this bare factual record. One is that he was a polymath: trained as a classicist, he made himself a scholar in a remarkably diverse range of subjects. The second is that he succeeded in living, in the twentieth century, what the Middle Ages called the *mixed life*, 'sometime contemplative and sometime active'. He had to carve out from a busy career with heavy administrative and educational responsibilities the time for the research and reflection

that were his lifeblood. The medieval analogy is in one regard perhaps not quite accurate, since Oakeshott's contemplative preoccupations were with scholarly matter rather than with the spiritual exercises that Walter Hilton wrote of in his *Epistle of the Mixed Life*. There was a genuine touch of the mystic in him, though, as anyone will recognise who opens the marvellous anthology, based on readings that he had selected for school prayers at St. Paul's, and that he tidied together at Winchester, *The Sword of the Spirit*. Here, amid many finely chosen passages from Scripture and much poetry, is Plato in the *Symposium*, 'the man who has learned this much of love, that he can see what is beautiful in all its order and pattern, will at last reach the goal he is seeking'; here is St. Bernard, 'God is never sought in vain, even when we do not find him'; here is Albert Einstein, 'the most beautiful and profound emotion we can experience is the sensation of the mystical. It is the source of all true science.' The selection of passages testifies to the cast of mind of the man who chose them.

Walter Oakeshott was born in 1903, the second son of Dr Walter Oakeshott. His father had emigrated to South Africa when his own father's early death left the family in straitened circumstances: the tragedy repeated itself when Dr Oakeshott died early of pneumonia, leaving a widow and four small children. Mrs Oakeshott decided to bring the family back to England, where they found a home in Pirbright and were much befriended by the children's Oakeshott aunts, 'the Hendon sisters'. In due course Walter was sent first to Westerleigh, a preparatory school at St. Leonards', and thence with a scholarship to Tonbridge. There he rose to be a senior classicist, and in his last year was head boy.

From Tonbridge Oakeshott won an Exhibition to Balliol. He came up to Oxford in 1922, achieved a First in classical 'Mods' and a First in Greats in 1926. Among his tutors Cyril Bailey, who taught him for Mods, was probably the strongest personal influence: they remained on intimate terms until Bailey's death.

Balliol was a very active time for Oakeshott. He rowed in Eights and acted with the Balliol players, taking the parts of Hippolytus and of Orestes in the Greek plays that they took on tour in the summer vacations. In the General Strike of 1926 he, together with a group of Oxford friends, organised the production and circulation of a newspaper, *The British Independent*, whose aim was to offer reliable and impartial news that would counter the bias of the media: the last number sold 20,000 copies. Philip Mason, his contemporary, described

him at Balliol as 'perhaps the best liked and most admired undergraduate of his generation'. The influence of his Balliol days was certainly powerful: it was there that he made friends who were to be close to him all his life, Roger Mynors, Kenneth Johnston (who translated the *Hippolytus* for the Balliol Players), Geoffrey Meade, André Nairac (later Attorney-General of Mauritius), Philip Mason, my father Hugh Keen (later Secretary to the Oxford University Chest when Oakeshott was Vice-Chancellor). It was also while he was at Balliol that the most passionate interest of his life, in the history of art, began to develop, first sparked, it would seem, by Sir John Beazley's lectures on Greek vase-painting.

Oakeshott left Balliol in 1926 for a post as assistant master at Tooting Bec School, deliberately avoiding for his first job the 'independent sector'. It was while he was in his next post, at Merchant Taylors', that he became engaged to Noël Moon, a friend of his own Oxford circle and herself a classicist (she had achieved a rare Distinction in the Diploma in Classical Archaeology, and in the year before they married held the Gilchrist studentship at the British School in Rome); and a classicist moreover who, like himself, had been fired by Beazley's teaching. They were married in 1928: their first child, Helena, was born in 1931, followed by the twins, Evelyn and Robert, in 1933, and Rose, their last-born, in 1940. It was a very close and affectionate family — and has remained so.

In 1931, after two and a half years at Merchant Taylors' and a spell spent working for the Kent County Education Committee, Oakeshott was appointed to an assistant mastership at Winchester, where he remained until 1939. These were very important years in his life. Always unusually sensitive to visual beauty, the buildings and furnishings both of Winchester College and of the cathedral made a sharp impression on him, nurturing a love that he never lost. In the school he made a powerful impression as a teacher of wide reading and high intelligence. The Headmaster, Dr Williams, noting his strong bibliophile interests, early appointed him to be the first librarian of Moberly library, the new school library sited in the former 'Brew house', a post that was to prove important for him. In 1936 his first book, *Commerce and Society*, was published, a survey of the impact of commercial exchange on social structures from the earliest times to the industrial revolution: it was well received. In this same period also he began to develop the interest in early maps and exploration that inspired another book, published in 1942, *Founded upon the Seas*, a study remarkable for

its successful integration of the tumultuous story of English sixteenth-century seamanship with the parallel story of the Renaissance (classically inspired) and expansion of cosmographical scholarship in the same age.

Two events of this time were of greater significance and brought him more sharply into the public eye. One was his discovery, in the Fellows' Library of Winchester, of the unique manuscript of Malory's *Morte Darthur* — of which more presently. The other was an invitation to join the team setting to work on the inquiry into unemployment, sponsored by the Pilgrim Trust. Spencer Leeson, now Headmaster of Winchester, granted him a year's leave of absence, later extended to four terms, so that he could take up the offer. The idea of the inquiry was the brainchild of Archbishop William Temple, to whom Oakeshott was already known: Sandy Lindsay, who had been Master of Balliol when Oakeshott was an undergraduate, was a member of Temple's steering committee, so the invitation was less surprising at the time than Oakeshott's subsequent career might suggest. He threw himself enthusiastically into the work, especially into the interviewing of the unemployed on which the survey was based, and took a main hand in writing up its findings, which appeared as a book under the title *Men Without Work*.

Men Without Work is a remarkable book, a model of sociological inquiry that perhaps uniquely among publications of its type and time still holds its place on the open shelves of sociology libraries (it has been twice reprinted). Its lucid statistical analyses drove home the point, previously ignored, that after recession the figures for the long-term unemployed — the hard core of the real social problem of unemployment — tend to continue to rise long after recovery has begun. Perhaps the most striking feature of the book, though, is the understanding and feeling of the reports of the interviews, in their homes, of the longer-term unemployed. It is here that Oakeshott's hand in the work is most discernible, in the concern with individuals relayed through its vivid vignettes of hardship, aspiration and disappointment, together with the sense conveyed of the waste, in terms of human resources and creativity, that then as now was the blackest aspect of prolonged worklessness in an advanced society.

II

When, very shortly after his return from his time with the Pilgrim Trust to Winchester, Oakeshott was appointed to be High Master of St. Paul's, war was looming. By the time that he took up his new position, it was clear that in the event of war's outbreak there were just two options for the school he was to head — to close for the duration or to move out of London, which would be utterly exposed to the expected *Blitzkrieg*. By the time that war did break out in September 1939, Oakeshott and the Surmaster, H. A. M. Tyson, had an operational plan in place. The school would move into a wing of Easthampstead Park in Berkshire (put at its disposal through the good offices of Lady Downshire): the boys would be billeted in and around Crowthorne (four miles away): Wellington College had generously offered shared use of its playing fields. In the summer of 1939 there was a practice evacuation, the boys travelling by bicycle from London. In September the plan was implemented, and St. Paul's, and Walter Oakeshott, spent the next six years at Crowthorne.

The evacuation was a triumph of smooth administration, gifted improvisation and charismatic leadership. But evacuation was only the beginning of the problems, for St. Paul's, principally a day school, had now to acclimatise itself to boarding conditions. 'We were a strange hybrid of a school', Oakeshott himself wrote, 'neither boarding nor day . . . but we attempted to cling desperately to the virtues of both.' Cling they did, and with amazing success, in which his leadership was a key factor. He taught (more than his share as High Master), he talked (to everybody, masters and their wives, boys, reluctant and recalcitrant landladies), manoeuvred ways round endless unforeseen difficulties. At the end of six years Oakeshott carried St. Paul's back to West Kensington, a journey less dramatic than the evacuation but hardly less fraught with practical problems (blitzed buildings, playing fields to be resuscitated from allotments, a whole range of new readjustments). By October 1945 he had it back up and running on its old site.

St. Paul's had been back in London only very briefly when Oakeshott was chosen by the Warden and Fellows of Winchester to succeed Leeson as Headmaster. There, from September 1946, he was to spend eight fruitful years. It was not an easy period, one of post-war austerity and shortages, of inelastic finances, of some governmental hostility to the public schools, and during which, for many, the realisation dawned

only slowly that the ways of the pre-Second War world would never return. Unsurprisingly in the circumstances it is not an easy period in Oakeshott's career to assess.

In most outward things — Winchester's ancient buildings apart — the mark that he left on the school was not a very sharp one. Though he had shown at St. Paul's, in the crisis of war and evacuation, high administrative talents, administration was not Oakeshott's preferred preoccupation. At Winchester he found an able, intelligent and idiosyncratic set of housemasters, who prized their independence; he was content (save on one occasion) not to intrude much in the way they ran their houses. An educator rather than an educationist, he did not seek to make great innovations in classroom or curriculum. One small step was taken, through the appointment first of George Seddon and then of H. C. A. Gaunt, that nursed through its vulnerable fledgling days at Winchester the study of English Literature as a sixth form subject. To anyone who was at the school in those days, the power of his influence as Headmaster was apparent: the evidence of it, in terms of tangible things done, is less easy to recapitulate.

As Headmaster, Oakeshott was liked and respected by his staff, both as a leader and as a scholar, and by some loved, greatly. Where his personal impact was above all powerful was on the boys individually who were lucky enough (as I was) to be in the school during the eight years of his headmastership. He had a peculiar capacity, when he spoke to anyone, to give the sense that for the time his whole attention was theirs. Stories of his visits to boys in high fever in the sanatorium, chatting to them and when they were recovering reading aloud to them, are still remembered among Wykehamists of the time. 'My son's career was made possible by your father's interest in the welfare of the young and the encouragement that he gave them', the mother of one of the school's Quiristers wrote to Oakeshott's children after he died: he had a very special gift for personal communication with the youthful. That, I think, is how this very scholarly man made such an impression on so many whose inclinations were not scholarly at all, and on the very young as well as on older boys. It was this quality that *The Wykehamist*, the school magazine, singled out in 1954 in the last issue of his time. 'No headmaster of Winchester', it declared, 'can ever have been more loved . . . the feeling towards him has been in a special way personal, transcending all distinctions of age and status . . . no Headmaster can ever have been felt by boys to understand them more individually and compassionately.'

Oakeshott's light at Winchester shone brightly, above all, as a teacher, for there as at St. Paul's he was emphatically a teaching headmaster, one of the last giants in a great tradition in English education. The range of his scholarly interests meant that his influence could be spread very wide and, besides, he made a point of spending at least one hour, at some juncture in the academic year, with every form in the school. Senior classicists whom he taught caught something of his own special love for Plato and Aeschylus: as a historian I had from him my first introductions to the history of science and to medieval art and literature — and also to the writings of Karl Marx. Above all, what I believe he communicated most widely was something of his own sensitivity to things of beauty, his perception of the loveliness of men's handiwork, and something more too — that, to use his own paraphrase of the words of Abbot Suger, 'through the works of men's hands the mind can be lifted towards truth'. I do not think that when I heard those words in a sermon that he preached in the college chapel in 1951 I knew what a Platonist was: some inkling of a Platonic vision of the ideal union of truth and beauty was what he left in the minds of a great many of us.

In 1953 Oakeshott was invited by the Fellows of Lincoln College, Oxford to succeed Lord Murray as their Rector, and he accepted. His last days at Winchester were blighted by what was probably the most traumatic incident in his career: he asked for the resignation of a housemaster, W. R. P. Ridgeway, in whom he had lost confidence, and Ridgeway appealed to the governing body. The Warden and Fellows were divided, as were many among the staff who felt warmly towards both men. A majority decision on the governing body upheld Oakeshott's action, but he was not far from breakdown when he left. Lincoln proved in consequence to be a sanctuary.

III

Vivian Green, Oakeshott's colleague at Lincoln and later himself Rector, has described his eighteen years there as 'momentous' for the college. At Lincoln certainly there was no lack of *tangibilia* to attest to his influence. When he came to the college there were just seven tutorial Fellows: when he left there were eighteen. When he came there were seventy rooms to house graduates and undergraduates: when he left there were 183 (a large part of the increase being the

result of the well-timed acquisition of rooms in what was formerly the Mitre Hotel). A no less important acquisition was the building of All Saints, the city church made redundant which the Church Commissioners agreed to permit Lincoln to convert into its college library. Oakeshott worked indefatigably, both to raise by appeal the money needed to pay for the conversion, and on the plans for the work itself, collaborating enthusiastically with the architect, Robert Potter.

There was much more too: it was a great period of rebuilding and refurbishing. All this came over and above the ordinary round of business for a head of house which Oakeshott carried out with the courtesy and good nature instinctive to him. He also found time (and Lincoln helped him to find it) for much study: some of the most important of his academic writings, above all those on medieval art, were products of his time as Rector. Looking back, he described his election gratefully as one of 'the greatest pieces of good fortune of my life'.

For two of his years as Rector of Lincoln, 1962–4, Oakeshott was Vice-Chancellor of Oxford. His was an important term in that office. At its start he inherited a difficulty from the time of his predecessor. Plans had been drawn up for the building of a new Zoology Laboratory, and the incoming professor, J. W. S. Pringle, had accepted the chair under the clear impression that the space for an enlarged department provided for in those plans would be available. But they involved taking into the science area an acre of land from the University Parks: there was strong opposition, and in the term before Oakeshott took up office in October, Oxford's congregation rejected them by a clear majority. Oakeshott, who had at an earlier Congregation meeting, defended the proposals with lucidity and force, felt the embarrassment of the situation acutely. Early in his time of office an inquiry was commissioned, under Sir William Holford, into the site requirements of the growing science area. A location for the new laboratory (with space for Zoology and more) was identified, on the south side of South Parks Road: and Merton College was persuaded to make it available. Within the two years of Oakeshott's Vice-Chancellorship, the difficulties had been defused with typical diplomatic skill, and a major development had begun.

At the start of Oakeshott's Vice-Chancellorship the Robbins Committee's Report on Higher Education was imminent. He followed vigilantly the press comment that its impending release generated, noting particularly the voices raised in favour of more directive co-ordination.

In his Oration to the University at the beginning of 1963 he mused aloud over the widespread suggestion that 'in future both the review and the administration of higher education as a whole should be the responsibility of a single government authority'. Privately he had become by then convinced that Oxford would be wise to look at the order in its own house afresh, rather than wait for direction. The second year of his Vice-Chancellorship saw the fruit of those musings and that inward conviction, in the appointment of what would come to be known as the Franks Commission. The report of that Commission, tendered long after Oakeshott had laid down office, was to lead to the most important overhaul of the workings of Oxford University in the twentieth century. The report was not his work, and I do not believe that he contributed much to its findings: its very conception, notwithstanding, was largely his brainchild.

IV

Oakeshott retired from the Rectorship of Lincoln in 1972, and went to live at the Old School House at Eynsham, where in his retirement he was able to devote himself single-mindedly to his scholarly interests. But before going on to consider them, there is one particular aspect of his public career that must be mentioned, one which bridged, as it were, his active and his contemplative interests.

As has already been mentioned, building and redecoration were major preoccupations with him at Lincoln. Both at Winchester, and at Oxford as a leading figure in the University, the same preoccupations were with him, and in both places his work in this area left a powerful visual mark.

At Winchester, from the time of his appointment as Headmaster, the ancient buildings were always on his mind, and he formed early a warm partnership with the college architect, John Harvey. Under their joint aegis, a major programme of cleaning and refacing of the stonework of the Chapel was put in hand, and in the subsequent refurbishment of the interior Oakeshott played a special part. The cleaning of the roof of the Chapel and its repainting, following closely the evidences of what had been the original design, brought out afresh the slenderness and refinement of the ribbing of this marvellous later fourteenth-century achievement in wooden vaulting. In the course of this same programme, the Chapel's carved seventeenth-century altar

rails (re-acquired from Sir George Cooper of Hursley Park) were restored to their original place. The greatest achievement of all, though, was the recovery and refitting, in Thurbern's chantry under the Chapel Tower, of important parts of the original medieval stained glass commissioned by William of Wykeham. This was the crowning triumph of Oakeshott's and Harvey's partnership in restoration.

In 1822 the heavily corroded medieval glass from Winchester College Chapel was sent for cleaning to Messrs Betton and Evans of Shrewsbury. Unable to remove the blackening from its exterior surface, they returned to Winchester a faithful set of copies which were duly fitted, and the old glass was dispersed. Thanks to the researches of Herbert Chitty in the early part of this century, a number of the lost panels were identified in various places in the UK and elsewhere, but in his time there appeared to be little chance of the college's recovering any of them. Soon after his return to Winchester as Headmaster, Oakeshott became aware that this situation might have changed. He found that the Shirley family, who had left their house at Ettington Park where a series of Winchester fragments had been made up into two windows in their mortuary chapel, were prepared to allow the College to repurchase the glass, at a price that would pay for a fitting replacement. More glass that might be recovered, from St. Giles' Church in Shrewsbury and from two private houses in the area, was identified. The problem that initially appeared insuperable, of financing the purchase of the Ettington glass and bringing it to Winchester, was solved by the personal generosity of Sir Kenneth Clark. Through the good offices of Sir Eric Maclagan, the Victoria and Albert Museum was persuaded to permit the return, on permanent loan to Winchester, of the figure of Joas which (together with three other figures) had by roundabout means come into their possession. Through the years 1948 to 1951 Oakeshott, with Harvey, worked tirelessly in negotiations with owners, in raising funds to meet the further costs of refitting the glass in the windows of Thurbern's chantry, in consultations with Sheffield University's research laboratories and with Denis King of Norwich over the means of cleaning away the corrosion. By the end of 1951 the glass was in place, the richness of its medieval colours revealed anew by cleaning, the two marvellous Ettington panels, of Wykeham kneeling before the Virgin and Child, and of Richard II kneeling before John the Baptist, translucent in the lower range of the window of the chantry, facing west.

On the governing body of Winchester the Warden of New College,

Alick Smith, had been a staunch ally of Oakeshott's through all their discussions of the programme of recovery and refitting of the ancient glass. When Oakeshott came from Winchester to Oxford as Rector of Lincoln, Smith had already thrown himself with enthusiasm into the plans for the restoration of Oxford's ancient buildings which culminated in the launching of the Oxford Historic Buildings Appeal. It was natural that Smith at once sought out Oakeshott as a supporter and collaborator in his efforts. As Smith's health declined in the years following, Oakeshott's part became more and more important. The first task that he took up was the research into what could be discovered about Wren's original designs for the Sheldonian theatre, the first building targeted through the Appeal. The restoration of its stonework, sculpture and interior along this guiding line was largely masterminded by him. That was only one, if the principal, of the long series of projects of restoration made possible by the Appeal's success, in which he was involved: the outlines of the story he has told himself in *Oxford Stone Restored*. As Sir Ffolliott Sanford, Registrar of the University at the time of Oakeshott's retirement, put it, 'all in all, one can safely say that none of his contemporaries left a greater physical mark on Oxford.'

V

Among buildings, libraries were a special interest of Oakeshott's. His first 'office' at Winchester in his early days was his appointment as Librarian of Moberly Library: later he became honorary Librarian of Winchester Cathedral. At Lincoln he refurbished the old Senior Library and himself presented a set of Flemish medallions of the sixteenth century to decorate its windows, and he was the moving spirit in the acquisition of All Saints Church for its college library. He had always been a bibliophile, and in libraries the books mattered to him quite as much as the buildings that housed them. He was always in and out of libraries, and always on the alert in them. This love of books and this alertness were the essential background to the three notable bibliographical discoveries that were among the most dramatic incidents in his many-sided life.

The most famous of these was Oakeshott's discovery, in 1934, of the sole manuscript of Malory's *Morte Darthur* in the Fellows' Library at Winchester (more precisely, in the safe then housed in the Warden

of Winchester's bedroom). Oakeshott was examining the manuscripts, principally with an eye to items that might be exhibited for educational purposes in the showcase in the school library: he pulled down and opened a stout volume, which proved to contain a history of King Arthur and his knights, in English and in a fifteenth-century hand. It would fit well, he thought, into an exhibition which, at the request of Sir Frederic Kenyon (then a Fellow of Winchester) he was to mount in a few weeks for a visit from the Friends of the National Libraries. It was as, later, he was preparing notices for this exhibition and consulting G. Duff's article on early printing in the *Cambridge History of English Literature*, that he ran across the words 'no manuscript of the work [the *Morte Darthur*] is known . . . though Caxton certainly revised it'. Hurrying back to the Fellows' Library with a copy of the Everyman edition, it was rapidly clear to him that before him there was indeed a manuscript of Malory, and that Caxton had indeed revised it (especially in Book V, where Caxton had eliminated the archaisms that Malory carried into his own work from his source, the alliterative *Mort d'Arthur*).

The find, written up a few weeks later in *The Times*, was a landmark in Arthurian scholarship. Kenyon, who believed strongly in 'discoverers' rights', pressed Oakeshott to prepare an edition, but with a scholarly humility that was entirely characteristic he stood aside in favour of Eugene Vinaver, whose work on a new edition of Malory (to be based on Caxton's text, till then the oldest and most reliable) was already advanced. Vinaver's magnificent edition, now collated with the Winchester text, finally appeared in 1947. Oakeshott never lost his interest in Malory: the accounts of the beginning of the Quest for the Holy Grail, and the sonorous passages that describe the mortally wounded Arthur bidding Bedivere to take his sword to the water side and cast it into the lake, are both in *The Sword of the Spirit*. It was a great sorrow to him, as to many other lovers of Winchester, when the Warden and Fellows in 1976 resolved on the sale of the manuscript, and it left the city where it had stayed so many years and which looms so large in Malory's story, for the British Library.

The story of Oakeshott's second 'find' begins in the same Winchester period as the Malory story. Teaching the history of the sixteenth century had stirred in him an interest in Renaissance cosmography and the early history of exploration. In the summer of 1935 his eye was caught by a catalogue entry for a Sotheby's sale of manuscripts and books of a commonplace book of the sixteenth century, listed as a

'geographical dictionary' and including some maps. For the modest sum of £4–15 the book was acquired and found its way to Oakeshott's shelves, whence in years following it was from time to time taken down and pored over, but really did little until in 1952 the time came when it seemed sensible to realise its increased value by sale. It had just been put in the hands of a bookseller when Oakeshott, visiting a Raleigh and Hakluyt exhibition in the British Museum that was showing a substantial series of Raleigh's letters, recognised their hand as that of his own commonplace book. As he instinctively guessed at that moment, and as subsequent careful examination at the Museum by T. C. Skeat confirmed, it was a notebook of Raleigh's, collecting material for his *History of the World*, and a discovery of enormous import for Raleigh scholarship.

The notebook, hurriedly recovered on this occasion from the bookseller, was in the end sold, but long subsequently. Meanwhile, Oakeshott began to take a new interest in the stanzas written by Raleigh on the flyleaf beginning:

Now we have present made
To Cynthia . . .

The researches that these lines inspired are summed up in his book, *The Queen and the Poet*. The first part of this book examines in close detail the story of Raleigh's rise to royal favour, and of his relations with the Queen (and with other poets of the time, notably Marlowe and Spenser); the second presents, in suggested chronological sequence, the 'Poems to Cynthia', that is to say Raleigh's poems addressed to the Queen between the time of his rise to favour and his first imprisonment in 1592. The last of them is that from the flyleaf of the notebook. Though Oakeshott's efforts to relate the various poems with particular events and turns of fortune in Raleigh's career are not all convincing, the overall contention of the book has held; that is, that Raleigh as a courtier poet wrote for occasions. It thus exploded conclusively the view that Raleigh wrote poetry essentially as a pastime of pleasure, as the spirit moved him.

A third 'find' was also concerned with Raleigh. When a copy of Pierre d'Ailly's *Imago Mundi*, printed in 1483 and with manuscript annotations, appeared in a Kent country house sale in the mid-fifties, Oakeshott did not this time need to look twice to recognise the hand of those annotations. The book was in a list of Raleigh's library in the notebook, and was an important piece of his background reading for

the *History of the World*. Its acquisition led Oakeshott into the research summarised in a polished and fascinating paper on 'Renaissance maps of the world and their presuppositions' (*Bulletin of the John Ryland's Library*, vol. 44). This was his last significant work on cosmography, and the last that linked his writing with Raleigh. His interest in the sixteenth century, and in the court and culture of the age of Elizabeth I, remained a preoccupation to the very end: in his last days he was projecting a book on that enigmatic collection of poems *Love's Martyr* (which includes *The Phoenix and the Turtle*), on which he had published an exploratory article in the *Huntington Library Quarterly* in 1975. Raleigh, moreover, had another influence on his later life besides. The proceeds of the sale of the notebook, when it was finally sold, enabled Oakeshott to buy a flat in Rome, and that was where some of the most important of his later musings on medieval art took shape. The interest was one that, like his interest in cosmography, went back a very long way, and that likewise had been sharpened in his early Winchester days, in this case by his first glimpse of the treasures of the Cathedral library and of its great Bible.

VI

Walter Oakeshott's main contribution to art historical studies is undoubtedly his research on this manuscript book, the massive lectern Bible produced in two volumes at Winchester in the twelfth century. The Bible is still housed in the Cathedral, though it is now, due to Oakeshott, rebound in four volumes, so that the public can admire various pages at the same time. Today it is widely considered to be one of the greatest masterpieces of European Romanesque art, but it was much less well known when in 1936 Oakeshott organised an exhibition at the college which included not only the Bible but also the illuminated leaf from the Book of Kings which had belonged to William Morris and which is now in the Pierpont Morgan Library, New York. This had first been connected with the Bible by Eric Millar in 1926. The exhibition also included the Winchester Malory and the most important illuminated English manuscript of the tenth century, the Benedictional of St. Aethelwold, Bishop of Winchester. Now in the British Library, at that time it was still in the library of the Duke of Devonshire at Chatsworth. The Morgan leaf came over from New York in the *Queen Mary* and Oakeshott went down to Southampton

to collect it from the Purser. How much simpler things were in those days!

His first publication on the Bible, 'The Winchester XII-century Bible and the paintings of the Holy Sepulchre Chapel' was in the *Winchester Cathedral Record*, 1939, and in 1943 he gave a talk on the artists of the Bible to the Society of Antiquaries. To prepare for this he managed to arrange to cross the Atlantic with a naval convoy, obviously a highly dangerous voyage at this time. However, when he presented himself at the Pierpont Morgan Library he found that the Morgan leaf he had come to see had been evacuated with other treasures for safety. His book, *The Artists of the Winchester Bible*, was published by Faber and Faber in 1945, a slim volume printed on poor paper with forty-four black-and-white plates. Its wartime austerity contrasts with the luxury of his later book, *The Two Winchester Bibles*, published by Oxford University Press in 1981 in a large folio with a generous selection of collotype plates in both colour and black-and-white. Even so the later book was still a compromise, since Oakeshott had originally hoped this would be a full facsimile. Unfortunately the expense was considered too great.

'My wife and I', he wrote in the preface to this later book, 'were both pupils of Sir John Beazley, she a far more professional scholar than I. His is the inspiration behind this book. But if it had not been for my wife's interest and expertise in such problems, in Greek art, I suppose I would never have persisted in these efforts to establish the individual relationships between the artists of the books here discussed'. Oakeshott had attended Beazley's lectures on Greek vases in 1923 and, though not trained as an art historian, he had an excellent eye for style. Already in the first book, he had realised that many miniatures and historiated initials were painted over drawings by different artists. He demonstrated this dramatically by photographs taken by Otto Fein, the brilliant photographer at the Warburg Institute, and Oakeshott credited Fritz Saxl with the idea of back-lighting the pages, thus revealing the underdrawings.

The later book is an amplification rather than a correction of his earlier work. For example, his original division of hands, which includes one of the most graphic names ever coined for an anonymous medieval artist, 'the Master of the Leaping Figures', has been adopted by later scholarship with only minor variations. In the interval, continuing to think about chronological and stylistic problems, Oakeshott had solved the conundrum of the Morgan leaf. This is not, as Eric Millar

thought, the sole remains of a twin, equally luxurious Bible, but was intended for the same Bible and represents a change of plan to include full-page miniatures.

Once at Lincoln College, Oakeshott was able to benefit at first hand from the advice and example of Oxford friends and colleagues in matters palaeographical, codicological and textual. In addition to old friends like Roger Mynors, these colleagues included the remarkable group of historians and scholars of the manuscript book for whom Duke Humfrey's Library in the Bodleian, under the Keepership of Richard Hunt, acted as a mini-Research Institute, for example Beryl Smalley, Richard Southern, Graham Pollard, Tom Boase, Otto Pächt and, later, Bob Delaissé and of a younger generation, Michael Kauffmann and Albinia de la Mare, whose help is acknowledged in the later book.

It was Neil Ker who noticed that the Winchester Bible text had been corrected from the 'Auct.' Bible. From Ker's observation, included in his Lyell Lectures published in 1960, Oakeshott was to build his theory of the part played by the two Bibles in the story of how Henry II extorted a Bible from the Winchester monks for Witham Priory under St. Hugh. His theory, restated in his last publication in the *Bodleian Library Record*, 1985, was that the 'Auct.' Bible came from St. Albans and was the less grand Bible which the monks let go, but later retrieved. It was typical of Oakeshott's generosity and thoughtfulness to younger people that, when he arranged at some time in the late sixties for the 'Auct.' Bible to travel to Winchester in order to place it side by side with the Winchester Bible, he invited me to accompany Neil Ker, Richard Hunt and himself.

In 1961 Otto Pächt published in the *Burlington Magazine* an article on the Chapter House paintings from the convent of Sigena in Northern Spain. Fortunately photographs had been taken shortly before the building was gutted by fire in the Spanish Civil War in 1936, and Pächt had recognised that the paintings must be by the later artists of the Winchester Bible. Oakeshott followed up on Pächt's discovery with his book *Sigena: Romanesque Paintings in Spain and the Winchester Bible Artists*, published by Harvey Miller in 1972. In this he examined in greater detail the overlaps between artists in the Bible and in the paintings. He also dealt with the chronological problems as they impinged on the question of influence from the Byzantinizing mosaics in Sicily. He even thought he could discern the hand of the

Master of the Morgan leaf in the mosaics of the nave of the Cappella Palatina, Palermo.

Stylistic questions remained of more interest to him than iconography or the overall programme and meanings of the Chapter House paintings. He paid careful attention, however, to the palaeographical question of the decorative capital lettering in the paintings and the Bible, a topic to which he returned in his contribution to the *Festschrift* for Otto Pächt of the same year.

We can be grateful to Oakeshott for two other interventions in Winchester matters. First was the recognition of an initial cut from the Bible, which was finally restored to it, due to him. Second was the successful uncovering, for which the Pilgrim Trust provided the funds, of the twelfth-century wall-painting in the Holy Sepulchre Chapel of the Cathedral. This proved to show, like the thirteenth-century overpainting, the Deposition from the Cross, and to be again in the style of the later artists of the Bible, probably by the Master of the Morgan leaf himself. It is now the finest surviving English twelfth-century wall-painting.

Earlier, in 1950, Oakeshott published with Faber *The Sequence of English Medieval Art*, a short introduction followed by a series of plates, a number of which were from manuscripts in the extraordinary collection formed by C. W. Dyson Perrins. The book was dedicated to Dyson Perrins and to M. J. Rendall, a former headmaster of Winchester. He also launched the Faber Library of Medieval Manuscripts, short monographs with colour plates, with a distinguished list of authors, Francis Wormald, Tom Boase, Charles Mitchell, Emmy Wellesz, C. R. Dodwell, Eric Millar, Jean Porcher.

In Oxford he offered occasional lectures series and in 1956 he was invited to give the Rhind Lectures at Edinburgh University, which were published in 1959 as *Classical Inspiration in Medieval Art*. This was harshly reviewed (those were the days of vicious anonymous reviews in *The Times Literary Supplement*), which was hardly fair for he would not have claimed original scholarship. He aimed to provide a readable introduction to a topic on which major art historians, especially in Germany, Austria and France, had already done much research. It must be admitted, however, that it is superseded not only by ongoing scholarship but also by Erwin Panofsky's far more substantial and sophisticated book, *Renaissance and Renascences in Western Art*, of 1960.

The subject in 1956 was at once topical and of more personal

concern to Oakeshott. The idea of the Middle Ages as an interruption to, but nevertheless as learning from and preserving classical culture appealed to him as a classical scholar. It also had a relevance at this historical moment in Britain, after the victory of the Second World War over one form of barbarity had so soon turned sour in the Cold War with its threat of new barbarians at the gate. Within a tradition of humanist education founded on study of classical culture, Oakeshott's book can be seen in a context exemplified by Haskins' famous *The Renaissance of the Twelfth Century* of 1927, a tradition to which Panofsky's book also belonged, even if its affiliation *via* Warburg took a different route.

On a more personal level the influence of Beazley has already been mentioned. Oakeshott's wife, Noël, one of Beazley's best students, was a distinguished classical archaeologist in her own right, author of a still fundamental article on early South Italian vase-painters, 'the first serious attempt at a classification of Italiote vases according to painters' as Michael Vickers has described it (for an obituary see Martin Robertson, *Lincoln College Record 1975-6, 1977*). From the quotation given below it is evident that Oakeshott realised how his work ran parallel with his wife's in his isolation of the artists of the Winchester Bible. Another interest they can be seen to have shared was in the continuity of artistic traditions, in her case from late Mycenaean to Geometric, in his from late Antiquity to the Renaissance.

While Vice-Chancellor, Oakeshott persuaded the University to acquire Beazley's photographs and papers, and later helped to ensure the establishment of what is now the Beazley archive. The Oakeshotts had bought at auction in Basel a handsome Attic black-figure band-cup which Beazley, to honour their friendship, subsequently made the name-piece of the eponymous 'Oakeshott Painter', which gave Oakeshott the greatest pleasure. On their retirement from Lincoln the Oakeshotts gave the cup to the Ashmolean Museum in Beazley's honour. It is published in *Burlington Magazine*, 117 (1975), 382. Two other notable antiquities which also passed through their hands are the cup by the Antiphon Painter, now in Houston, and the Borchardt Measure, now in the British Museum, the latter written about by Oakeshott himself.

Oakeshott's *The Mosaics of Rome from the Third to the Fourteenth Century*, published in 1967, though also based primarily on earlier Continental scholarship, is a more substantial book than his *Classical Inspiration* and still useful as a lucid and judicious account in English.

As with his work on the Bible, its strength lies in first-hand observation conveyed in the descriptions of the churches, and he is particularly good on changing technique and its effects on style. A lot of trouble was taken over the colour plates, many of which are notably successful in a very difficult medium. The book has been published in translation in Austria, Germany and France.

Oakeshott saw himself as an amateur in the field of art history, as implied by his reference to his wife as 'a far more professional scholar'. His genuine modesty did not permit him even to make the just claims he might have for his work. Certainly he was never guilty of two sins common to academics. He never claimed exclusive rights to his materials, nor did he consider his opinions to be canonical. If he was an amateur, it was in the best sense of love and admiration. He responded to the beauty of objects as he experienced them and successfully endeavoured to communicate his empathy and sense of discovery to others.

VII

Recognitions, in the narrow technical sense, came somewhat tardily to Oakeshott. The Universities of St. Andrews and of East Anglia both conferred honorary doctorates on him. He was elected FBA in 1971. When in 1980 he was knighted for 'services to medieval studies' he was seventy-seven and had been in retirement for eight years. Alas that his wife, his pillar of support through so many arduous passages, had died four years before: she would have prized the honour for him more than he was capable of prizing it for himself, for he was blessedly impervious to external accolades. What mattered to him supremely was truth and beauty. Wonder, and the thirst to understand that it prompts, were the great motive forces in him. His gentleness, his courtesy and modesty, his beaming smile and a delightfully whimsical wit were outward characteristics that captivated all who came to know him: there was a spiritual profundity underlying them. In all his researches in many fields he reached out always toward that which he believed could inspire and elevate.

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Note. Sections I–V and VII are written by Maurice Keen; Section VI by Jonathan Alexander. We both wish to acknowledge the help and guidance of Professor J. C. Dancy, and of Jasper Gaunt, Walter Oakeshott's grandson.

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