

An Excerpt from *The Last Englishmen*

If the nineteenth century had been all about piling up one scarcely credible heroic exploit after another and never stopping to ask why, the twentieth century thus far seemed to be all about sitting down and taking apart one's motives. Instead of thrashing through the jungle, battling fevers and hostile tribes in search of the source of the Nile, these new adventurers searched for themselves. This was a different sort of wilderness and required a different set of tools. In Paris, Margaret Marshall had ended John Auden's first formal session of analysis by saying that his candor posed a great difficulty. Honest patients were hard to treat. This was partly because honesty obscured the most important truths and partly because such patients usurped her role by trying to analyze their own behavior. Margaret insisted that she alone could determine his motives.

Why did he want to climb Everest?

"It is a mythical future admiration that you want," she pronounced. "The present and the analytical work required for this result you ignore. Without regard for the present you will be unable to achieve anything." She then compared his two attitudes.

"You expressed dislike of being loved simply for having a handsome face. But you court worldly admiration for some hypothetical achievement. Isn't there a contradiction here? You should wish to be liked simply for yourself."

"Of course I would wish to be liked simply for myself," John replied impatiently. "But what exactly is this self if it is not connected with some action? Should I just sit around all day in Paris cafés?" Their sessions took place in Paris cafés.

"That is taking it too far. You would not be yourself if you sat all day in a café."

When they were back on the street, Margaret asked him if he was enjoying his analysis.

"Very much."

"Wystan answered in just the same resentful manner," she said, sounding pleased. It was Wystan who recommended that John see Margaret. Margaret had pronounced his libido perfectly normal and he imagined she might fix John, too.

"What is it that draws you to the mountains?"

"I feel safe when I am isolated and unobserved."

...

It hadn't taken long before the question of whether he would return to India at the end of his furlough or commit to a serious and extended treatment took over. The faint hope that the Dalai Lama might allow passage of a new Everest expedition, argued for his return.