Seymour Slive Memorial

October 18, 2014

Speakers:

Thomas Woodward Lentz
Sarah Slive Davila
William W. Robinson
Frits Duparc
Arthur Wheelock
Susan Kuretsky
Walter Liedtke
Sofia Pierce-Slive
Peter Hecht
Alice Davies
Christopher White read by Alex Slive

with
Bo Winiker on trumpet

Please join us for the reception in the lobby.
• We are gathered here this afternoon to honor the life and achievements of Seymour Slive – teacher, scholar, husband, father and friend.

• We will hear about his many contributions to the field of Dutch art history, his great energy and boundless passion for the visual world, his warm sense of humor, his affection for his many students and the countless number of young minds and characters he helped nurture and shape during his long career.

• He came to Harvard sixty years ago, a WWII Navy veteran with two degrees from the University of Chicago, and lured to Cambridge and the art history faculty by Frederick Deknatel. The lives of thousands of Harvard students were changed by his celebrated lectures, frequently punctuated
with the pleading admonition “open your eyes and look.”

• What is sometimes forgotten amidst the richness of his life is that for nearly a decade – 1975-1982 – he served as the director of what is now known as the Harvard Art Museums. [He was Acting Director in 1974-75.] His accomplishments and battles in that position now seem almost legendary to me: in part because he did this while a full-time faculty member in Art History, but largely because he laid the foundations for the new Art Museums here at Harvard that will open less than a month from now.

• It was Seymour Slive who recognized not simply the expanded role a reinvigorated art museum could play in the curricular life of a great university, but he also had the drive and passion to roll up his shirt sleeves and make it a reality by
bringing into existence the building we sit in this afternoon – the Arthur M. Sackler Museum.

- The birthing pains of this much-needed building (which held Harvard’s great ancient and non-Western collections) were formidable:
  - A university that at times considered an art museum a kind of “luxury” in a decidedly alpha-numeric culture
  - A time when the museum as an institution – even its very existence – was questioned by new ways of looking at and thinking about works of art
  - Daunting fundraising challenges (when told that he could raise funds for the new museum as long as he did not touch Harvard donors, he responded that there were probably a few villages in West Africa that Harvard had not yet reached)
• A physical infrastructure (namely the old Fogg) that was bursting at the seams and unable to adequately display and store its great holdings

• A skeptical staff and a doubting public

• I was actually a member of one of the last versions of the Fogg’s famed “Museum Course,” which occurred in the midst of Seymour’s herculean efforts to build the Sackler. I heard – and learned – from him about the thinking, planning, politics and strategy necessary to give birth to a new museum.

• He imparted his hard-earned wisdom with both inspired insight and shrewd practicality – traits not often found in combination in a university setting.

• Coupled with these lessons were constant reminders of what was most important for an art museum in a university context: the intrinsic
power and transformative capabilities of original works of art, and the value of close, sustained looking and thinking.

• Those qualities lay at the heart of his teaching and philosophy, and they inspired the principles behind the new Art Museums soon to open across the street. Perhaps the most distinctive feature of the new building is the Art Study Center, specialized, purpose-built spaces designed to encourage the kind of behavior Seymour long espoused – focused looking that is longer, deeper and different. Where, as he would say, one can open one’s eyes and actually look.

• I’m pleased to announce that an endowment fund has been established in his memory – the Seymour Slive Memorial Fund – thanks to a generous initial gift from John Deknatel and Carol Taylor. Its purpose is to support the activities of the Art Study Center, and I can think of no more
fitting gift in his honor. It would make him not only proud, but I think it would make him smile at the thought of what he both started and accomplished.
Sarah’s Words for Seymour, October 18, 2014

Thank you Tom! Thank you for this wonderful news. Seymour would be delighted to know that scholarship in the arts is supported in the Memorial Fund.

I have the distinct honor of welcoming you on this afternoon of remembrance on behalf of Seymour’s family. We would like to start by extending deepest appreciation to Tom, Porter, and Deanna of the Department of Fine Arts and Architecture and Harvard Art Museums for making this event possible.

As you can imagine, these last few months have not been easy for us. Our dad led a long illustrious, happy life filled with family, work, food, and good company. Katya, Alex and I inherited Seymour’s internal body clock and for some strange reason we three, as city people, keep farmer’s hours – whatever time to bed, early to rise. We miss the almost daily crack-of-dawn conversations with our dad. In fact, as I was polishing and practicing this little speech very early this morning, I realized that if he were still here, I would have called him and he would have said, “Bravo Sarah! It’s just marvelous!” Thanks Dad!

So, we are learning that the luck of long life, the luxury of constant contact and spending so much wonderful time together does seem to make the loss even more deeply felt.

However, the generosity of the tender condolences that we have received has given great comfort to Zoya, Katya, Alex and me and we thank you.

There is a striking realization in these many messages each with personal and individual stories. Seymour certainly touched and influenced many lives and a solid, consistent portrait of the man emerges from the collective memory.

We joke that our dad was an “equal opportunity” enthusiast! Seymour took as much pleasure from a pie well-baked as a building well-built. He supported and applauded a new dance as much as a career unfolding. An elbow-to-elbow dinner conversation was as important as the lecture hall and as impactful as a talk delivered to a wide and esteemed audience such as this.

This is Seymour’s legacy that we celebrate today. The joy of hard work, the value of close friendships, the appreciation of beauty in nature, and the potential of what each person can create.

Many of you have traveled quite a distance to be with us today. In a moment you will hear from dear friends Bill, Frits, Arthur, Susan, Walther, Sofia, Peter, Alice and Christopher. We extend our appreciation for their words. We thank you all for coming. Please join us for the reception upstairs after the program. We are pleased that we have received an advance copy of Seymour’s Frans Hals book. So please take a moment to take a look at it in the reception area.

Thank you.
I want to talk, on a personal level, about being Seymour’s student. I have some qualifications for the task, since it has been my great good fortune to have been his student for my entire professional life--more than forty years. It took me nearly that long to complete my dissertation, but the experience of being Seymour’s student—and I think all my colleagues present today would agree--was not limited to a period of formal undergraduate or graduate training, or even determined by an affiliation with Harvard University. Once connected to Seymour, you became a lifer. He never stopped teaching and you never ceased to learn from him.

Since I also had the good luck to have worked at Harvard for most of my career, I happily saw Seymour regularly in the library, on the path through the Yard or in the conservation lab in front of a work attributed to Frans Hals or Jacob van Ruisdael that had come in for his opinion. (I learned more from examining pictures with him in the painting lab than in most courses.) But in many of these encounters, he would eventually get around to: “Have you read such-and-such an article?” “Have you had the new monograph on so-and-so in your hands?” Of
course I hadn’t, and he had, and I always marveled, and despaired, at how he could keep up with the scholarly literature and I couldn’t, but it was—and still is—an inspiration for me at least to try. [....] He loved art history, the history of seventeenth-century Dutch art in particular, and he never tired of talking, learning, and teaching about it. It was no accident that the Festschrift dedicated to Seymour on his 75th-birthday was entitled Shop Talk.

I began graduate school in the fall of 1973. Having read Seymour’s Frans Hals monograph and the volume on Dutch Art and Architecture in the Pelican History of Art series, I looked forward to meeting the man who could present serious scholarship in such lively, accessible prose. Someone who writes like that, I thought, must be a likeable, approachable person.

I quickly learned that Seymour was approachable, if one learned to respect his acute sensitivity to how he spent his time. During my early years in graduate school, he was director of the Fogg Art Museum, but he never let up on his teaching and scholarly work, and, of course, he was utterly devoted to his time with his family. Happily, Seymour was a virtuoso of multi-tasking, but he didn’t make time for small talk. If one needed to see him, one deferentially applied for an appointment to his formidable gate-keeper, Ada Bortoluzzi, in whom the habit
of concealing his whereabouts and schedule was so deeply ingrained that one never dared ask whether he might be in the office later today or tomorrow or next week. No, one accepted the appointment time Ada offered and arrived for the meeting with a finite agenda. After Seymour had answered your questions—which he did fully, but not expansively—his tone and body language signaled that the meeting was not...open-ended. At first, it was disappointing that this great communicator and manifestly congenial man did not want to sit and shoot the breeze with a twenty-three-year-old student with time on his hands. Ultimately, it was an invaluable lesson in professional conduct and an introduction to time management.

Another lesson I learned from Seymour—probably the most fundamental one—came in the form of a six-word marginal note on one of my early graduate student papers. He probably scribbled the comment while grading a stack of papers in the middle of the night and thought little of it. **But it changed my life.** It simply read: “Your writing needs more journalistic umph.” U-M-P-H—umph—is not in the dictionary, but it was obvious what he meant—more vitality, more muscul arity, more engagement. [...] I was devastated—the peerless master of vigorous art-historical prose was telling me my writing was dead on arrival. Of course, he was right. I re-read the paper and realized that, like a high-school or college student, I
had been writing for an audience of one—the teacher who would be giving me a grade—and just put down everything I knew about the subject without giving much thought to clarity or engaging the reader. Seymour was telling me, not only that my writing was dull and disorganized, but that if I aspired to join the profession and write for publication, I would be held to a higher standard. I started working on it then and am still working on it now.

I think for Seymour graduate students were subject to a trial period. He wasn’t a hand-holder, and it took a few years and a certain level of achievement before one was fully accepted. But after you passed that test, his commitment was total. As I am sure many others experienced, any publication or exhibition or similar good deed immediately elicited a supportive, hand-written note from him. And needless to say, he was always prepared to supply a letter of recommendation or support for a project. Once he really went above and beyond even his own rigorous sense of duty. Applying for a job at the Morgan Library in 1983, I needed a letter of recommendation. Word came from Seymour’s office that he was in the hospital, and it was doubtful he could produce a letter within the requested time frame. A day or two later, another call came from the office, instructing me to appear at the Slive home that afternoon. I arrived to find him lying on his back, in his pajamas, on a couch in the living room, visibly uncomfortable because he was
recovering from serious surgery, but with a yellow legal pad in his hands on which he had drafted an eloquent letter in support of my job application.

Seymour, as we know, loved pithy aphorisms and quotations. I treasure one that he pronounced so frankly that it made a lasting impression—another of his lessons in professional conduct for which I am deeply grateful. “When you’re standing on another man’s shoulders, you don’t spit on his head.” Seymour unfailingly lived up to this maxim: He never neglected to acknowledge the help of a colleague, and he never tired of praising his predecessors, especially early 20th-century scholars of Dutch art who compiled the first comprehensive, photographically illustrated catalogues of works by Rembrandt, Frans Hals, and others. He stalwartly defended Wilhelm Valentiner, the German-American art historian and director of the Detroit Institute of Arts, whose compilations of Rembrandt’s drawings and Hals’ paintings served as the basis for all later publications on these artists. Despite his prodigious accomplishments, today Valentiner is often remembered by Rembrandt specialists with a certain contempt as the guy who never met a painting in Rembrandt’s manner that he didn’t think was an autograph work by the master, and who published dozens of such dubious pictures in a notorious volume called Rembrandt: Rediscovered Paintings. Seymour would never partake in the unseemly project of dismissing a towering
figure like Valentiner with a sarcastic remark about a few misguided attributions. It’s not that he was uncritical of his predecessors, but he preferred to recognize his debt to them, and politely disagree, rather than mounting a frontal attack that began with a recitation of their errors.

Long after he had retired from teaching, Seymour read and signed off on my dissertation. It is more than a little odd, in retrospect, that he, not an active faculty member, would be my primary reader. However, since I had been a graduate student for 23 years, the faculty evidently considered me such an outlier--or relic--it must have seemed only appropriate that a seventy-five-year-old retired professor should supervise my thesis. That this was an unconventional arrangement certainly never occurred to me, because, in my mind, Seymour would never stop being what the Germans aptly call my Doktervater—literally, my doctorate father—with all this implies of a life-long commitment to one’s doctor-progeny—Doktorkinder, I suppose.

The day I received my degree, Seymour turned up at the department’s after-party with a present. It was a copy of the 1618 edition of Karel van Mander’s Het Schilderboeck—The Painter’s Book—our fundamental early source for the study of the lives of Netherlandish painters from Jan van Eyck to Hendrick Goltzius. The
gift of the antiquarian book itself was generous enough, but Seymour directed my attention to the fly-leaf: not only a warm inscription from him, but a note from Jakob Rosenberg stating that Max J. Friedländer, the great authority on early Netherlandish painting, had given the volume to him in Berlin about 1930. Rosenberg gave it to Seymour the day Harvard granted Rosenberg an honorary degree in 1961. It cannot have been easy for Seymour to part with it, but this kind of profoundly generous, deeply affecting gesture was just characteristic of the man. [...] The Van Mander is my most cherished possession.

I could conclude by saying “I’ll miss him,” and, yes, I certainly miss Seymour’s conversation, physical presence, and the knowledge that, like a parent, he was just...there. I loved him like a parent, and in my heart and mind, he will always be there.
As a teacher Seymour excelled particularly in lecturing to undergraduates and in public lectures, which he delivered with the same panache, wit, enthusiasm, and intelligence that characterized his writing. His pace and timing were impeccable, and he knew exactly when to insert a joke or anecdote to wake up a group of undergraduates in a darkened room in the middle of the day. It would have been easy to delude oneself into thinking that his performances at the podium, like his engaging prose, flowed spontaneously and effortlessly from his mind. But they were both the result of painstaking preparation as well as profound learning and boundless enthusiasm for his subject. He worked hard to make his knowledge and research more accessible to students and readers.
About twenty years ago I happened to be standing with Seymour at a reception in the Fogg, when he was approached by the actor John Lithgow, then a Harvard overseer and generous advocate of the arts at the University. He had been an undergraduate in the 1960s, and he wanted to recall with Seymour what Lithgow remembered as the most dramatic lecture performance of his days at Harvard College. As Lithgow retold it, in the midst of a discourse on Renaissance or Baroque art, Seymour showed a slide of an abstract expressionist work, presumably to make a point about painterly values or abstract passages in earlier styles. There was an audible tittering in the dark lecture hall, indicating that his undergraduate listeners were amused—or appalled—at the comparison of an old master with a childish mash-up of slapdash brushstrokes by Jackson Pollock or Franz Kline. Seymour, Lithgow recalled, abruptly ordered the slides turned off and the lights turned on, and he strode to the front of the stage and delivered a passionate, extemporaneous speech about the seriousness and importance of contemporary art. Seymour listened to this story appreciatively, but I don’t think he remembered the occasion. Nor did he recognize Lithgow, so he asked, “And what do you do, sir?” To which Lithgow modestly replied he was an actor. Seymour quickly shot back: “I’ve been a ham all my life.” When I later recounted
this exchange to Zoya, particularly Seymour’s quip about having always been a

ham, she responded, without hesitation: “Well, yes, that IS true.”

I had the good luck, along with Alice Davies to be Seymour’s student for my entire career. Alice began studying with him as an undergraduate and worked with him on many of his publications, right up to reading the final proofs of the revised Frans Hals monograph, only weeks before he died. [According to the Phaidon Press web site, that book will be published on Monday/the day after tomorrow].

Whenever I write a review or disagree with a colleague in print, I

To return briefly to Valentiner, Seymour like to recount a visit with him about

1952 or 1953, when Seymour was teaching at Pomona College and Valentiner was director of the Los Angeles County Museum. Then in his early seventies,

Valentiner was living in a small apartment in Los Angeles. He wanted to show

Seymour something: The little wall space that he had was occupied by a new work by a little-known Bay Area artist named Richard Diebenkorn.

was invited to review Werner Sumowski’s Drawings of the Rembrandt School--a multi-volume publication in the tradition of those monumental early 20th-century works by Bode, Hofstede de Groot or Valentiner--it could have been tempting to criticize Sumowski’s lifelong effort to organize the thousands of surviving drawings by Rembrandt’s pupils and followers by attacking the many questionable attributions in his book. I might have done it, if I hadn’t known that Seymour would have been disappointed by such a review. It would have been
spitting on the head of an esteemed scholar whose book I still use nearly every day.
Dear Zoya, Katya and Joe (Umphres), Alex and Kaela (Lee), Sarah and Mario (Davila), and (grandchildren) Natasha, Anna, Nadia, Sofia, and Mario, friends, colleagues, ladies and gentlemen.

What a great privilege to have been invited to say a few words about Seymour at this memorial gathering. All the more so because I never even studied with him. And yet, he taught me so much. 

I still recall the very first time he was mentioned to me: It was 1962. On June 15th, my fourteenth birthday, the spectacular Frans Hals exhibition was inaugurated in Haarlem, the Netherlands. As many of you will know, the art-historical fundaments for that exhibition were laid out by Seymour. My father, was involved in the organisation of the show and told me, in awe, the day after the official opening that he had met an American who knew everything about Hals and Dutch 17th century painting: Seymour Slive. In fact, my father said, “I got the impression that he knows more about Dutch art than the Dutch art historians I know!” Not only was my father impressed by Seymour’s knowledge but also by his friendliness and his ability to enthuse others. 

In the introduction in the catalogue of that same Frans Hals-exhibition Mr. Baard, then the director of the museum, wrote: ‘It was a privilege that Seymour Slive, professor at Harvard University, immediately agreed to collaborate on the exhibition’. Baard continued to refer to Seymour as ‘this young scholar, one of the best
connoisseurs of painting from the Dutch Golden Age’. One should bear in mind that in 1962 Seymour was only 41.

As the name Slive didn’t mean much to me at that point in life, I forgot this whole episode until our paths crossed again which was almost ten years later. His name came up again in our house, when, as a young student in the history of art, I bought the first two volumes of Seymour’s monumental work on Frans Hals. I was so proud to own these serious and impressive books. That I would ever meet him, let alone work with him, hadn’t even occurred to me. And yet, that did happen some five years later.

Towards the end of 1979 as the curator of the Mauritshuis, I launched the idea to organise the first Jacob van Ruisdael exhibition ever. It was generally known that Seymour was working on a revised edition of Professor Rosenberg’s catalogue Raisonné of the artist of 1928. So the Mauritshuis approached him and he immediately agreed to collaborate. As a result, I had the privilege to work closely together with him on the Ruisdael exhibition during the following years. Although Seymour was already a celebrity and one of the pillars in the study of Dutch art history and I was a young and unexperienced art historian, he treated me from day one as his equal, which of course I was NOT.

We spent many, many hours together throughout the preparations for the Jacob van Ruisdael exhibition and it was during this time that I learned so much from him. Of particular note were our trips to the Jewish cemetery
in Ouderkerk aan de Amstel, to Ootmarsum, Haaksbergen and Bentheim, visiting the sites where Jacob van Ruisdael made sketches during his travels. To the present day, this journey remains one of the highlights of my art historical life. I will never forget the enthusiasm we shared that day and the insight we gained into Ruisdael’s vision and creativity. Visiting each of these places, with reproductions of his drawings and paintings in hand, we came to a profound understanding. Seymour was so thrilled and excited about the experience that he was actually jumping up and down on his feet!

I also clearly remember an evening in his room in the Hotel des Indes, close to the Mauritshuis. This was the evening we would make our final selections for the Van Ruisdael exhibition. When I arrived in his room, both the floor and his bed were covered with black and white photographs of paintings, drawings and etchings by Van Ruisdael. For over two hours Seymour and I were crawling on hands and knees over the floor, moving photographs around, comparing them and gradually removing more and more of them until we made the definite selection for the exhibition. I wish I had made a selfie of the two of us on all fours on the floor. But even without a photo, the memory of that evening is still crystal clear in my mind.

This was the same period that Seymour came to our house for dinner. Both my wife and I were excited and even a little nervous as well. We wanted everything to be perfect for him, after all you don’t get Seymour Slive
for dinner every day. After our welcome, we asked him what we could serve him for drinks. ‘What do you have?’ , he asked. I offered beer, red and white wine, scotch and jenever, that is genever gin. ‘Being in Holland, I should have a Dutch genever’, he answered. Most of you will know that there are two types of genever, so-called young and old. Thus I asked him which one he would prefer. ‘It’s such a long time since I had genever’, he said, ‘Let me taste both, please’. So I poured him two glasses of genever, a young one and an old. You should realize genever contains 45% alcohol. He drank both glasses \textit{ad fundum}, and then he told me that he preferred the old one. So, could I pour him another one? Two or three of these glasses would have brought me down immediately, but not Seymour!

My wife Renée, who is a very good cook, had prepared a lovely meal. But just as a precaution, she asked him whether there was any food he didn’t like. His answer was characteristic. He said: ‘I like everything’. But then he quickly added: ‘although I am not crazy about camel hump’. You should know that he had just returned from China where he had apparently been served camel hump. ‘But’, Seymour continued as if he didn’t want to embarrass my wife, ‘if camel hump is on the menu for tonight, I will eat it anyhow’. Fortunately, my wife had not prepared camel hump that day. Seymour was a grateful guest who clearly did enjoy the meal, the wine and our company. I will always remember his sense of humour and his wonderful stories.
In the years thereafter, we stayed in touch, exchanging ideas, opinions and experiences. He was always generous with his knowledge and his friendship. The last mail I received from him dates from early this year. In it he referred to, among other things, and I quote: ‘an avalanche of memories. Recall that almost a half-century has passed since we worked together on the pioneer Ruisdael show!’.

Let me end with a small anecdote that took place in 2003. In that year I showed him a Jacob van Ruisdael painting which he had included in his catalogue Raisonné as ‘doubtful’, whereas I believed it was authentic. We had a lengthy discussion but neither of us was able to convince the other. We agreed to disagree and it did in no way affect our friendship. A couple of days later I received a postcard written in his typical handwriting. The text he sent was characteristic for Seymour. I quote: ‘Dear Frits, Czeslaw Milosz wrote: ‘When someone is 55 percent right, that’s very good, and there is no use wrangling. And if someone is 60% right, it’s wonderful, it’s great luck, and let him thank God. But what’s to be said about 75% right? Wise people say, this is suspicious. Well, and what about 100% right? Whoever says he’s 100% right is a fanatic, a thug, and the worst kind of rascal.’ A wise statement that I will try to live up to. I will always keep Seymour’s email I mentioned before. In that same mail he called me his friend. That meant so much to me.'
I will treasure the many fond memories I have of Seymour: it has been such a privilege to have his friendship as well as the satisfaction of working together as scholars of Dutch 17th-century painting.

I thank you for your attention.

Fritz Duparc
Let me take you back in time, to Amsterdam in 1641, to a world that Seymour Slive loved and explored with the passion and insight that we celebrate today. In that year Rembrandt painted a large double portrait, now in Berlin, that depicts the Mennonite preacher Cornelis Anslo as he, with hand outstretched, expounds upon a biblical text to a woman, who, with handkerchief clutched in her hand, quietly reflects upon his words. One can only imagine the rich cadence of Anslo’s voice, and the imagery that he evoked to create such an impact on the woman’s state of mind. The Dutch poet and playwright, Joost van den Vondel, who knew of that voice and its power to transform a person’s mood and understanding, captured the challenges the artist faced with the following words:

O, Rembrandt, paint Cornelius’ voice.
The visible is the least important part of him:
The invisible one only learns through the ears.
He who wants to see Anslo, must hear him.

I first learned of Vondel’s epigram from Slive’s fundamental book on Rembrandt and his Critics, which examines how Rembrandt’s contemporaries reacted to his art. Now, however, I also associate Vondel’s words with this great teacher, for the power of Slive’s voice still resonates with me, not only on those occasions when he would weave together stories in large lecture halls to bring to life the painters of yore, but also in those personal moments when we would be together in front of a work of art. I treasure those moments because I would invariably come away from them with a greater sense of Rembrandt’s distinctive style and technique as well as new insights about issues of quality and condition – good old fashioned connoisseurship. As we all know, in whatever forum, Seymour could convey the visual and emotional power of Rembrandt’s art through the rhythm of his speech and his choice of words. Like Anslo, he spoke with his whole body, his arms, his feet – there was never a podium that could contain him - and his eyes, which would light up in joy at the wonder of it all.

The thing about Seymour, however, is that his voice still resonates in his writing, almost as loud and clear as it did when it filled a lecture hall or the space between two friends. Frans Hals
comes alive in his texts, as do the sitters that Hals depicted, and no less so Rembrandt or Jacob van Ruisdael. The books and exhibition catalogues he wrote on these artists are read each year by students around the world, including mine at the University of Maryland. Slive’s fundamental study on seventeenth-century Dutch painting is the core around which my course is taught. I always urge my students to study Slive not just for the content but for the way he conveyed it. I want them to understand the rhythm of his words, the unexpected flourishes, the carefully considered detours, and the importance of imparting the joy of discovery that comes across in each of his texts. These are lessons I learned from him, and ones that I try to transfer to a new generation of art lovers.

Seymour’s writing, like his lecturing, seems effortless, but, as with all good writing, that is an illusion. Good writing only succeeds through care about the placement of each word, and its sequence in a thought or sentence. For anyone who has ever received a hand-written letter from Seymour, it is clear that these concerns were foremost in his mind. His letters are filled with self-editing. Words and phrases scratched out, with little carrots leading to new formulations that somehow capture the sense of the sentence more completely than before. But, not just the sequence of words concerned him, also the types of words – strong, active, and evocative.

Over the past four decades I have been fortunate to have had a wide range of experiences with Seymour, all of which have help mold me as an art historian. From those, I would like to emphasize only a few, none more important than his role as mentor when I began studying with him in the late 1960s. He allowed each of us to grow at our own pace and rhythm, never forcing us to follow a defined path. For example, he never constrained us from building our own construct of Rembrandt’s world, which evolved as our experiences broadened. He taught us to give each painting the benefit of doubt when dealing with attribution issues. Study the compositional conception and look carefully at brushwork, to be sure, but also pay attention to the painting’s history. How has it has been perceived and interpreted by collectors, connoisseurs, and art historians over the years? Vondel’s words, for example, tell us much about the challenges
that Rembrandt, Hals and others faced in the artistic climate in which they worked, and something can be learned from that. Slive also reminded us, in word and deed, that we owe enormous debts of gratitude to the giants in the field who have come before us, and we heard much about, among others, Jacob Rosenberg and Wolfgang Stechow, two scholars with whom he had abiding friendships.

The relationships I had with Seymour extended into my career at the National Gallery of Art, where the character of the mentorship shifted to a collaborative one. I will mention just three of the projects that drew us together, one with Rembrandt, one with Hals, and one with Vermeer.

One of the first challenges I faced at the Gallery in the early 1970s was dealing with a large collection of Rembrandt paintings that contained many great masterpieces, but also works of uncertain attribution. We started a Rembrandt project to try to gain a better understanding of the works on the wall, none of which had undergone technical examinations or had been restored since the Gallery had opened in 1941. We invited Seymour and Egbert Haverkamp Begemann to help guide this project, and I remember with great fondness the long hours we had together in front of Rembrandt paintings during those years. Later, in the 1980s, we worked together on a fabulous exhibition of Frans Hals paintings, which we did together with the Royal Academy in London and the Frans Hals museum. It was a joy there to watch his keen mind at work as an exhibition organizer in helping decide which paintings should be included in that show so that we could capture the essence of the artist’s work. Finally, in the mid-1990s we had another chance to work together, and that was with a film that the Gallery made about Vermeer. True to form, Seymour stole the show in that film, as he expressed in his inimical way the essence of that great master with his carefully chosen words and the expressive cadences of his voice. For those of us that need that occasional fix, and want to see and hear Seymour in action, this film is a good place to go.

It is with enormous gratitude that I thank Zoya and the rest of Seymour’s beloved family for
inviting me to be part of this wonderful occasion as we reflect on remarkable impact this great teacher and scholar had on all of us, and will continue to have.

Arthur Wheelock
SS. October 18. 2014

I think we can all agree that no one has ever had a more euphonious name than Seymour Slive--- clearly destined for book jackets or theater marquees. In Fine Arts 13, where he performed to a spellbound audience, the irrepressible Harvard undergraduates renamed him “See-More-Slides.” Either way, the name evokes the sound of his voice, his laugh and that shrewdly amused gaze, so reminiscent of certain portraits of Frans Hals.

My first sighting of him in the Fall of 1963, even before we’d met, was not an unusual moment—just a man in a hurry, wearing a slightly rumpled suit and walking quickly to class. But the image was memorable and it’s with me still: that lively face framed by silvery wings of hair which seemed to float serenely, in contrast to the futurist blur of rapidly moving feet below. He had the look of someone completely alive and happy in the moment. But of course he was on his way to introducing a roomful of students to the material he loved best.

As a teacher Seymour was available for consultation, but not for idle corridor chats, and never without an appointment, so one prepared carefully for a meeting with him. NO first names...He was "Mr. Slive” even to advanced graduate students and often for those well launched into professional careers. He left you to decide when you could call him Seymour and, believe me, that decision was a not a simple one, especially because communications from him for a very long time were merely signed SS.

He also left to you the business of finding your own voice as a speaker and writer, though the grounding in research skills and clarity of expression was as careful as can be. His professorial comments on one’s efforts -- short, sharp and extremely legible in razor sharp pencil--- might be preceded by the tactful, but slightly alarming phrase \: “one tiny point....” (his points were never tiny)-- with a reference to essential, if sometimes obscure sources, written or visual, that one
had overlooked. Or there might be a down-to-earth comradely warning like the one many of us will recall about not “throwing the baby out with the bathwater.”

For his graduate students, Seymour liked to seize upon teaching moments as they offered themselves—and for the recipient the experience could be startling. Here’s one I won’t forget .... Being hailed one morning from the Director’s office on the second floor of the Fogg by the familiar voice. Inside: a distinguished looking visitor standing proudly by a painting on an easel.

“Here,” Mr. Slive announces grandly, “is one of our graduate students—she’ll give us an opinion on the picture.” [at such a moment your entire life passes before your eyes] . “Ter Borch, I finally blurt with a quaver,“ and then add untactfully, “but he can’t have painted this ... it looks like a later copy.” At this point the owner is looking incredulous and offended, but Seymour is beaming happily. I rapidly exit...hearing his voice over my shoulder cheerfully booming: “So you see, Sir, THAT’s what we teach them at the Fogg!”

Looking back, I understand now that the real lesson was not how to recognize a Ter Borch, or even a copy of one, but to use what you’d learned. “Do your work” was Seymour’s mantra and by that he meant acquiring knowledge and forming your ideas in order to share them......and to relish the process as he did.

In more recent times, knowing Seymour mostly long distance or through intermittent meetings with spaces of time in between, still made possible a growing sense of permanent and deepening connection, greatly enhanced and encouraged by Zoya’s marvelous warmth of welcome. If you were working on something and wanted to discuss it in person, Seymour was eager to meet and generous with encouragement and practical suggestions. If you wrote to him, he always answered immediately---no casual computerized emails, but a real note or letter, hand-written in script as distinctive as his voice. These messages often included careful printer’s corrections to his own text if he wanted to add or
remove a word or phrase. Of course I saved every one,.....even the Maine postcard with the picture of a harbor seal.

Sending Seymour anything at all, even a small publication, was to be granted absolute attention, because he looked so closely at every bit of it---footnotes too---and not because he wanted to be critical. He simply wanted to give back to you anything he might have on a subject. Since he was never empty-handed, welcome examples of “one tiny point” might still be offered along with his pleasure that you’d shared your work with him.

Perhaps most touching of all was the way he could remember a former student’s much earlier efforts. More than 30 years later, Seymour recalled—to our astonishment—a paper my husband Robert had once written on Jan van der Heyden for one of his graduate seminars. We unearthed the actual paper recently and his final comment was: “You’ve come a long way!”

Over the last decade communications from Seymour might refer honestly but lightly to the challenges of age, but it was clear that his world always remained very wide, very deep and very close to his family. Modest references to himself as “this old grey mouse” were utterly belied by allusions to work in progress or ready for press, consultations requested, service on boards, and a surprising quantity of travel... New York and Los Angeles (once even Poughkeepsie) but also Spain, Holland, Paris, London, and St. Petersburg.

Zoya, of course, always present in his words.... in an especially wonderful way in a communication from Maine in which Seymour mentions that they are happily back in what he always referred to as “the bosom of nature.” He reports that he is enjoying reading—no rereading—Anna Karenina in a new translation;......... but Zoya is reading Moby Dick!
The person we celebrate today will always be remembered for his enormous contributions to our field and for his extraordinary body of work. But what I’m thinking about now is his utterly full, well-lived and well-loved life. A remark from one of his letters says it all:: “A long time ago my parents taught me to be grateful for small things.”

Susan Kuretsky
I knew Seymour Slive above all from his visits to the Metropolitan Museum over the past 34 years, although well before that, as a graduate student at Brown and then the Courtauld, and when I taught at Ohio State in the later 1970s, Seymour was always on my mind as the leading American scholar of Dutch art. I wish that I had known him as a teacher, about which my colleagues have warm and colorful tales to tell. I knew Seymour firstly – chronologically first – as a favorite author, and then as a gentleman, and then as a friend. In the last role Zoya, of course, was part of the package, and I will always be grateful for that, and for her asking me to say a few words today.

You know what I mean by a gentleman, but it deserves some elaboration. The first time I spoke to Seymour was in the Witt Library of the Courtauld Institute where he appeared to look at some archival photos – this was probably in 1972 so it would have been for his Hals catalogue – and I went over to introduce myself, as young graduate students are inclined to do. He said immediately, after warmly shaking my hand, “Now, you applied
recently for work at the Fogg,” meaning PhD work with him. This could have been a delicate subject since I did not get in, mainly, I would like to think, because Arthur Wheelock was already there, working on virtually the same subject I had in mind for my dissertation. Many people would have avoided the topic of rejection but Seymour went right to it, and after many later meetings with him I know that he did so because it was the most considerate response at that moment: to raise the question of my possible disappointment, to offer an explanation and genuine words of encouragement. I told him I was very happy at the Courtauld, and I saw in his expression not relief or anything other than wishing me well.

So many of us have had this kind of experience with Seymour, especially in the form of minutely scribbled letters, notes, and postcards, which he then proof-read and corrected in the margins. You could not send him anything, no matter how trivial, without receiving warm and thoughtful words of thanks. What for Emily Post was a matter of training in the social niceties was simply INSTINCT with Seymour, a genuine love of humanity and a predisposition to treat everyone with respect and kindness. Once when I sent him what seemed to me an insignificant article I enclosed a
note saying that, as he may have heard, New York City was shipping all its
trash out of state, and this was my contribution to that program.

Immediately a letter comes back with a page of laughter and
appreciation, everything but a contract to go on stage. Seymour was the
kind of person who starts laughing before you get to the punch line – the
very idea of humor was one of his many reasons to enjoy life.

Seymour would often come to the Met on his whirlwind trips to New
York, to attend a meeting at the Guggenheim, or to see exhibitions – I’ll
never forget going through the De Kooning exhibition at MoMA with
Seymour and Zoya three years ago. They looked carefully for hours, and
seemed to know all about it – “Look, Zoya, there’s the one he did right
after seeing this and that.” I’m sure it would have been quite the same if
we were looking at ancient sculpture or Renaissance enamel. Speaking of
which, Seymour was once reading a German book in the Met’s library,
and when I walked in, he pointed to the page and said, “Look, Walter,
They had e-mail in the Renaissance!” “Email” is the German word for
enamel, and for a moment (Seymour was never quiet about these things)
there was general hilarity in the library.
Seymour would always ring up long before visiting the Met, asking thoughtfully if I might be able to spare a little time, and maybe a sandwich. His warm greetings were usually followed by the somewhat conspiratorial question, “What’s in the lab?” He took a great interest in the conservation of pictures, and in anything newly arrived. He really FELT that paintings were made by people, and he wanted to know just how and why: the craft, the knowledge, and of course the history but also what that particular person, such as Hals or Ruisdael, had put into the work, their touches of heart and soul. I once had a Ruisdael landscape hanging in my office, about which another colleague might have said, “Right, one of the Westphalian subjects, about 1653.” Seymour walked up to the picture and exclaimed, “Oh look at the dog!” A year later he and I were driving in the country, and he looked out at the landscape where something was running, and he shouted, “Oh look at the dog!”

I don’t need to say more – Seymour was a force of nature, bursting with love for art, for life, and for Zoya. We love him and will miss him for the rest of our lives. You will recall that in his later years Seymour often referred, usually laughing, to his impending trip to the Western Paradise.
He did not mean the Getty Museum, although his exhibition of Rembrandt drawing at the Getty, organized by Seymour at the age of 89, was something like a corner of heaven. Wherever the Western Paradise, I’m sure Seymour received a warm welcome, and someday I hope to see him there.
West Wind #2

Mary Oliver

You are young. So you know everything. You leap into the boat and begin rowing. But listen to me. Without fanfare, without embarrassment, without any doubt, I talk directly to your soul. Listen to me.

Lift the oars from the water, let your arms rest, and your heart, and heart’s little intelligence, and listen to me. There is life without love. It is not worth a bent penny, or a scuffed shoe. It is not worth the body of a dead dog nine days unburied. When you hear, a mile away and still out of sight, the churn of the water as it begins to swirl and roil, fretting around the sharp rocks – when you hear that unmistakable pounding – when you feel the mist on your mouth and sense ahead the embattlement, the long falls plunging and steaming – then row, row for your life toward it.

best,
sofia pierce-slive
SEYMOUR SLIVE

Looking for Seymour, I began reading him again. And right away, he was there. Down to earth, lively, common sensical. Never pompous, but writing as I remember him speaking.

In an early contribution to *The Burlington*, published in 1961, he wrote about the words for the different colors in Dutch and English, which he had found in an until then overlooked part of a 1647 dictionary. It is precisely the kind of topic which most authors would discuss in such a way, that one will gladly save their paper to be read some other time, most likely to be never. Not so with Seymour. He catches the reader’s attention with a brief introduction on the extraordinary composition of the book he is going to deal with, pointing to its paragraphs on stones and herbs and numbers and trees, and while he makes you smile about it, he points out how very rich it is, and more specifically, how very rich the seventeenth-century vocabulary for the colors was.

For the 1647 compiler of the dictionary, there was not just light and dark yellow, but there was, and, come to think of it, still is, also yellow as gold, yellow like saffron, or yellow as the yoke of an egg. And there is deep and full yellow, of course, but there is a bastard yellow, too. The author of the dictionary Seymour discussed, a British soldier who served in the Netherlands, was not as naive as an arrogant reader nowadays might think, but indeed used many more words to describe the colors he saw than we nowadays do. He knew of – I quote – *waxing white*, *milk white*, *snow white* and *pale white* – and Seymour saw and recognized this wealth as something we have lost, well knowing that such a terminology would nowadays – I quote again – *be more at home in volumes of verse than in monographs on painting*.

And while being perfectly brief and matter of fact, he cannot resist pointing out that if Henry Hexham, the author of this dictionary, had been on the winning side when defending Breda – I quote – *one of the greatest Baroque pictures would never have been painted*. This little nod at Velasquez makes another smile appear on the face of the reader and no doubt would also have worked well in class.

Looking for Seymour then, it is possible to find him. And to miss him, too, in a field where much academic writing is so hopelessly bad and where connoisseurship is so often tinged with snobbery. Not so in Seymour – and here I must quote again – *if Hals made the 290 paintings Valentinier attributed to him, he was one artist. If he only painted the 109 which Trivas ascribed to him, he was quite a different one*. It is the kind of remark, and the way in which this common sense is phrased, which sum up Seymour for me.

I also always felt that Seymour really cared about art, and that he wished to share and communicate his enjoyment of it. And that as an historian, he was not easily fooled by cliché’s and general assumptions, let alone by short-lived academic fashions.

He was one of the first to be sceptical about the nineteenth-century idea that Dutch seventeenth-century culture was an emanation of the country’s Calvinism, well-knowing that not all of the population was likely to have shed its old beliefs overnight, and that many of the most characteristic Dutch seventeenth-century painters, like Vermeer and Steen, were Catholic, not Protestant. Seymour was also an early critic of the all too easy symbolic reading of Dutch painting, and already voiced his misgivings about this in the early sixties, long before it had become a general trend to think of Dutch
pictures as so many riddles in need of a solution. And like Freud (if indeed it was him) he was always happy to point out that *sometimes a cigar is just a cigar.*

Apart from the art historian Seymour, however, there was Seymour the colleague and friend, the letter-writer, and ultimately – and very much so with Zoya – the generous and inspiring host. And it is this *friend,* who makes the happiest memories surface when I think of him. It is eighty-year old Seymour exclaiming: *Come on Peter, live dangerously,* while taking the hesitant me by the hand to cross a busy American street, and it is the even older Seymour serving me a lobster the last time I visited him and Zoya at home, because he had found out I had never had one.

It is the Seymour who told a private collector whom we went to see, that his Ruisdael should not return to the sad place above the stairs where it had hung when we arrived. And by making the owner *look* at the picture properly, he indeed got his way.

The Seymour that comes to mind so easily, is the man who himself recalled the generosity and kindness of van Gelder, the man who was more or less in charge of Dutch art history when Seymour came to Utrecht to work on *Rembrandt and his Critics.* He remembered van Gelder to have been as welcoming as a stove in winter, *radiating warmth,* as he put it. And as some of you will think of Jacob Rosenberg when thinking of Seymour, I like to think of him and van Gelder, too.

Also, Seymour was not afraid of things new, and willing to change his mind if he thought he had been wrong. In fact, he even liked to point out that this was precisely what thinking was for. And, which is quite rare in art historians who study the old masters, he brought this same open-mindedness to art which he had not seen before or that was contemporary. When he and Zoya saw an exhibition of recent work by Jan Dibbets in the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, they decided on the spot that they would like to have a similar picture for themselves. And because their stay in Holland was almost over, they tried to get hold of the artist within 24 hours. I forget how exactly this was arranged, but they indeed got to see Dibbets, and a few months later the artist was in Cambridge to make them the painting they wanted.

All of this, I think, is very much about enjoying life as well as art.

Having had a stroke in the early nineties, Seymour after a while resumed writing letters, and while signing the first, still somewhat wobbly one, with a nice and readable *Seymour,* he qualified himself in very shaky brackets as *Coppenol’s worst pupil.* Coppenol, as you will recall, was the seventeenth-century Dutch calligrapher, who was twice portrayed by Rembrandt. Life-enhancing, that is what Seymour was.

On my first visit to Seymour and Zoya at home – and that is the dear recollection I would like to round up with – Seymour happened to be reading the same volume of Brodsky essays that I had begun reading in Utrecht before my departure, but which I had left behind because it was too heavy to carry along on a trip to the States. This identical reading at the very same moment was a coincidence I never forgot. It set the tone of our conversation, and gave me a feeling of home-coming that was to last. I have recently returned to that volume of *essays,* and like reading some of Seymour’s art historical writings anew, re-reading a book which he so much enjoyed, is yet another way of bringing him near, and of being in touch. With me, I think, he will last as long as I will.

PH
My association with Seymour stretches back fifty-four years, from 1961 when I arrived in Cambridge as a Radcliffe freshman to the sad day in June when my decades-long stint as his research assistant ended. With Zoya’s approval, I’ll speak of the early sixties, when the women at Harvard attended Radcliffe College, were housed in a separate quadrangle, excluded from the convenient undergraduate library in the Yard and in the minds of many treated as second-class citizens. The Silve family lives up Garden Street near the Radcliffe Quadrangle and, when the housing of men and women was merged in the early seventies, Seymour quickly pointed out to me that there now was a shuttle bus to ferry the undergrads to the Yard so the boys wouldn’t have to walk. Typical Silve observation. But back to the early sixties.

I entered as a freshman undecided on whether I would major in Fine Arts or Psychology. So I did the obvious, I took the Fine Arts survey course, in which Professor Slive covered the Northern Renaissance and Baroque periods, and also a Freshman Seminar co-taught by David Riesman and Erik Erikson. Erik Erikson - to my mind, a mixture of Santa Claus and God. But the Rock Star won.

I’ve stayed close to my Radcliffe classmates, currently representing them as co-chair of the upcoming Harvard-Radcliffe 50th reunion. They continue to tell horror stories of the put-downs they suffered from the male Harvard faculty. Remarks such as - “don’t even think of majoring in this subject, you just plain won’t go anywhere with it.”

Not my experience. So, it confused me until I realized why.
Professor Slive. From the first encounter he treated me with interest, encouragement, respect, and trust. Junior year when I was doing an individual tutorial with him, I asked if I could miss few sessions because I had just started the first Radcliffe downhill ski team, and we needed time to train. His response? “Sure. There’s nothing I like more than a well-rounded woman!” Hole moley. I never worked as hard for anyone as I worked for him. That tutorial resulted in my undergraduate honors thesis on Rembrandt’s landscape drawings, which, unbeknownst to me, he entered for a Radcliffe graduation prize. That travelling fellowship paid my tuition fees at the language courses I took in France and Germany the next year, in preparation for my doctoral work. Slive to rescue again in the late 1970s when I was living on an Army base in Fairbanks, Alaska, as the copyright on my doctoral dissertation was about to elapse. This time, he secured its publication in the Garland Dissertation series. (Not unique. He did the same for someone sitting right in front of me today.)

Shortly after I returned to the Boston area in 1979, Seymour wrote me a note with a question about an Everdingen painting I had seen in a private German collection. Not an email, not a phone call, but a handwritten note which was his usual way of communicating. He complained about feeling overwhelmed by his multiple tasks as professor, museum director, and also collaborator with the Mauritshuis on an upcoming Ruisdael exhibition. I wrote back answering the painting question and offering to help him with the exhibition catalogue. This time the
phone rang, and the decades-long association started.

Snippets of Seymour as teacher and scholar. He lectured without notes, essentially dancing around the stage. His infectious enthusiasm for his subject and ability to express it in language easily understood by the non-specialist has left an indelible impression on those lucky enough to have heard him speak as well as the readers of his widely distributed books. As his research assistant, I learned to answer a letter the day it came in. I also witnessed time and again his congeniality and generosity as a scholar. He shared information without restraint and cautioned against belittling another scholar’s opinion. The Rembrandt Project underscores how important this is with regard to art connoisseurship.

Allow me to jump to this year when he was gravely ill, but nonetheless summoned the strength and courage to add two more stunning achievements to his biography. In April I offered to help vet the final galleys for his Frans Hals book, but he turned me down and did it himself. I should stress how capable he was to very end. My tasks as “research assistant” were more secretarial than substantive. And, at the end of May, he was there in Harvard Yard to receive his well-deserved honorary degree. The last time I saw him was a week later when he was back in Mount Auburn Hospital. I walked into his room, we exchanged greetings, and the phone rang. He picked it up and said, “Oh, hi Sarah, thanks for calling. An angel with a white halo has just appeared. Would you call me back later?” Oh my heavens! We chatted happily about his
recent triumphs. The Hals book published by Phaidon this very week, the astonishing decision to produce it in a Dutch edition, and the Harvard Commencement - with Al taking pictures of Aretha Franklin as she sang the national anthem. (Google it.) I am ever so grateful for these sweet memories.

Alice I. Davies

October 18, 2014
Zoya tells the story of how when Seymour was appointed to Harvard, a member of the search committee expatiated at great lengths about the new colleague’s scholarly achievements and talents to Jakob Rosenberg. After a while Jakob said, a touch impatiently, ‘but, was für ein Mensch ist er?’, ‘What kind of man is he?’ I would like to give you my answer to that question.

In 1955, nearly sixty years ago, I was the curator on duty in the Print Room of the British Museum. From my raised vantage point I observed a youngish man, neatly but informally dressed, enter the room. He had, not unsurprisingly, the look of an American academic. Two things about him immediately struck me. One was his expression. Only for a nana second did it remain inert. Otherwise his face registered with remarkable rapidity a kaleidoscope of different emotions. The second was that he walked slightly with the rolling gait of a sailor carefully treading the decks Not of course knowing of his nautical past, I assumed that he had just been listening to Louis Armstrong singing ‘the British Museum is falling down’.

Given our community of interest we were soon talking. I then had one of those experiences that I am sure many of you have shared. Without preliminaries, immediate bonding or you could say love at first sight. Within forty-five minutes or an hour, we were well on our way to becoming, as the Italians so nicely describe it, amici per le pelle, or friends through the skin.

I have on a number of occasions witnessed how when Seymour joined a group of people talking together he immediately registered the power of his personality. With his gift for the gab, he quickly became quite naturally a centre of attention, if not the centre of attention. It is called charisma and Seymour had it in spades. He even captured the imagination of a child aged two. When Seymour was staying with us, our infant elder daughter heard his return home. She furiously rattled the side of her cot, crying out ‘See ... more .., See. .. more’. Her racket continued until he acknowledged her cry in a warm patriarchal manner. (One may note that he was as loving a parent that ever was, even if he was not one of your diaper-changing fathers.)

There was nothing narrow in Seymour’s approach to life. He was omnivorous in his interests. In the morning he would leap out of bed - and, having shared a room with him, I can say he really leapt out of bed like Athena fully armed for the day if not for life. As he surveyed the morning scene, he gave the air of a man who felt confident that the world was his oyster.

Which naturally leads on to the subject of food. To call him a gourmet would be a shade precious, but he had an adventurous and discerning palate. What was to his taste, he hugely relished. Admittedly living with a cook of the calibre of Zoya, it would be a dull dog who did not enjoy the pleasures of the table. And I needn’t tell this audience what a bulwark Zoya was to Seymour in his life. How often would he say words to the effect, where would I be without my Euridice. Che farò, che farò.

To return to that culinary theme. I say to Frans Hals, I say to Jacob van Ruisdael, eat your hearts out. The pinnacle of Seymour’s expertise was surely devoted to the lobster. To walk down with Seymour to the little harbour in front of the opera house in Stonington, Maine, was preface a to supreme lesson in connoisseurship. From the swirling mass of lobsters caged together in the water, he, with his unerring eye, picked out a beaut; not an ounce more and not an ounce less
than three and a quarter pounds. Then, like a pasha having chosen his bride for the night, he carried his victim triumphantly back to his paradise on Dear Isle.

Later on began the battle of the stove with the lobster in boiling water whistling its way towards death and consumption, while Seymour, standing squarely before the hob, prepared to exercise his chef’s skills on the king of crustaceans. He had an unusual characteristic when he was cooking. He kept the little finger of his left hand in a vertical position, as is if it was a radio mast through which he could converse with the lobster. ‘Buster’, a favourite word, ‘buster, aren’t you cooked yet?’, he seemed to be saying. The eating took place in rapt silence, broken only by the cracking of shell and the smacking of lips. Both literally and metaphorically, it was, to speak in the vernacular, finger-licking good.

His attitude to food can be said to encapsulate his attitude to life. His joie-de-vivre was infectious. One immediately got caught up with what was enthusing him at the moment, expressed with that rich voice which might have been mellowed in a barrel of vintage port. He was a supreme optimist who adhered wholeheartedly to the philosophy of Candide. As a result he was such fun to be with. The joy of his personality made the world seem a better place.

Unquestionably Seymour was a hero of our discipline. And when heroes depart from this world they tend to leave an aching void in our hearts. We struggle to find words of comfort. I can do no better than repeat the words of that child, but in a minor key: [very quietly] Seymour, Seymour.

Christopher White