

The
W. H. Auden Society
Newsletter

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An Appeal to Members

The Society operates on a proverbial shoestring (almost on a literal one), and membership fees do not quite cover the cost of printing and mailing the *Newsletter*. Because the costs of sending a reminder letter are prohibitive, we rely on members to send their annual renewals voluntarily. If you have not sent a renewal in the past year, could you kindly do so now? Payment can conveniently be made by any of the methods described on the last page of this number.

Rachel Wetzsteon (1967-2009)

Rachel Wetzsteon, who died in December at the age of forty-two, was a distinguished poet, as well as a scholar and lover of Auden. She was educated at Yale, Johns Hopkins, and Columbia, where she earned her Ph.D., and she taught at William Paterson University, as well as the Unterberg Poetry Center of the 92nd Street YM-YWHA. Rachel was the author of four books of poetry, most recently *Sakura Park* (Persea, 2006), as well as a critical book on Auden, *Influential Ghosts* (Routledge, 2006). The fourth collection of her poems, *Silver Roses*, is forthcoming from Persea on 1 September 2010.

Her poems, like her, were ardent, witty, and full-flavored.

She was a passionate native of the Upper West Side. Rosanna Warren wrote that Rachel “made Manhattan her beat, the New York of the single girl-woman, flaneuse, heartbreak survivor, smoker, wit, and bookworm.” Several poems in *Sakura Park* (“Little Song for a Big Night”, “Evening News”) evoke Auden’s song-like lyrics, to profoundly moving effect. Her second book, *Home and Away* (Penguin, 1998), contains a memorable elegy for Auden, whom she pictures as “a little wrinkled maybe,/ but always upright.” Her critical study of Auden is especially perceptive in its discussion of the poet’s own elegies, and of Hardy’s influence on him.

Rachel was an inspired and inspiring friend, someone who sustained all who knew her with her powers of heart and mind. She had the habit of rescuing us, sometimes without our knowing it, from troubles of all kinds. Her devotion to Auden knew no limits: I remember fervent conversation with her about her beloved New Year Letter, and about *Forewords and Afterwords*, a book we both cherished. Rachel was truly and deeply – even a bit madly – learned, and without a trace of pedantry; her spirited, endlessly sympathetic personality, full of warmth and screwball excitement, will be much missed on middle earth. May her memory be for a blessing, in that “one landscape that we, the inconstant ones, / Are consistently homesick for.”

DAVID MIKICS

David Mikics (dmikics@uh.edu) is Professor of English at the University of Houston. His most recent books are A New Handbook of Literary Terms (Yale University Press, May 2007) and, with Stephen Burt, The Art of the Sonnet (Harvard University Press, April 2010).

Uncle Wiz and the Gyroscope

One morning in December last year I arrived at the British Film Institute's Special Collections archive in central London to sift through their collection of Ivor Montagu papers. The plan was to research Auden's documentary debut, the short *avant-garde* work *Coal Face*, which had been premiered at a 1935 screening. I wanted to learn more about the people involved in that event and thought that the Montagu material might yield some useful background correspondence. Anyone interested in British film culture between the wars will soon come across the name of Ivor Montagu (1904-84), a co-founder of The Film Society, whose papers have been frequently consulted since entering the archive in the 1980s. I wasn't expecting to find anything new but, a few minutes after settling down to a long day of note-taking, I opened a pristine white envelope and eased out the fragile contents, the most immediately striking of which gave me a jolt. It was a three-page handwritten manuscript (blue ink on cheap unwatermarked paper) in Auden's best handwriting, with pencil annotations by another hand. This was unexpected.

That wasn't all—there were two substantial typewritten documents on stapled yellowing paper, apparently a list of subtitles and intertitles, with timings, also with pencil annotations. Then another manuscript, not in Auden's hand.

Clearly these were different stages in the development of verse translations by Auden and obviously linked to the main film at that 1935 screening—Dziga Vertov's *Three Songs of Lenin*. About the film itself I knew nothing at all at this stage. The undated papers were not arranged in order and after some shuffling what emerged were:

- (a) An eleven-page typescript, a literal translation by Montagu (and possibly another) of the three Russian folk songs featured in the film
- (b) A manuscript rendering of Songs One and Two into verse by Auden, with later pencil emendations by another hand, presumably Montagu's
- (c) A typescript (13 pages, but incomplete) which incorporates Auden's renderings into instructions for the title-makers
- (d) A handwritten copy of the Three Songs, not by Auden or Montagu, with some minor variations from (b) and (c).

An exchange of emails with Professor Mendelson in the States confirmed that this was something of a find, and a most interesting one, for what had come to light after an interval of three-quarters of a century were Auden's renderings of folk songs for a classic of Soviet propaganda.

2

The Film Society was founded in 1925 and was the first of its kind in Britain. Much of what we now take for granted in our contemporary film culture can be traced back to the Society, and looking through programmes from the period it is striking how many films, now part of any critic's canon of classic cinema, were first screened on Sunday afternoons in the 1930s. There would be a close link to the GPO Film Unit as the founder John Grierson's first film, the seminal *Drifters*, was screened along with *Battleship Potemkin* at an early gathering.

Despite much jeering from the popular press, who predictably derided the Society's intellectual pretensions (and even Montagu's mother referred to "Ivor's Sunday afternoons of gloom"), it was an immediate success. Films from Germany, Russia and France dominated each season, and many directors were first introduced to a British audience at Society screenings: Leni, Berger, Pabst, Reiniger, Renoir, Clair, Cavalcanti, Ivens, Len Lye and many others. One programme consisted entirely of films made by women, including Germaine Dulac's *La Coquille et le Clergyman* (memorably rejected by the censors as being "so cryptic as to be almost meaningless. If there is a meaning, it is doubtless objectionable").

Montagu was a Cambridge graduate who would become one of the most fascinating and engaging cultural figures of his generation. He was the son of a peer (Baron Montagu of the banking family), a member of the Holborn branch of the Labour Party and founder-president of the International Table Tennis Federation. He would also become the first ever film critic for the *Observer* newspaper, and later worked alongside Michael Balcon as associate producer on such Alfred Hitchcock classics as *The Man Who Knew Too Much*, *The 39 Steps*, *The Secret Agent* and *Sabotage*.¹ He would also join the Communist

¹ Hitchcock's 1936 version of Conrad's *The Secret Agent*. In their "Last Will and Testament" in *Letters from Iceland*, Auden and MacNeice wrote: "And the

Party and befriend Sergei Eisenstein during the great Russian director's fraught American period, and he would be a co-signatory, with Auden and others, of the questionnaire answered by the contributors to *Authors Take Sides on the Spanish Civil War* (1937), in which he wrote: "Fox-hunters, people who shoot down birds, dukes, bankers, like Franco. Cocktail parties are given for him. If there were no other reason – with the Republic you find better company").

Better company could certainly be found at Film Society events whose members included H. G. Wells, Bernard Shaw and Anthony Asquith. T. S. Eliot and Virginia Woolf could be seen in the audience and Auden, along with his colleagues in the Unit, was a paid-up member.

The programme for Sunday, 27 October 1935, was typically diverse and ambitious, with some German commercial shorts, a nature film about sea urchins, a dazzling abstract work by the painter Len Lye and premieres of three films of lasting importance: Arthur Elton's study of the effects of grinding poverty, *Housing Problems*; the experimental short *Coal Face* (for which Auden had written the madrigal "O lurcher-loving collier") and, as the main feature, the new Soviet production. Shortly before the screening Montagu would approach Auden, working nearby at the GPO's Soho Square offices, for advice on an urgent matter involving the Russian film, but until my recent discovery the nature and extent of Auden's contribution remained unknown.

3

Three Songs of Lenin was directed by the hugely influential Russian film-maker David Kaufmann (1896-1954), better known by his adopted name Dziga Vertov, the Russian word for gyroscope.² Best

Stavisky Scandal in picture and sound / We leave to Hitchcock with sincerest praise / *Of Sabotage*". The suicide of the French financier Serge Stavisky was allegedly arranged by the French police under orders from the premier to conceal pervasive establishment corruption. The scandal sparked riots, a general strike and the resignation of two successive premiers.

² Kauffman's adopted name of Dziga Vertov is usually translated as "Spinning Top", but comes from the Hungarian for gyroscope, which, with its associations of precision engineering, science, kinetic energy and modernism,

remembered today for *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929), Vertov would fall eventually out of favour during the Stalin regime and his reputation went into a slow decline. This new film was commissioned by the Party leader Stalin in part to enhance his own appeal to the Soviet public but also to win friends abroad at a time before the show trials and purges had fatally compromised the legitimacy of a tyrannical regime.

Auden scholars have long been intrigued by a terse note in The Film Society programme for that particular Sunday afternoon:

The Society thanks Mr. W.H. Auden for kindly advising on the English rendering of many passages in the songs.

Now we know what the advice entailed, and it amounts to a significant addition to our knowledge of Auden's working practices in the mid-1930s. Let's first consider Montagu's literal translation of Song One, then compare Auden's rendering. Although Montagu spoke fluent Russian, his version suggests collaboration with a third party, presumably a native speaker.

First, Montagu's version:

My face was in a dark prison
blind was my life
without light or learning
I was slave though unchained
but into this dark came
a light-ray
The ray of the truth of Lenin.

we never once saw him
we never heard his voice
but yet he was close to us
as a father
much closer!
no father ever did

is certainly more appropriate. (I am indebted to Leslie Chamberlain for this information).

for his children –
What LENIN did for us

where was darkness
he made light
from the desert, a garden,
from death – life.
he showed the weak and poor
that a million sand grains
are a mound,
a million wheat ears
are a sack,
and a million weak –
mightier than strong!

Here is Auden's rendering:

My face in a dark prison lay
 And blind my life remained
No learning mine nor light of day,
 A slave although unchained
Till through my darkness shone a ray
 And Lenin's truth I gained

We never looked upon his face
 We never heard his voice
Yet closer than a father he
 Much closer to us was
No father for his children did
 What Lenin did for us

From darkness thick he made a light
 From deserts gardens green
And out of death the life he brought
 Through him the poor have seen
A million sand grains make a mound
 A million corn a sack
A million of the weakest straws
 Break the strong camel's back.

With all he had he took our part
He gave his brain, his blood, his heart.

What's particularly exciting about this discovery is that it shows the young (or youngish) poet engaged in a brief and energetic collaboration, deploying his brilliant skills to an explicitly political end, and the Montagu papers provide a snapshot of the period's working practices. Vertov's film, today widely regarded as a late masterpiece by the most influential of all Russian documentarists, is above all a piece of propaganda, commissioned by Stalin to mark the twentieth anniversary of Lenin's death and (of course) to enhance Stalin's reputation and consolidate his role as Lenin's heir. Auden mediates the content into English verse in a form that makes it feel natural and culturally appropriate. At the same time, it is clear that Auden has a high level of technical understanding when it comes to the constraints of sub-titling. In fact, given what we know of Auden's worksheets, which are often covered in metrical calculations, he must have found these very limitations a congenial challenge. The manuscript is covered in shot numbers which relate in turn to those in the typescript.

Auden's handwritten pages do not include a version of the Third Song, although the manuscript appears to be complete. It may be that the original prose rendering was deemed sufficient for the screening, or that deadlines would not allow for completion. Another possibility is that Auden simply lost interest in the project, unhappy with Montagu's intervention and amendments.

4

We can assume that, working closely on a daily basis with technicians, Auden would have been familiar with the established method of consulting a "shot list", consisting of a brief summary of each scene, describing the subject-matter and action, and giving its length (usually in feet and frames, as all cutting-rooms had footage counters but few could measure footage in seconds), and with practice the writer would get used to an established rule of "three syllables to the foot on 35mm and seven syllables to the foot on 16mm".³

³ *The Technique of Documentary Film Production*, by W. Hugh Baddeley (Focal Press, 1963), p. 202.

Here, and for the first time in print, is a short extract from Montagu typescript (a), the source material upon which Auden worked. I have been faithful as far as possible to the original layout, with its sometimes erratic use of capitals and lower case and I have imposed a grid for ease of reference. What cannot be reproduced are the many scribbled amendments, deletions, calculations and initials characteristic of a working document passed from hand to hand.

The left-hand column shows the shot number, followed by V (standing for Verse) – indicating those titles which Auden would be expected to revise and approve. The centre column shows the text (the underlining serves to highlight the titles Auden would work on). The right-hand column contains technical directions (FI = fade in; FO = Fade out) and the time in seconds the shot would remain on screen.

13.	The room in Gorki where Lenin died, its windows face the park.	12.
14.	Here is the bench we know from the photograph . . .	9
15V.	SONG ONE white and black on grey mottled card "My face was in a dark prison. . ."	F.I. F.O. 22
16V.	. . . my face was in a dark prison. . .	7
17V.	. . . blind was my life . . .	6
18V.	. . . without light or learning, I was slave though unchained . . .	9
19V.	. . . but into this dark came a light ray the ray of the truth of Lenin.	8

19A.	End of Reel One.	
19B.	Reel Two.	
20V.	. . . we never once saw him . . .	14?
21V.	. . . we never heard his voice . . .	5
22V.	. . . but yet he was close to us as a father much closer!	10
23V.	. . . no father ever did for his children what LENIN did for us.	13

This typescript is very much a work in progress as a lengthy technical note to the title-makers confirms. It begins:

The following [fifty-nine] titles are “verse” titles to be held up for a few days while wording is checked in consultation with Auden

There is evidence that 106 titles in all would be needed in time for the screening, a painstaking and costly business. Not only the content, but the design of the subtitles were matters of concern:

General instruction: Layout and solidity of size, etc. of type to be checked and verified to compare, not slavishly but as guided by, present Russian lettering. Order in careful consultation with title-card maker, who should see at least (typescript ends)

Let’s now consider the second typescript (Montagu typescript (c)), which incorporates Auden’s versions of the first two songs as

well as some other changes. This in effect is a set of instructions from Auden to the title makers.

15V.	SONG ONE white and black on grey mottled card "My face in a dark prison lay. . ."	F.I. F.O. 22
16V.	. . . My face in a dark prison lay . . .	7
17V.	. . . And blind my life remained . . .	6
18V.	. . . No learning mine or light of day, A slave although unchained . . .	9
19V.	. . . Till through my darkness shone a ray, And L e n i n ' s truth I gained.	8
19A.	End of Reel One.	
19B.	Reel Two.	
20V.	. . . We never looked upon his face . .	14?
21V.	. . . We never heard his voice . . .	5
22V.	. . . Yet closer than a father he - Much closer to us was.	10
23V.	. . . No father for his children did, What LENIN did for us.	13

This was the version Auden approved and which would appear on screen.

My forthcoming study, *Auden on Film*, will look in greater detail at the development of these other titles and their relation to the screen images accompanying the three Songs. As poetry they are undeniably very minor works, but they happen to date from a particularly intense and productive period in the low dishonest decade with which Auden is still commonly associated. They add to our knowledge of the work of a great poet.

5

The discovery of these translations prompted a flurry of media interest and was widely reported. The *TLS* (22 May 2009) published the translations included my commentary and a short editorial, and the story was picked up by the BBC's flagship news programme, *Radio 4's Today*. During the interview there was also an opportunity for me to plug the British Film Institute screening the following month.

This event, brilliantly organised by Nathalie Morris and her colleagues, included a display of the manuscripts on the BFI's mezzanine and the screening itself was a partial recreation of the Film Society's original programme, including *Coal Face* and Len Lye's *Kaleidoscope*. An expectant audience of around two hundred gathered in the main theatre and enjoyed a lively introduction by Nathalie focusing on the good work of the BFI archive, my own account of the discovery and a magisterial reading of all Three Songs by the actor Simon Callow.

The story of the discovery was reported in the national broadsheets and followed up by the international press, with many internet news sites linking to articles in the *TLS* and the *Guardian*. The coverage was not free from distortion and hyperbole, particularly in the emphasis on Auden's Communist sympathies (the *TLS* imposed the misleading headline "For the Love of Lenin") and the assumption that these translations were original poems and not commissions.

Soon after its original 1935 London screening in October, *Three Songs for Lenin* (without Auden's subtitles) had its American premiere in New York (6 November 1935—"presented by Mejrähpomfilm in commemoration of the Seventeenth Anniversary of the "October Revolution"), one day ahead of its first official Moscow screening. The American programme includes glowing testimonials from Ambassador William C. Bullitt, Will Rogers ("The picture is tremendous

propaganda”), André Malraux and Film Society stalwart H. G. Wells (“One of the greatest and most beautiful films I have ever seen”).

The fact that the film was screened overseas before its Soviet premiere was certainly ominous—Dziga Vertov would soon fall out of favour with the regime and the rest of his career was spent in relative obscurity.

The Ogre does what ogres can, and Stalin himself took a predictably close interest in film—daily screenings were arranged in the Kremlin by Andrei Zhdanov, Minister of Culture. We in the West know Alexander Nevsky, Ivan the Terrible and a handful of others, but many hundreds of unknown films from the era constitute a formidable and unknowable body of work. Auden would, one imagines, be mildly astonished that a small favour for Ivor Montagu would merit such interest seventy-five years later.

DAVID COLLARD

David Collard is writing Auden on Film. Thanks to Nathalie Morris (BFI), Simon Callow, Farnoosh Fathi, Annie Janowitz, and Professor Edward Mendelson. A version of this article first appeared in the TLS (22 May 2009) and is adapted with kind permission.

Auden at the Mid-Century Book Society: A Memoir

The Mid-Century Book Society was started in 1959 by Arnold Bernhardt, the head of Value Line, an investment fund. Because Mid-Century was a losing proposition, it was worth a lot to Mr. Bernhardt as a tax loss. The editorial board, who chose the main selection, consisted of W.H. Auden, Jacques Barzun and Lionel Trilling, who had previously all been the editorial board of another book club, The Readers' Subscription. There was a financial manager, an employee of Mr. Bernhardt's firm, and an editorial director, Sol Stein, who later became a book publisher. When Sol was fired in 1962, I was hired to replace him.

For the first few months I dealt with messrs Barzun and Trilling, who had interviewed me for the job, Mr. Auden was away in Austria with Chester Kallman. The first time I met Mr. Auden was when he was delivering his essay for the upcoming club bulletin. Mid-Century was situated in a four-story walk-up brownstone on the east side of Manhattan. I received a call at my desk on the fourth floor from the reception desk: "Mr. Auden is here to deliver his copy." "Tell him I'll be right down," I said. "No,no," they replied, "He's on his way up." So, I sat at my desk, listening to heavy footsteps on the stairs, then heavier breathing at each landing, and at last a large figure wrapped in a coat and scarf burst through the doorway, completely breathless and waving some papers. He could barely say "Here!" as he flung the papers onto my desk. Then he wheeled around, waved and paused in the doorway to call out "Cheerio!" and was off down the stairs. Lionel Trilling told me later, "Wystan is shy about dealing with people until he gets to know them."

At editorial meetings, when the main selections were chosen, Mr. Auden showed up early. He sat in a deep armchair and the first thing he did was take off his shoes and put on slippers he had brought with him. Then he asked me to wheel over the tea cart piled with all the books that were under consideration that month. Since the cart was piled high with books and he was seated in a deep armchair the net effect for the rest of the meeting was that Mr. Auden was a disembodied voice emanating from behind a pile of books. In addition, he had what was to me an impenetrable English accent. But the voice would issue from behind the books and Messrs Barzun and Trilling would say, "Is that so, Wystan" and "Yes, Wystan" and "Certainly,

Wystan." and we would wind up with the main selection being the correspondence of Richard Strauss and Hugo von Hofmannsthal.

At the one yearly Directors meeting I attended, Mr. Bernhardt was joined by his financial man and Auden, Barzun and Trilling. At one point I was explaining about returns. Book clubs operated in those days on what was called "negative option". That is, you the member sent in a slip saying you didn't want the selection, otherwise it was automatically sent to you. In our case, we figured more than half the sales were from people neglecting to send in the refusal slip. I didn't mention that, but I did point out that fifteen percent of the books sent out to members were returned unopened. Mr. Auden was appalled. It seemed to me he took it as a personal affront that people rejected a book he had advised them to read. Some time later a motion came up that had to be voted on. We went around the table until we got to Mr. Auden. He didn't answer. Finally, Jacques Barzun called out, "Wystan!" Mr. Auden looked at him and said, "Fifteen percent!" It had been bothering him ever since I had mentioned it.

I have been editor of three book clubs in my years in publishing, but there has been no experience as fascinating as dealing with W.H. Auden, Jacques Barzun and Lionel Trilling.

STEVEN FRIMMER

Steven Frimmer is a retired editor with more than thirty years experience at three book clubs and two major publishers.

“Too Sad to Sing”

Auden did not want his correspondence preserved: one of the best-known pieces of correspondence to survive despite his wishes is also one of the briefest, an undated postcard (from the 1960s or 1970s) sent to the composer Robin Holloway, in response to Holloway’s request that he write a libretto based on Nathanael West’s *Miss Lonelyhearts*. Auden wrote back, simply, “Dear Holloway: Too sad to sing.” The brief reply gave its title to Kenneth Brecher’s *Too Sad to Sing: A Memoir with Postcards* (1985) where the postcard is reproduced (p. 58). It has been frequently quoted since.

What did Auden mean? Perhaps he was himself too sad to sing: observers in those years remarked on his uneven health, his “conversations that became repetitious and formulaic” (in Edward Mendelson’s phrase), his accelerated indifference to manners. Perhaps he meant instead that West’s novella was too sad to be made into a satisfactory opera, by Auden and Holloway or by anyone else: in opera, “Every high C accurately struck demolishes the theory that we are irresponsible puppets of fate or chance,” Auden wrote in “Notes on Music and Opera”; Nathanael West’s “main characters” on the other hand (Auden also opined) are one and all “doom[ed] to a peculiar and horrid fate” by a “disease of consciousness which renders it incapable of converting wishes into desires” (“West’s Disease”; both essays are collected in *The Dyer’s Hand*).

Whatever Auden meant, he was quoting Christina Rossetti, a quotation unidentified (so far as I know) until now. Here is the relevant poem, from her collection of verse (supposedly or at least partly) for children, *Sing-Song* (1872):

Hear what the mournful linnets say:
“We built our nest compact and warm,
But cruel boys came round our way
And took our summerhouse by storm.
“They crushed the eggs so neatly laid;
So now we sit with drooping wing,
And watch the ruin they have made,
Too late to build, too sad to sing.”

How do we know Auden meant the reply as a quotation? We cannot know for sure, but it seems quite likely: Auden included po-

ems from *Sing-Song* in the anthology he edited with Norman Holmes Pearson *Poets of the English Language* (1950); the anthology also includes her “Amor Mundi” (““Oh, where are you going with your lovelocks flowing?””), a possible model for Auden’s own earlier ““O where are you going?” said rider to reader.” *The Poet’s Tongue*, (1935), which Auden prepared with John Garrett, also includes Christina Rossetti (though nothing from *Sing-Song*), and she gets a clerihew to herself in *Academic Graffiti*. Certainly Auden knew her lyric poems.

What does the source, if it is indeed a source, say about Auden’s postcard? The whole poem of Rossetti’s describes a disappointment (not only a sadness) at the loss of a beloved dwelling: her linnets must “watch the ruin” (and blame the boys) in the same locale where they once built nests. Auden wrote all his later libretti in collaboration with Chester Kallman, whose sexual escapades sometimes included “cruel boys”; Auden’s refusal to write a libretto for Holloway may have encoded a lament about the damage Kallman’s habits had done to Auden’s moods, or even about the literal damage that Kallman’s “boys” had done to Auden’s living quarters – to his summer house in Ischia, to the later summer house in Kirschstetten, or to his apartment on St. Mark’s Place in New York (see, e.g. Humphrey Carpenter, *W. H. Auden: A Biography*, 1981, p. 438). Auden may, on the other hand, have simply lamented his own advancing age, or his troublesome health (especially remarked by those who saw him at Christ Church). Auden’s late short poem “Bird-Language” (1967) – also eight lines of tetrameter (though rhymed in couplets) – seems like a further response to Rossetti’s quatrains: there the birds may utter “rage, bravado, lust” or “joy,” but “Noises that betoken fear” are Auden’s fallacious projection of human memory and human anticipation into the life of birds that know only this day. At the least, the apparent quotation suggests Auden’s sense of himself as diminished or disappointed in his attempts to “build” as well as to “sing,” attributing to that diminishment his reluctance to undertake more ambitious projects, even as he continued to exercise the considerable powers he retained.

STEPHEN BURT

Stephen Burt is the author, most recently, of Close Calls with Nonsense, a collection of criticism, and Parallel Play, a collection of poems.

Book Review

Stan Smith. "Gubbins at a Desk: Auden's Cave." *Authors at Work: The Creative Environment*. Edited by Ceri Sullivan and Graeme Harper. New York: D. S. Brewer, 2009.

Is the Poetic Muse more likely to visit a flowered hill in the Lake District or a garbage-strewn apartment in Greenwich Village? That is—in the business of inspiration, does place matter? It used to be widely held that the literary genius possessed a privileged independence from his geographical locale, such that his mind was, as Ceri Sullivan explains, "its own place." Yet as contemporary thought continues to downplay the artistic mind's transcendence of its material environment, the circumstances surrounding the creative act take on increased importance. In her introduction to this book, Sullivan proposes that new studies of "the creative environment" of great writers not only promise to enrich our understanding of literature, but they also have far-reaching implications for anyone with a vested interest in the creative industries. To this end, the book offers a multi-faceted approach to the questions of place as they relate to artistic accomplishment. There are essays on the work habits of authors as various as Milton, Trollope, and the Brönte Sisters, as well as a variety of interviews with critics and "industrialists" from the literary field. The book functions, then, as a sort of extended meditation on the material aspects of literary achievement. And though it posits the possibility of identifying certain consistent (and hence possibly replicable) qualities in the environments of highly successful authors, its most captivating moments occur not in the recognition of similarities in work styles, but of differences. Artists tend to be eccentrics at their work, and no one in this book stands out as much in this regard as W. H. Auden.

Auden is enough of a character to render most biographical treatment interesting, but Stan Smith deserves special kudos for embracing the less-appealing aspects of Auden's personality in a way that is both entertaining and humanizing. (One wonders if Auden would feel the same way.) Smith's writing has a way of taking the reader into his confidence, such that his essay reads like a series of anecdotes divulged by someone who knew the poet very well. Indeed, he does enlist the help of Auden's friends to paint the picture of a man who was at times irascible, controlling, compulsive, and most important to this particular investigation, messy. Writer James Stern

expressed his frustrations about Auden's New York apartment, asserting that "frustrated burglars could not have created greater chaos: they would hardly have covered the floor with books and clothes, all the furniture with papers, and filled every receptacle, including a flower vase, with the remains of cigarettes. God, Wystan, what a mess!" In his memoir of the poet, Charles H. Miller described an "Audenscape" that "reeked of stale coffee grounds, tarry nicotine, and toe-jam mixed with metro pollution and catshit, Wystanified tenement tang." And acquaintance Brad Stevens concurred, albeit a bit more positively, that Auden's apartment "seemed completely disorganized to me, but you know Wystan—he was making a book out of that mess." Smith so convincingly portrays Auden a man who lived and worked in chaos that we are left pondering how such disorder inspired poems of inimitable clarity and arrangement. This is a good question to meditate on, as it relates directly to the larger purposes of this book. It is also quite funny that in an inquiry that stresses the materiality of artistic production, Auden brings so much stuff to the proverbial table—newspaper clippings, Benzedrine, coffee grounds, manuscripts, cigarette butts, dirty clothes, and bags of trash—that we are left both amused and repulsed.

Smith proposes that Auden's work habits were as perplexing as the environment in which he applied them. In tracing his revision strategies, Smith tells of an episode in which Auden lost his temper over a typing error and made Harold Norse cry. Yet Smith follows this anecdote with one in which Auden liked a publishing error so much that he decided to keep it. And though Smith establishes Auden as a very hard worker, he also references Christopher Isherwood's disclosure that "when Auden was younger he was very lazy." Apparently Auden hated revision so much that if Isherwood didn't like a poem, the poet would simply throw it away. He did this with particular lines as well, cobbling together only the pieces of poetry that Isherwood liked: "In this way, whole poems were constructed which were simply anthologies of my favourite lines, entirely regardless of grammar or sense. This is the simple explanation of much of Auden's celebrated obscurity."

If this chapter feels at times like Smith organized a gathering of Auden's friends for the express purpose of roasting him, it also at times offers deeper observations on the artistic problems of place. Indeed, Smith's entertaining series of anecdotes disassembles the underlying structure of this essay, which functions as a sustained ex-

amination of Auden's methods as they relate to broader questions of poetic inspiration. Smith considers how the location where a poet writes uniquely works its way into a poem in the construct he intriguingly terms "the mythological present." And as Auden himself has much to add to this discussion, Smith is wise to lead us to "The Cave of Making", a part of the larger poem "Thanksgiving for a Habitat" that Auden wrote in Kirchstetten, Lower Austria, in the only house he ever owned. Smith explains that it is here that Auden offers "the fullest, most symbolically charged account of what he calls 'our lonely dens', those places of solitary activity where, in a significantly passive voice, 'silence/ is turned into objects.'" For Auden, the Muse is most likely to visit a silent place, a place "devoid of / flowers and family photographs", where "all is subordinate/ here to a function, designed to / discourage daydreams." This environment is intentionally lonely, yet it allows the poet both to commune with the dead and to people the air with words, to separate himself from the surrounding world in order to more deeply examine it. Smith's insights into this poem, albeit brief, are worth reading, though one wishes he had more rigorously applied his analytical prowess to help us make further sense of it. For while the poem seems central to questions of place, its descriptions alternatively contradict and amplify Smith's existing picture of Auden in ways that could be more closely examined. Still, as it stands, Smith's work is useful to anyone interested in the material aspects of Auden's poetic output. Just like the book in which it is published, the chapter raises more questions about the creative environment than it answers, and as such it promises to serve as a catalyst for further inquiry.

MEGHAN DAVIS

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Notes and Queries

Ian Hamilton, in his *Writers in Hollywood 1915-1951* (Heinemann, 1990, p. 151), describes Aldous Huxley's time as a scriptwriter and in particular his collaboration with Isherwood (on an unmade film about faith-healing), his rejected adaptation of *Alice in Wonderland* for Walt Disney and "... a saga of negotiations about a possible movie of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (with Isherwood, Auden, and even Samuel Beckett somehow involved as possible co-writers)." This seems unlikely. Beckett was published by Grove Press, which also published Lawrence, so perhaps a rumour was spread that Hamilton mischievously perpetuated. As for the Auden connection, I have so far found nothing elsewhere linking this unlikely combination of writers. Can *Newsletter* readers throw any light on the subject?"

DAVID COLLARD

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Recent and Forthcoming Books and Events

On 27 January 2010, as part of the Gresham College series "Creative Inspiration", the acclaimed ensemble Chamber Domaine, led by Thomas Kemp, performed the Auden-Britten collaborations *On This Island*, *Fish on the Unruffled Lakes*, and *Les Illuminations*, as well as a chamber arrangement of Auden and Britten's cabaret Songs.

On 20 February 2010, as part of the National Theatre's series entitled "A Study of Art", the theatre and opera director Phyllida Lloyd, alongside music expert Colin Matthews and Philip Reed, editor of Britten's diaries, discussed their respective relations to Britten's work. These conversations were interspersed with performances by the Royal Opera House's soprano Elisabeth Meister singing Auden and Britten's cabaret songs.

On 27 February 2010, the National Theatre's "A Study of Art" series presented a discussion of Auden by Professor Stan Smith, poet Andrew Motion, as well as David Buckingham and Paul Kent, both colleagues of Auden's from Oxford. The panel was chaired by James Naughtie.

A performance of Leonard Bernstein's Symphony No. 2, inspired by Auden's *The Age of Anxiety*, at the Royal Festival Hall, 21 April 2010, was preceded by a public discussion of the poem by Glyn Maxwell at the South Bank Centre, on 18 April. An essay by Maxwell on the poem and symphony appeared in the *Guardian* newspaper on 10 April 2010, and may easily be found on the newspaper's web site, guardian.co.uk.

A new production by the Young Vic and the English National Opera of Hans Werner Henze's opera *Elegy for Young Lovers*, with a libretto by Auden and Chester Kallman, was presented in London in late April and early May 2010. The production by Fiona Shaw was universally praised by reviewers.

A new volume in the Complete Works of W. H. Auden, *Prose, Volume IV, 1956-1962*, is scheduled for publication by Princeton University Press in October 2010. The book includes the complete text of *The Dyer's Hand* together with Auden's essays, reviews, and broadcasts from his years as Professor of Poetry at Oxford. The book also includes the English texts of the Creweian Orations that he delivered (in Latin translations prepared for him by an Oxford classicist) on alternate years when he was Professor of Poetry. These orations are splendid examples of Auden's formal playfulness and wit.

A critical edition of Auden's *The Age of Anxiety*, edited by Alan Jacobs, will appear probably early in 2011 in the series W. H. Auden: Critical Editions, published by Princeton University Press.

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