

The Memory Chalet by Tony Judt.  
William Heinemann 2010.

Tony Judt died in 2010 at the age of only 62 from a terrible muscular disease called amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, first diagnosed in 2008. He had enjoyed an illustrious academic and literary career, writing, inter alia, such influential and controversial books as *Reappraisals: Reflections on the Forgotten Twentieth Century* and *Postwar: a History of Europe since 1945*, but when he received his diagnosis and knew that soon his working life, and then his life full stop, would be brought to an untimely end, he was encouraged by friends to share more private thoughts and reflections on life in general and his own life in particular, initially for internal circulation only.

The title is inspired by Jonathan Spence's book *The Memory Palace of Matteo Ricci*, and directly evokes a place that Judt used to stay with his parents when he was young in the Swiss alpine village of Chesières; the book is comprised of 25 essays, divided into three parts with an introduction and an Envoi.

For me this collection of private thoughts evokes in its literary quality and uncompromising honesty the essays of Michel de Montaigne, and the poignancy of some of them is almost unbearable. Judt writes about family and growing up, education and work, love and loss, politics, formative experiences and much more. There is a moral intensity to his writing that only serves to emphasise the huge loss that his premature death meant to the world of scholarship and political debate.

His writings about his engagement with Israel and his Jewish heritage, of which he was very proud, will strike a chord with many Jewish readers, but this is a book with universal appeal that represents a wonderful epitaph to its author.

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