

The
W. H. Auden Society
Newsletter

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A Note to Members

The Society apologizes to its members for the long wait they have endured for this number of the *Newsletter*. The search for a new Editor took more time than we had hoped. We hope the contents of this number may be some small compensation for the delay. All current and recent memberships will be extended an additional two years without any further cost as a small recompense. We hope now to return to the more regular biennial schedule that we followed in the past.

“The Habit of Art”

Alan Bennett’s New Play about Auden and Britten

Our London correspondent writes:

Peter O’Toole once described the actor’s craft as “farting around in disguises,” and there’s no shortage of flatulence and dissembling in Alan Bennett’s latest play, based upon an imagined encounter between Benjamin Britten and W. H. Auden in Oxford in 1972. *The Habit of Art* opened to general acclaim at the Lyttelton Theatre on 5 November 2009 and played to packed houses throughout its run. I was lucky enough to book the last available place in the four-part lecture series *Discover Auden*, which accompanied the production in December. What follows is a diary of that month and some reflections on the play itself.

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On the first afternoon an audience of around fifty was ushered into the Cottesloe, the smallest of three theatres making up the National’s sprawling complex on London’s South Bank. Following an introduction by the organiser Anthony Banks, the poet Hamish Robinson gave an illustrated talk of great wit, understanding and insight, the edited text of which appears elsewhere in this number of the *Newsletter*. Readings were given by the actors Perri Snowdon and George Rainsford, and a recording of the poet himself reading *Musée des Beaux Arts*. It’s always a pleasure to hear a poet eloquent in his praise of Auden’s range of achievements, and Robinson chose some refreshingly off-trail examples of Auden’s work from each phase of his career. We left the theatre and drifted away into the frosty evening with a bundle of fresh perspectives and a keen enthusiasm for the rest of the programme, which would clearly not be “Auden for Beginners” but a serious and questioning analysis, a “discovery” indeed.

The following Thursday we met on an overcast morning in the National's car park to travel down to Oxford for a late but convivial lunch and a visit to Auden's *alma mater*.

A short walk under leaden skies brought us to the gatehouse of Christ Church College and we crossed a windswept quad to the corner block between the cathedral and the Great Hall, ascending a stone staircase to be welcomed by Dr. Paul Kent, the distinguished chemist who knew Auden for many years and who delivered a lively talk, without notes, in measured ironic cadences.

As an undergraduate, said Kent, Auden was scientifically inclined but "didn't go the distance," switching in his second year to Politics, Philosophy and Economics, but finding "there was too much work in that," made a second switch, to a degree in English, in which he gained "a resounding third class honours degree." Kent's view was that Auden's career immediately after graduation consisted of a hand-to-mouth living in a series of "makeshift positions" until his move to the States in 1939. Kent touched on the less well-known aspect of Auden's American years, particularly his time as a commissioned Major in the US Army reporting on the psychological effect of aerial bombing on German civilians.

In 1956 Auden was elected Oxford Professor of Poetry (an "honoric if not lucrative" post, in Kent's phrase). Dr. Kent was then a recently appointed tutor in Chemistry at Christ Church and recalled that most of his colleagues at the time were recent, post-war appointments. Auden was, said Kent, aware of his unpopularity in certain quarters, and kept a low profile during the first few terms, but slowly began to participate in general College life, chatting amiably in the Senior Common Room and at High Table to the resident dons about history and politics, though rarely about poetry. He would promptly disappear at 10pm for "beddie-byes." Dr. Kent elicited laughter with a well-timed pause when he remarked, "He respected us and we respected him . . . *mostly*."

One assumes it was Auden's departure for the States before the outbreak of the Second World War that still rankled. He was, even by College standards, an odd fish.

Dr. Kent taught organic and bio-chemistry. There was one other Christ Church tutor in the subject, the physical chemist David Buckingham, and Kent recalled an evening (this would have been 29 Oc-

tober 1963) when there was a lengthy conversation between Buckingham and Auden, "all very mathematical and abstruse." After a time the two men parted but the next morning, posted in Buckingham's pigeonhole in the porter's lodge, was the manuscript poem *After Reading a Child's Guide to Modern Physics*, a Xerox copy of which Dr. Kent kindly provided.

Though the face at which I stare
While shaving it be cruel
For, year after year, it repels
An ageing suitor, it has,
Thank God, sufficient mass
To be altogether there,
Not an indeterminate gruel
Which is partly somewhere else.

There followed a brief visit to Christ Church cathedral to see the place where Auden habitually sat during Matins, and a short stroll to the Great Hall. We filed past High Table where Auden spent many evenings, pausing to admire his portrait hanging to one side of the main entrance, opposite a picture of another Christ Church don, Charles Lutwidge Dodgson, or Lewis Carroll.

Other memories of Auden followed: You would ask him for a cigarette at your peril; "If you smoke you *must* buy your *own* cigarettes" was the testy response. But he was in other respects both kind and generous. Insisting on chilled vodka for his martini aperitif, Auden paid for a refrigerator to be installed in the Senior Common Room and, troubled by the poor acoustics in the Great Hall, provided a public address system. This could be seen as marking his full integration into College life, and the end of his professorship was marked by the award of an Honorary Doctor of Letters.

Paul Kent had known Auden's father when the latter was Professor of Public Health, as well as the poet's brother John, whom he recalled had the same distinctively lined and creased face.

Auden had problems with his bank balance during this period and jumped at the chance to give a series of well-paid lectures in the States, after which his life fell into a regular pattern of spending the first term in Oxford, the second in the States and the third at his Austrian house in Kirschstetten. Auden would also pass through Oxford when travelling between America and Austria, calling on old friends.

Kent recalled that it was in 1971 that Auden first put out feelers to his old College about his possible return as a resident, finding his neighbourhood in New York becoming rather too violent.

An unnamed College tutor in English described Auden in the formal proposition for residence as “an aging person, well soaked in vodka, in a very questionable state of health.” From this period – Auden was sixty-three) dates the familiar image of a ramshackle figure shuffling in carpet slippers to the cathedral or to High Table for supper, a very short distance from his residence in the former Brewhouse in either case. Described by Kent at this time as “not prickly, but quirky,” this is the Auden we see in Bennett’s play.

In a passage deleted from the final play script, but included in the introduction to the published text, Bennett has the Dean of Christ Church say, in support of the poet’s proposed residence:

His doing after all is mainly done. No. We are asking him to *be*. Count the poet’s presence as one of those extra-curricular plums that only Oxford has to offer. Fame in the flesh can be a part of education and in the person of this most celebrated poet the word is made flesh and dwells among us, full of grace and truth.¹

I fell in step with Dr. Kent as we walked to the Brewhouse. It was now late afternoon and growing dark. The shadowy stone passages radiating from Peckwater Quad had a chilly dampness that made the soft yellow lights of the Great Hall all the more welcoming. Dr. Kent told me about the time he had been invited to America to receive an honorary degree and that Auden, ever eager to offer advice and guidance, told him immediately that “you’ll need a joke,” as this would be a perfect way to break the ice at such events. Kent replied that he didn’t know any jokes, and Auden promptly told him three. These Kent repeated to me, but I shall not record them here!

Arriving at the Brewhouse we were rather surprised to see a handsome and imposing stone building, the raised entrance reached by an iron staircase, like a fire escape. Many photographs were taken as darkness gathered and moments later our coach pulled up to ferry us back to London as the snow began to fall.

¹ *The Habit of Art* (London: Faber, 2009), introduction, p. vii.

The third event was held in a striking new glass structure on the roof of the National Theatre: a talk about Britten's music, delivered by Matthew Scott, the National Theatre's Head of Music, creator of the original score for *The Habit of Art* and an expert on the work of Britten and Stravinsky. He began appropriately with a clip of the documentary *Night Mail* to acclimatise us to the period of active collaboration between Auden and Britten, those brief six months in 1934 when they worked together at the GPO Film Unit.

Scott then opened his talk with an intriguing question: why did Auden choose to collaborate with other writers and composers? Scott's view was that collaboration was in the spirit of the time. He also stressed that, on their arrival in America in 1939, Auden and Isherwood were effectively refugees, a condition in which friendship becomes all-important to give a sense of purpose and continuity to an interrupted life

Scott spoke at length and in illuminating detail about the opera *Paul Bunyan*, tracing the roots of the libretto back to Auden's 1930s plays, which of course have choruses and musical set pieces and which had been, in the poet's own words, "*libretti manqués*."

What led Auden to a relatively late interest in opera? Scott considered three simultaneous prompts: financial, artistic and emotional. His view was that the financial pressure on Auden as a refugee made a commission from Benjamin Britten to produce a "High School Opera" a lifeline, as well as a connection to a previous era in Europe. Scott revealed that composer and lyricist get a percentage of the box office, usually split 75% and 25% respectively – a potentially very lucrative partnership.

There had not been a collaboration between a major poet and composer in English since Purcell and Dryden in the seventeenth century, and Scott's view was that Auden stuck to a Dryden model in the *Paul Bunyan* libretto, which he wittily nicknamed *Annie Get your Grail*, describing it as "spectacularly virtuoso" and worthy of greater attention. The choice of the legendary woodsman Bunyan as a subject was a happy one, given Auden's interest in myth, albeit challenging to stage and seldom performed since.

Scott went on to consider in detail Britten's superb 1936 setting of *Our Hunting Fathers*. Playing a recording he pointed out an immediately striking quality: that we can hear and understand every word

that is sung! Britten was brilliantly accomplished at setting words to music, and this composition—Britten’s first for a full orchestra, his which he regarded as his “Opus 1”—stands as a watershed in the composer’s development.

The remainder of the talk, liberally illustrated with recordings, looked in detail at Auden’s collaboration on *The Rake’s Progress*, Stravinsky’s only full-length opera. There’s a surprising link between Stravinsky and the GPO Film Unit, mentioned in the programme notes to a recent English National Opera production of *The Rake’s Progress*. The composer wrote, in a letter to Auden dated 6 October 1947:

Am grateful to Aldous Huxley who suggested you to me as a prospective collaborateur. Not so long ago I heard with delight your brilliant commentary verses in an English travelogue film.²

This begs the question: *which* film? *The Way to the Sea* is nearer to the idea of a travelogue than *Night Mail* but the former was never, to my knowledge, screened outside Britain.

At the end of the afternoon the group fell with a glad cry on a typically stylish arrangement by the organisers: a generous supply of mince pies and mulled wine. We then settled down to watch *Night Mail* in its entirety, with a heightened awareness of Britten’s remarkable score.

How would the month’s three very different encounters with Auden and Britten affect our appreciation of the new play? Alan Bennett is now seventy-five and widely regarded as a National Treasure, an unofficial honour understandably resented by those on whom it is conferred. Reviews had been almost unanimously positive, and the production described by one critic as “a multi-layered masterpiece.” As a long-standing admirer of Bennett’s theatre work I was keen to see how he would tackle such a complex subject, and intrigued at the prospect of seeing an actor portray Auden.

² Stravinsky to Auden, 6 October 1947, *Stravinsky: Selected Correspondence, Volume 1*, ed. Robert Craft (London: Faber, 1982), p. 299.

The play is set during one afternoon in a brightly-lit rehearsal room, a replica of the actual rehearsal spaces in the National which are normally off-limits to the theatre-goer. As the Lyttelton audience files in, so the actors drift on stage and what we get to see is in fact a read-through of another play, *Caliban's Day*, which centres on an imaginary 1971 meeting between Auden and Benjamin Britten, who is at an advanced stage in the composition of *Death in Venice*. While just six years separates the two men, Auden is already cracking up and his cheerfully repugnant personal habits are gleefully portrayed by Fitz (Richard Griffiths), a cantankerous prompt-dependent actor still learning the role and eager to get away early to do some lucrative voiceover work for Tesco. The actors clash with one another, with the Stage Manager (a wonderfully droll performance by Frances de la Tour), with the script, the props, and with the hapless author Neil, played with long-fused exasperation by Elliot Levy.

The arrival of a young Humphrey Carpenter to interview Auden for the BBC leads to a farcical mistaken identity:

Carpenter: I am not a rent boy. I was at Keble.

Auden: Really? Well, that can't be helped.

This gets a big laugh. The real-life Carpenter would of course go on to write important biographies of both Auden and Britten, but in the play cannot help but be a rather clunky device. Although he remains on stage throughout as a kind of recording angel, Carpenter is a wavering presence, serving principally to mediate chunks of biographical data about the protagonists, but having little dramatic definition. As we shall see rent boy and biographer are later mapped against one another.

Alex Jennings is impressive and convincing as a brittle, anguished Britten, although one doubts whether the composer was really as diffident and uncertain of his own genius as Bennett suggests, and Adrian Scarborough, a fine comic actor, does what he can with the underwritten part of Carpenter, who sets the tone in his opening lines:

I want to hear about the shortcomings of great men, their fears and their failings. I've had enough of their vision, how they altered the landscape.

This rather begs the question: why? Why do we want to learn about the shortcomings? Bennett's rather unilluminating view is that "[b]oth Britten and Auden's works were in better taste than their lives."³ So we get all the dust and some of the Eros. Auden pisses in the kitchen sink, breaks wind noisily, summons local rent boys for punctual blowjobs, lives in squalor and for much of the play appears to be little more than a lavish repertoire of eccentricities, a bundle of autistic flaws rather than an assemblage of living qualities. Britten agonises over his attraction to boys, his unfulfilled desires, and there is some tense dialogue skirting the tricky issue of the protagonists' ephrophilia, and the role of compliant mothers offering their adolescent sons as disposable muses. Auden in the play is cheerfully unworried about the legality and probity of such desire, while Britten is all but incapacitated with guilt and shame.

The dissident Fitz tackles the Author about the warts and all approach, pre-empting audience criticism:

Fitz: I just feel it diminishes him.

Author: "The facts of life are the truth of a life."

Fitz: It's like the peeing in the basin. We keep focussing on his frailties, putting a frame around them. It's — as he says himself — impudent. It's impertinent.

Richard Griffiths gamely stood in at the last moment when Michael Gambon, originally cast as Fitz/Auden was indisposed, and this production makes a virtue of that necessity. That Griffiths looks nothing at all like Auden, despite occasionally donning an eerie latex mask, is the stuff of much rather forced comedy. What Griffiths brings to the role of Fitz is a poignant sense of his own failing powers: his memory is starting to fade and an irascible temper barely hides a real sense of dread at some impending loss.

Bennett recycles some of the surrealist techniques originally deployed in *The Dog Beneath the Skin*, so we are treated to articulate po-

³ *The Habit of Art*, Introduction, p. v.

eticising furniture in a so-so pastiche of Auden's 1930s theatre verse, and a direct address to the audience by two of the poet's deep facial crevasses resulting from Touraine-Solente-Golé Syndrome (a nod to Right Foot/Left Foot in *Dogskin*). If the play fails to dazzle, this is partly because the structural conceit—a rehearsal of a work in progress—inevitably comes across as, well, unfinished. The distancing effect of the play-within-a-play is however largely forgotten in the second half as the central characters engage more closely, the Pirandellian scaffolding melts away and Auden and Britten talk themselves to the brink of collaboration on the *Death in Venice* libretto. It is a thrilling and beautifully paced sequence as Auden warms to the challenge, unaware of Britten's increasing dismay at the prospect. This all has the ring of truth.

A further problem of course is that Auden at this stage of his life had become a garrulous, clock-watching bore. The charismatic young man of the 1930s is touchingly recalled by Britten: “[Y]ou didn't ever want to be with anyone else. And talking always. People went to bed with him to stop him talking . . . though it didn't.”

Other flashes of Auden's brilliance do occur—the odd aphoristic line, the occasional quote from the poems and in Fitz's moving delivery of “In Memory of W. B. Yeats”—but what we have here is Auden diminished and at bay. Bennett's take on genius is essentially philistine and crowd pleasing, and might be summarised as “he may very well be a clever poet but just look at the state of his underwear, if there is any.”

As to the Bennett/Carpenter line, perhaps in our dire celebrity culture we do want to see our public figures demeaned and degraded and exposed as fallible and all-too-human. By way of balance Bennett makes a case for the Ortonesque rent-boy, Stuart (Stephen Wight) as an excluded, marginal yet essential figure. But Stuart's address to the audience, reminding informed spectators of Auden's Caliban in *The Sea and the Mirror*, entirely fails to convince:

When do we figure and get to say our say? The great men's
lives are neatly parcelled for posterity, but what about us?
When do we take our bow? Not in biography. Not even in
diaries.

We are all rent boys then, more or less. Those of us who are not great men are necessarily excluded from posterity. This hardly seems

the basis for complaint, and it is surely the achievements of writers and musicians that act as a consolation to our individual failure to enjoy even the Warholian fame-ration of fifteen minutes.

The Caliban echoes are rather lost in any case as the rent boy's brief monologue is barely coherent, let alone eloquent. Bennett's sympathies nevertheless seem to lie with Stuart, who confidently dismisses Henry James as "a tosser" yet doesn't seem to know who Caliban is. He describes himself as "fodder for art." Aren't we all?

The playwright himself doesn't seem to hold Auden's work in especially high regard:

I don't think I'd read much of his poetry or would have understood it if I had, but when Auden gave his inaugural lecture as Professor of Poetry [...] I dutifully went along, knowing, though not quite why, that he was some sort of celebrity.⁴

But Auden was never a celebrity, and certainly not in the degraded modern sense of the term. He was a very great writer who grew into premature curmudgeonly old age, developed some unattractive habits and died alone in a hotel room. For those of us who admire Auden— and to paraphrase the tosser, James—there are qualities only, and not flaws, and this perspective extends beyond the work to the life, no matter how ramshackle it seems by conventional bourgeois standards.

The Habit of Art may circle the globe to repeat the international success of Bennett's previous play, *The History Boys*, although I feel it's unlikely that a large popular audience exists for the spectacle of two Highbrows campily bickering, however brilliantly staged and however well portrayed by talented actors, farting about in disguises.

Our London correspondent wishes to thank Dr. Paul Kent, Hamish Robinson, Anthony Banks, Matthew Scott, Pen Vogler, Elliot Levy and all those involved in the National Theatre's "Discover Auden" programme.

⁴ *The Habit of Art*, Introduction, p. v.

The Poetry of W. H. Auden

A Talk for the National Theatre

The following text has been extracted from a talk given at the National Theatre, London, in December 2009. The talk was included in a program of events designed to celebrate the production of Alan Bennett's new play about an imaginary meeting between Benjamin Britten and W. H. Auden, The Habit of Art. Where the discussion turns to a particular poem, a title has been given in square brackets.

It has often been said of Auden, in the attempt to characterize the historical role played by his poems, that he introduced a great deal of new subject matter into poetry, or more specifically, that he was the first to introduce a great deal of modern subject matter into poetry. It has even been said that he was the first modern poet, meaning by this not that he was the first to make modernity a matter of contention in his work, but that he was the first *not* to: that he was the first to take modernity completely for granted, and write about it in a way that was completely natural, indeed, in a way that was completely modern.

In short, Auden has often been seen to be the first poet of real power to step out from and beyond modernism—represented variously by the work of Yeats and Pound and Eliot—according to which the poet defined himself as for, or against, or painfully ambivalent about, a modernity that was always understood to be *encroaching*. In Auden's poetic world, modernity is no longer encroaching; it is simply a fact. It has arrived. This qualitative shift represented by Auden's poetry is not only evident in the subject matter or content of his poems, but also in their styles and in the breadth and pitch of their aesthetic ambition.

From the start, Auden's poetry was enormously varied both in form and register, and this diffusion and variety, in spite of the acknowledged rhetorical power of his poems, have been understood, not incorrectly, as resulting from a lack of the sense of higher mission that animated the poetry of the modernists and Romantic poetry in general. From the start, Auden's poetry was, in the profoundest sense, *liberal*: a poetry of the liberal condition, a poetry released from poetic theologies, and free to draw its sustenance from all sorts of profane sources. It is not irrelevant to this condition that Auden him-

self was the first major English poet to have studied for a degree in English literature, or that he edited a brilliantly eclectic anthology of light verse.

Likewise, the figure of the poet as embodied by Auden himself, or as represented in his work, changes entirely: he is no longer the diviner or the visionary familiar from the pages of *The Waste Land* or *The Tower*, but a would-be professional who kept professional hours, a clinician or an analyst rather than a prophet. Inspired by the example of Eliot, an example Eliot had no doubt never intended to set, Auden is reported to have insisted that poets should dress like bankers or businessmen. If he drew deeply from Eliot and Yeats, he always did so to a strikingly different, even opposite, effect. If he was ever biliously oracular in the style of Eliot's Tiresias, for example, this was generally for the purposes of collusive mystification.

In so far as there are overarching ideologies in Auden's early poetry, they are political or psychiatric: if the world was sick, it was a political or medical problem, rather than a poetic one. The role of the poet was at most diagnostic or monitory, and if he showed any signs of physical or moral decay, or hindered the formation of a healthy society, he too should be subject to the cure. This non-sacral character of the functionary poet—which, of course, does not exclude the possibility of professional pride—represents a deeply held position in Auden's understanding of poetry, a position to which, contrary to the generally accepted view of his development, he remained constant throughout his life. Later, when he had shed the ideological trappings of his youth, this non-sacral character took on its more considered and mature form: an amalgam of the Christian acknowledgement of the essential unimportance of art and a Horace-like appreciation of the realities of power.

There is a somewhat malicious anecdote recounted by the novelist Edward Upward in a recent memoir of Auden that might serve as an allegory of Auden's predicament as a poet. The two men met for a drink in the Criterion Bar in Piccadilly. The young poet arrived wearing a white clinician's coat, and began to hold forth. On being spotted by a group of medical students, he was approached by one of their number and asked if he was a medical student himself. When Auden replied "no", the medical student told him to take it off as they didn't like to see the uniform of their profession being used as leisure wear. Auden was deeply affected by the incident according to Upward. We have here an image, perhaps, of the young Auden being

confronted with the essential “unseriousness” of poetry in a liberal world and with the illusory nature of the poet-as-functionary role that he had elected for himself.

[“Letter to Lord Byron,” Part IV]

I said above that one of the striking characteristics of Auden’s poetry throughout his career was the enormous variety of forms and styles in which he wrote and that this breadth of production was indicative of a new kind of freedom with respect to the past. When Eliot invoked Webster or Donne, or Yeats invoked Blake, they were seeking to derive, by a sort of necromancy, a polemical power from tradition that could be unleashed on the present in the battle over modernity. For Auden, however, the past lay before him as something much more neutral: all sorts of borrowings could be made and alliances formed merely for the sake of variety or amusement. Auden was a brilliant parodist, and his early verse is marked by the influences of all kinds, from the gnomic style of Anglo-Saxon poetry to the “sprung rhythm” of Gerard Manley Hopkins, from Jacobean songs to American blues, as well, of course, in the most deliberate manner, by the work of his two great poetic elders, Eliot and Yeats. Moreover he was inclined to lend his skill as a versifier to all kinds of other media: to film, to theatre, radio, travelogue, etc. When he did make a pointed and strategic alliance with a past writer, as he did in “Letter to Lord Byron,” it was precisely in defense of variety and amusement, of a non-hieratic, middling, *discursive* poetry, the sort of poetry that Byron had himself championed by invoking Pope.

[“Consider this and in our time...”]

Although it does not follow any strict metrical template, the poem is closely modeled on the alliterative line of Anglo-Saxon verse. You will perhaps have noticed the tendency to alliteration and other forms of sound-patterning in the poem, obvious in such lines as “Of College Quad or Cathedral Close,” less obvious in such lines as “Sitting in kitchens in stormy fens.” Equally, the lines tend to observe the two-part, four stress structure of the Anglo-Saxon line with its emphatic, mid-line caesura: “In the infected sinus, // and the eyes of stoats.” The use of this Anglo-Saxon line is highly appropriate to the doom-laden character of the poem: two of the most beautiful of the

surviving poems in Anglo-Saxon, "The Seafarer" and "The Wanderer," are themselves, like Auden's poem, *speeches*, or monologues, at once urgent and obscure, on loss, destruction and exile.

["Musée des Beaux Arts"]

The poem alludes to and describes Brueghel's painting "The Fall of Icarus," though not all the details of the poem's description are drawn from that one painting. A meditation on suffering, the poem is notable for the suitably unexcitable plainness of its language. It has the same brilliance of detail, but the rhetorical volubility of "Consider this..." is replaced by a more studied casualness. The poet instead addresses the reader directly in something close to his own persona. The longish, free-verse lines, with their full but haphazard rhymes, convey a sense of sure-footed movement. If we were to say the poem represents a stage in Auden's development, we might claim that the poem shows Auden turning away from a political understanding of the world towards something deeper and more universal, towards something closer to a religious understanding. Although the fall of Icarus itself is a classical subject, the other scenes described in the poem, the "martyrdom" and the "miraculous birth," are obviously Christian themes.

We might also note that this poem accords a new role to the artist, or rather an old role, the role of the "Old Masters": not that of the analyst or functionary, of one who points the way forward to political solutions, but that of one who depicts faithfully and beautifully, if mournfully, the frailties of human nature. Equally, in so far as his flight is a function of artifice, Icarus, the son of Daedalus, is himself an emblem of art, and not just of suffering, but of the failure of art, of its insignificance in relation to the necessities of human existence, as in the ploughman, and the course of human history, as in the ship. The moral of the poem, in this respect, comes very close to the assertion that Auden made elsewhere that "Poetry makes nothing happen."

["Brussels in Winter"]

It is worth noting how effectively the various similes are deployed in this poem. In comparing the tangle of streets to "old string," the poet prepares the reader for the description of the desti-

tute and homeless by sounding the note “abjectness,” old string being something one casts off and throws in draw. Likewise, in comparing the winter that grips the homeless to “an Opera-House,” the poet, by the same stroke, touches in another element of his description of the city: an opera house is typically a feature of a cityscape. The observation could be made with respect to the simile of a van, which, while meant to be an image of a phrase, also conjures up an image from a city street. Again, in comparing the glow of the windows of “rich apartments” to isolated farms, while offering an image for the physical appearance of the city, at the same time provides a sense of the moral displacement involved in city life, which prepares for the introduction of the “stranger” and the topic of prostitution.

[“Alonso to Ferdinand”]

Alonso’s meditation, addressed as a letter to his son Ferdinand, with its measured antitheses, is, in part, an imitation of humanist political treatises that typically addressed themselves as “advice to princes,” but its application is also evidently modern, and reflects the change in Auden’s political vision. In “Consider this...” the threat to the social order came from outside, from an “Antagonist,” an enemy, and the implied remedy, even if unspecified, was a matter of urgency. Indeed, the coming disaster is almost welcome as a necessary purgation. In Alonso’s letter, however, the threat to the good order of society is no longer external. On the contrary, it comes from within and is ever-present and ineradicable, indeed it is equated with nature itself: an innate tendency to corruption—original sin—that can only be held in check by a self-discipline, itself, perhaps, dependent on grace. The urgency of “Consider this . . .” has given way to a more settled, Christian pessimism.

[“In Praise of Limestone”]

What we see praised here is a landscape, a kind of landscape, a limestone landscape, and it helps to know that his first love in this respect was the limestone landscape of the moors around Alston in Cumbria, where he had been taken on holiday as a child. This landscape with its abandoned mines features in Auden’s early poems, those devoted to the private, and mostly comic, mythology that he shared with friends such as Christopher Isherwood. The limestone

landscape described in the poem, however, is based on the landscape of the hills surrounding Florence, which Auden came to know while spending his summers in Italy after the war. Indeed, as an analysis of a southern landscape, it resembles another of Auden's poems, "Good-bye to the Mezzogiorno," in which he attempts to sum up the differences between the landscapes of southern Europe and those of northern Europe, and the influences they exert and the way of life they make possible. The southern landscape, according to Auden's notions, being amenable and immediately beautiful, encourages a life given over to leisure and sensuality, while seeming to discourage the seriousness and application and the harsher realism fostered by the north.

In this poem, the poet describes the southern landscape in similar terms, but it is also justified, for if it is the ideal landscape for childhood, holidays and the carelessness of youth, and even if it does not promote the ambitions of those who have designs upon the world or wish otherwise to excel, it serves to remind us, in its seeming innocence and playfulness, of that second Eden that, in Auden's view as a Christian, we all aspire to reach. If the limestone world seems to suggest the illusion that life might be led without sin, it also reminds us, in spite of any real shabbiness, what a sinless life would be.

["The Geography of the House"]

In Auden's later poems, intimacy of tone becomes more and more pronounced. Although the poems still possess the same high degree of finish and of technical complexity, as Auden was always in search of new and more complicated poetical forms—he was, incidentally a passionate crossword addict—they also become more and more casual or conversational in their manner. Arcane notions often drawn from theology and an increasingly rarified vocabulary—one of Auden's prized possessions was the thirteen-volume *Oxford English Dictionary*—find themselves jumbled in with mundanities and gossipy asides in a way that a number of contemporary critics and former admirers, such as Philip Larkin, found trivial and disconcerting. As is well known—Alan Bennett makes much of this in his play—the older Auden got, the more disheveled and unbuttoned he became in his appearance.

To his critics, it seemed that his poems too were becoming "disinhibited." But this uninhibited quality had been part of Auden's per-

sona and poetry from the start. Moreover, typically of Auden, it had never been without its intellectual—or, in later years, theological—justification. Although the lines from “Letter to Lord Byron” that we have already heard: “The Pure-in-Heart can never be arrested. // He’s gay; no bludgeonings of chance can spoil it, / The Pure-in-Heart loves all men on a par, / And has no trouble with his private toilet...” are facetious, not least because they contain an obviously coded message, it remains true that the younger Auden was greatly influenced in his general conduct of life by this kind of secular antinomianism, as propagated by such figures as D. H. Lawrence. I have called it “antinomianism” because it is precisely in such theological term—namely, heresy—that the later Auden would reject such beliefs.

However, happily for Auden, very much the same kind of conduct could be equally well justified by the orthodox doctrine of the resurrection of the body: the doctrine teaching that God will save not only our individual souls and personalities, but also our individual bodies. For Auden this meant that there was no quirk or defect that was to be considered beyond the love of God and that could not be acknowledged as such. We have already mentioned that Auden, by the same logic of *eros*, was not entirely divorced from *agape*, the Christian love for mankind that is also the love of God. We also mentioned that, for the later Christian Auden, art was essentially unimportant. What was important was “loving your neighbour and earning your living.” Professionalism remained another constant in Auden’s life, and this downgrading of the aesthetic, of this concern for the beautiful, for “appearances,” coupled with this theologically inspired concern for even the most unsightly aspects of life, meant that Auden’s poetry was never going to be governed by any merely man-made aesthetic facade. It was indeed to be skillful, professionally executed, but it was not to give the lie to a world that God, at least, in Auden’s eyes, had blessed. Hence, in theory, the strange, campy eclecticism of Auden’s late style.

HAMISH ROBINSON

Hamish Robinson is the author of a book of poems, The Gift Returned, and was poet-in-residence of the Wordsworth Trust in 2005.

A Note on Geoffrey Tandy

There are hundreds of named beneficiaries in *Auden and MacNeice: Their Last Will and Testament*, published in *Letters from Iceland* (1937). Many of them are still familiar to us, others tremble on the brink of living memory, and some remain intractably obscure.

Take this example (from page 250 of the first Faber edition):

Item, to Robert Medley some cellophane
And a pack of jokers; item, a box of talc
To Geoffrey Tandy, in case he shaves again.

Medley is of course the Gresham's schoolboy who, on a Sunday afternoon walk, prompted W.H. Auden's decision to become a poet. Mendelson's gloss (in *Prose* Volume 1) is typically illuminating: the bequest of cellophane, a relatively new discovery, refers to the transparent coloured material used in the masks for Medley's Group Theatre production of MacNeice's translation of *Agamemnon* in November 1936, and the second item refers to his gouache "Jokers" which had been shown at the International Surrealist Exhibition in the same year. But who is Geoffrey Tandy?

Mendelson's note says that he was "a curator at the Natural History Museum and a close friend of T. S. Eliot." I recently spent several days looking through the Geoffrey Tandy archive at the Natural History Museum and *Newsletter* readers may like to know more about this remarkable man.

Tandy was born in 1900, took a degree in Forestry at Oxford and married Doris May Ellis (known as Polly) in 1923. By the age of 25 he was employed as Assistant Keeper of Botany at the Museum of Natural History in South Kensington.

In the summers of 1931 and 1933, Tandy joined an expedition to Loggerhead Key in The Dry Tortugas, a group of tiny islands in the Gulf of Mexico. There he studied the fauna and flora of the reefs and recorded seeing "with considerable if not very comprehensible pleasure, the arching roots of mangroves again."

In the *Listener* (20 September 1933) Tandy describes the region:

[T]hese islands are nothing better than wind- and wave-driven heaps of very porous loose sand, no more than ten or twelve feet above high water mark. Therefore there is no

permanent fresh water unless you have roof to collect the rain and tanks to store it in. There are such things there today, but they weren't there when the islands were named.

It is tempting to infer a link between Tandy's expedition to this comfortless spot and Eliot's choice of title for *The Dry Salvages*, ("presumably *les trios sauvages*") and who knows whether some casual conversation with Tandy led indirectly to the composition of *Four Quartets* or indeed to *Sweeney Agonistes* with its cannibal island and bamboo trees.

A photograph of Tandy the explorer accompanies an article in *Natural History Magazine* (3. 21, January 1932) Bare-chested in baggy shorts and holding a large barracuda he is exceptionally tall, skinny and sporting a modest beard. The beard would become more ambitious in later years and no doubt prompted Benjamin Britten's 1936 diary description of Tandy resembling "a stage bug-hunter."

Geoffrey Tandy enjoyed a measure of celebrity in the 1930s and makes an appearance in a *Radio Times* article of 19 January 1939, "Masters of the Microphone." The piece is illustrated by a double-page photomontage of the foremost broadcasters of the day, assembled in the grand foyer of Broadcasting House. Tandy's tall and heavily-bearded figure can be seen in the background, in the august company of George Bernard Shaw, W. B. Yeats, Winston Churchill, H. G. Wells and others.

He was also a talented if unambitious actor, giving the first ever wireless reading of *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats* on the BBC programme *The Children's Hour* on Christmas Day, 1937, two years before it was first published by Faber. Eliot would sometimes recite the latest *Old Possum* verses when visiting the Tandy family's home, Hope Cottage in Hampton-on-Thames. The book's co-dedicatee was "Miss Alison Tandy". Tandy and Eliot shared a deep love of cats and the Natural History Museum archive contains a thick file of cute feline snapshots, snipped from the pages of the *Daily Sketch*. Is it possible that some of these pictures may have prompted Eliot to create Skimbleshanks, Macavity, Old Deuteronomy and the rest of the Practical Cats?

The archive includes an undated typescript note from Eliot to Tandy on *Criterion*-headed notepaper. The bleakly affable tone is immediately recognisable:

With best wishes for Pentecost.

How's the fat girl with the eye shade? And how about a glass of the invariable on Wednesday next? Usual time and place. With regards to Pollylorum and the limbs of Satan, and love to the licensee.

Their usual rendezvous for "a glass of the invariable" was Gordon's Wine Bar, a gloomy dive in the shadows of Charing Cross Station; "Pollylorum" was Tandy's wife Doris (known as Polly), "the limbs of Satan" are their blameless daughters Anthea and Alison; "the licensee" is Tandy himself. The note is unsigned, but with a confident pencil drawing of a bald-headed Prufrock-like gent smoking a large cigar and wearing a piratical eye-patch.

Another Eliot drawing can be found in an inscribed first edition of *Old Possum's book of Practical Cats* dedicated to Geoffrey Tandy - a lively caricature of the bearded dedicatee in his Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve uniform. Tandy would throughout his life regard himself as a "Navy Man" and was a keen sailing enthusiast.

Eliot was particularly fond of Polly ("My dear Polligal", "Ole Ma Tandy", "Pollitandy") and, in a letter dated Ash Wednesday 1936, does his best to cheer her up during a difficult phase in her marriage, adopting the guise of a Hollywood tough guy:

If you needs any sistance to keep the Ole Man peaceable you say the word, sister, say the word, and I'll be along with a mighty powerful monkey- wrench I got handy.

Income from book reviews and BBC broadcasts supplemented Tandy's museum salary but his finances tended to be shaky. Eliot took a keen interest in his friend's fortunes, and arranged a Faber commission for a natural history book aimed at young readers. This never materialised and Eliot sounds mildly exasperated in an undated letter to Polly:

Furthermore, while the broadcasting is all very well, for the meagre sums paid by that corporation do help to keep the kettles boiling; and this book would do more for his reputation, and so for his pocket in the long run.

Eliot recommended his friend to the producer Donald Taylor at Strand Films and Geoffrey Tandy is credited as one of the two commentators on *The Way to the Sea*, the 1936 Strand production which features a verse commentary by Auden. This brought him into contact with both Auden and Britten. Tandy's brisk cadences, delivered with a slight Worcestershire accent, are pitch-perfect for this subversive exercise in documentary, and his range – from the declamatory to the jocular – suggest a reined-in sense of anarchic humour that contributes to the film's subversive intent. It is this Strand connection that leads me to infer that Auden, not MacNeice, is the donor of the talcum powder. As far as I am aware Auden never grew a beard, although liked to sport false whiskers when the opportunity arose.

Tandy was bored and unhappy in his career at the Museum., despite promotion to the post Head Curator of Botany. An undated archive typescript of random quotations and jumbled lines of letters and numbers includes the lines:

Natural History is a comic subject
I do not know why we pursue it at all.

Eliot, perhaps remembering his time at Lloyd's Bank recognised his friend's frustration, writing to Polly about his "grasping at activities at the BBC which could not lead to anything, but which seemed to provide an outlet of some kind".

A very different outlet came with the outbreak of the Second World War. Tandy's special interest in peace time was in cryptogamy - the study of certain classes of plant life such as algae, ferns, lichens and mosses, which have no apparent means of reproduction - the word's Greek roots mean "hidden or secret marriage." Somebody in authority at the War Office confused Tandy's specialism with that of *cryptology*, i.e. deciphering codes, or cryptograms and he was posted to Bletchley Park.. headquarters of the top-secret team, led by Alan Turing, dedicated to breaking the Nazi's complex Enigma code.

That, at least, is the story that has circulated for some years and one which Tandy's son Miles, who has researched his father's life in thoughtful detail, remains sceptical about. In conversation recently he confirmed his view the cryptog(r)amme story is just that - an engagingly donnish yarn put about by the inmates at Bletchley park following his father's arrival.

Tandy was no expert on codes, although he was an accomplished linguist and his research skills were also of great value. But Tandy's moment came in a breathtaking example of serendipity.

An abandoned German U-boat had been investigated by Royal Navy divers who salvaged a pulpy and waterlogged copy of an Enigma codebook. This was rushed straight to Bletchley Park. What was needed, and urgently, was an expert in the handling of saturated organic matter recovered from the seabed.

Thanks to Tandy's expert intervention with chemicals and blotting-paper the leaves of the U-boat's codebook were soon made available for examination by the code-breakers. It is now widely accepted by historians that cracking the Enigma code brought the end of the war materially closer, perhaps by as much as two years.

Tandy continued working in intelligence gathering and interpretation after the war. His private life became more complicated and he found a return to civilian life both personally and professionally difficult. A 1950 letter from Eliot to Polly refers to Tandy's "mental-physical-spiritual" breakdown, which in the poet's view had its roots ten years earlier, during the war. Eliot was always a thoughtful and generous godfather, later setting up a formal covenant for Anthea Tandy using some of his substantial earnings from *The Cocktail Party* (1949).

Geoffrey Tandy's brief encounter with Auden in the documentary film industry earned him the bequest in *Letters from Iceland*. He is not a well-known figure today, although as the years pass the activities at Bletchley Park are becoming the stuff of legend. The forthcoming centenary of Alan Turing will see even greater public interest in the men and women who cracked the Enigma code.

In 1946 Tandy started a new family with Maire MacDermott, with a daughter Genista and son Miles, to whom I offer my sincere thanks for their help in the preparation of this article. Miles has written with great sensitivity, understanding and insight about his father in his 1995 MA dissertation *A Life in Translation: Biography and the Life of Geoffrey Tandy*, to which this short article is indebted.

DAVID COLLARD

Quotations from T. S. Eliot © The Estate of T. S. Eliot.

A Revised Census of Auden's *Poems* (1928)

Note: This a revised version of an item that appeared in Newsletter 24 (July 2004).

Auden's first book, *Poems*, was privately printed by Stephen Spender during the long vacation from Oxford in 1928 in an edition described on its colophon (the verso of the page, with the printed dedication "To Christopher Isherwood") as comprising "About 45 copies." This number seems to have been optimistic. Perhaps thirty to thirty-five copies were completed; probably twenty-five of them were numbered by Spender; at least five, perhaps around ten, were left unnumbered. Eighteen copies are known to exist, five without numbers; at least twelve numbered copies and perhaps a few unnumbered ones are presumed lost.

Auden supplied Spender with most or all of the manuscript copy for the book; some poems, however, may perhaps have been supplied to Spender by others at Auden's request. Some of the copy seems to come directly or indirectly from A.S.T. Fisher, a student at Oxford with whom Auden had been friendly during his first year and who had kept copies of his earlier poems. Some of the copy was sold to the American collector Caroline Newton, presumably by Auden, having had it returned to him by Spender; this material is now in the Berg Collection of the New York Public Library.

Spender printed the front matter and the first twenty-two pages of text on a hand-press at his home in Froggnal, Hampstead. When the hand-press broke down, he hired the Holywell Press in Oxford to complete the job by printing the remaining pages of text (23 through 37) and an erratum slip containing an omitted section of a poem from the earlier part of the book. The Holywell Press also bound the book in its brick-orange paper wrappers. Spender asked the press to prepare the forty-five copies indicated on the colophon, but the press discarded some of his own hand-printed work, which, apparently, he had printed too amateurishly to be used. Spender apparently began printing the book in September 1928 and the Holywell Press finished the job apparently in October.

Spender sent some copies to Auden in Berlin and kept some copies for himself. In an undated letter, probably around November 1928, Auden wrote to Spender, apparently in reference to the many typographical errors, "Please don't think I was cross with you about

the books. It was jolly nice of you to do it at all and I know what my script is like" (Berg Collection). Auden and Spender separately (but, later, sometimes together) gave copies to their friends and relations, and the roster of the known copies provides a glimpse of their circle of acquaintances in their early adulthood.

The following census of copies is based partly on information in B. C. Bloomfield and Edward Mendelson's *W. H. Auden: A Bibliography* (University Press of Virginia, 1973), partly on Katherine Bucknell's edition of Auden's *Juvenilia* (Princeton University Press, 1994), and partly on recent information.

Most surviving copies include a number written in Spender's hand beneath the printed statement of limitation, "About 45 copies"; a few do not, and may have been given away after the first batch of copies was distributed. In the list below, all inscriptions, unless noted, are on the first page, which is otherwise blank. All known owners of each copy are listed in chronological order, separated by semi-colons; the owners of copies 10 and "24 – About" are known to me, but prefer to remain private; I do not know who owns copy 12. The absence of the erratum leaf is noted where it is known, but the erratum leaf may or may not be present in other copies; further information will be gratefully received.

Numbered copies (thirteen are known to exist; the copies with the twelve numbers that are missing from the sequence below are presumably lost):

- 2 Inscribed: "To Christopher | With love from the Author | 'Dura virum nutrix.'" ["stern nurse of men," the motto of Sedbergh School, which had a special place in Auden's private mythology because his Oxford friend Gabriel Carritt had been a pupil there]. Christopher Isherwood; Don Bachardy; sold by him in 1999 to the Huntington Library.
- 4 Inscribed: "To [Rex *deleted*] Cecil | With love from | the Author. | 'Dangerous: does set | Dancing blood.'" [The deleted dedication was presumably to Rex Warner; the verses are from Gerard Manley Hopkins, "To what serves mortal beauty?"] Cecil Day-Lewis; House of El Dieff (New York bookseller); sold in 1962 to H. Bradley Martin (an American collector); sold at Sotheby's, 30 April 1990, perhaps to Bernard Stone (a London bookseller); James O. Edwards (an American collector); sold by him to Jonkers Rare

- Books, Henley on Thames, 2003; sold to a private English collector, 2011. (H. Bradley Martin also owned copy 19.)
- 9 Uninscribed, but signed "W. H. Auden" beneath the copy number on the verso of the title page. With Edward Upward's ownership signature on the first page. Edward Upward; sold by him to the British Library in 1987 (shelfmark C.190.aa.24). Documented in Joanna Leever, "W. H. Auden's *Poems of 1928*," *British Library Journal*, 14.2 (Autumn 1988), 203-208.
 - 10 First inscribed by Auden in November 1928 to an illegible name, conceivably John [J.R.R.] Tolkien (although if this is so, Auden used a form of the name that Tolkien never used), which Auden deleted in May 1929 when he wrote over the original date and reinscribed the book to D. Van Lennep (otherwise unknown; perhaps the Dutchman called Dan in Auden's 1929 Berlin journal?); the inscriptions read: "To D. van. Lennep. | with love from | the Author. | May 1929 | John Hayward | with love | from | Wystan Auden | 'Permanendo Vincimus' | 'Who sweeps a room as | for thy laws | Makes that and the action fine'" [The date "May 1929" is written over "Nov 1928"; the nonsensical Latin tag, perhaps intended to mean something like "By persistence we conquer," which may have been an in-joke among pupils at Gresham's School, also occurs in a letter from Auden to Benjamin Britten, who like Auden and Hayward was an ex-Greshamian; the English lines are by George Herbert]. Auden perhaps retrieved the copy from Van Lennep, or never gave it to him, and later gave it to John Hayward; Anthony Hobson (an English collector); sold at Sotheby's, 28 June 1996 (with the title page and dedication reproduced on p. 14 of the catalogue); Annette Campbell-White; sold at Sotheby's, 7 June 2007; private English collector.
 - 11 Uninscribed, but signed on the title page by Auden below his printed name (signed "Wystan. Hugh. Auden.") and by Spender below his printed initials (signed "Stephen Harold Spender"). Archibald Campbell (a friend of Auden and Spender at Oxford); given by him in 1984 to Edinburgh University Library. Lacks the erratum leaf.
 - 12 Inscribed by Spender, "Winifred [Paine] | from S.H.S." (Winifred Paine was the Spender family housekeeper, with whom Spender had a close relationship), and by Auden "With love also | from the Author." Later inscribed by Auden "and with love now to | John Johnson | from | Wystan Auden" (Johnson was a young

writer associated with the Group Theatre in the 1930s, later a literary agent). Winifred Paine; John Johnson; sold at Phillips', 16 March 1995; Roger Rechler (an American collector); sold at Christie's New York, 11 October 2002; private American collector. Lacks the erratum leaf. *Reproduced in a "Copyflo" xerographic facsimile edition first made available by University Microfilms in 1960, but no longer easily available.* Illustrated on Christies' web site:

http://www.christies.com/LotFinder/lot_details.aspx?intObjectID=3983893

- 15 Inscribed "E. R. Dodds | with best wishes | from the Author". E. R. Dodds; bequeathed by him to the Bodleian Library (shelfmark Arch. AA f.58). Accompanied by Auden's undated letter to Dodds, on notepaper with the address of Auden's parents (42, Lordswood Road, Harborne, Birmingham): "Dear Prof Dodds, | Here is the little volume. | The poems are in chronological | order May 1927 - August 1928. No 2 is now completely rewritten | as it is too Yeatsian at present. | yrs very sincerely | Wystan Auden."
- 16 Uninscribed. John Layard; sold at Sotheby Parke Bernet, 15 December 1982; Carter Burden (an American collector); sold by him to Joseph the Provider (a California bookseller); sold in 1983 to Raymond Danowski; given by him in 2004 to Emory University Library. (A report on the Emory University Library collection in the *New York Times*, 29 September 2004, mistakenly identifies an inscription in a copy of *Poems* (1930) as the inscription in this copy.)
- 17 Uninscribed. Perhaps given by Spender to Winifred Paine's mother (see notes on copy 12), whose name was either Mary E. or Helen Paine; sold by Spender on her behalf in the 1950s to the University of Cincinnati Library. Lacks the erratum leaf (although the contents of the leaf are reproduced in Spender's hand). *Reproduced in a facsimile edition published by the Elliston Poetry Foundation in 1964, with a prefatory note by Spender.*
- 18 Uninscribed, but signed on the first page by its first owner, G[abriel] Carritt (close friend of Auden and Spender at Oxford) and, below this, the signature of its second owner, Sidney Newman (organ scholar at Oxford and close friend of Auden); Carritt presumably gave this copy to Newman after receiving another copy, number 19. Gabriel Carritt; Sidney Newman; unknown book dealer; Berg Collection, New York Public Library.

- 19 Uninscribed, but signed by its first owner, G[abriel] Carritt. Gabriel Carritt; unknown book dealer; H. Bradley Martin; given by him, probably around 1963, to the Houghton Library, Harvard University. See also the notes on copy 18. (H. Bradley Martin also owned copy 4.)
- 24 Uninscribed, but signed by its first owner, S[heilah] H. Richardson 26.2.29 [her dating of Auden's gift of this copy to her in Birmingham during a visit from Berlin; he was then engaged to be married to her]. Sheilah Richardson; given by her in 1947 to Dr. Helen Mary Trudgian (lecturer in French at Durham; the accompanying letter is addressed "Dear Dr. Trudgian"); given by her in 1951 to Durham University Library. *Reproduced in a facsimile edition for the Ilkley Literature Festival, 1973, with a separate booklet containing a foreword by B. C. Bloomfield.*
- 24—*About* Inscribed by Spender: "This valuable work to | David Ayerst from | Stephen Spender, the | printer. But if he has a true | regard for the future at Christies', | he will also get the author's | signature. | Feb 1st 1929." Inscribed below this by Auden: "To David | with love and best wishes | Wystan Auden". David Ayerst (a friend of Auden and Spender at Oxford); Glenn Horowitz (a New York bookseller); sold by him in the 1990s to a private American collector. The approximation in the numbering suggests that this was either the last or one of the last copies to be numbered.

Unnumbered copies (five are known to exist; the italicized letters are assigned arbitrarily for convenience):

- [a] Inscribed by Auden to Spender; then by both Auden and Spender to Cyril Connolly. The earlier inscription reads: "From the young author | to the | younger printer | with youthful love. | [*initials possibly not in Auden's hand*] WHA. | [*name and date in an unknown hand, clearly not Auden's*] Wystan Auden. | October 1929." The later inscription reads (in Auden's hand except for "and Stephen"): "Dear Cyril, | We thought you might like this | Wystan | and Stephen | 'we worship truth for we are true | beauty for we are fair | And goodness loves both me and you | For we have lovely hair'". In the early 1950s Auden convinced Spender to give this copy to Connolly at a lunch date later the same day; Auden promised to replace it with the copy that belonged to Auden's fa-

ther (but see the note to copy [u] below). Stephen Spender; given by him to Cyril Connolly; sold by Connolly's estate to the University of Tulsa. Lacks the erratum leaf.

- [b] Uninscribed. William Plomer; unknown book dealer; Jack Samuels (an American collector); Columbia University Library. No markings or corrections. Lacks the erratum leaf.
- [c] Inscribed: "For George Rylands | With best wishes from | The Printer, Stephen | Spender. | June 9th 1930." George Rylands; given by him in 1974 to the Library of King's College, Cambridge (catalogued in the Modern Archives as "Misc. 25"). Lacks the erratum leaf.
- [d] With separate inscriptions by printer and author; Spender's reads: "For Father D'Arcy | from | Stephen Spender | Oxford, June 16th, 1929"; Auden's reads: "To | Mabel Zahn with best wishes and | memories of a very happy | meeting in Philadelphia. | August 20th 1942. | Wystan Auden". Martin D'Arcy; perhaps given by him to Auden when they met in 1940 or 1941; Auden perhaps sold it to Mabel Zahn (rare book manager of Sessler's Bookshop in Philadelphia) or perhaps inscribed it for her after she acquired it through some other means; sold at Sotheby Parke-Bernet, 20 February 1973; John Fleming (a New York bookseller); Mrs. Vincent Astor; sold or given around 1973 to the Pierpont Morgan Library.
- [e] Uninscribed. Original owner unknown (but see the list of lost copies, below); sold at Christie's, 4 April 1974; House of Books (New York bookseller); sold around 1962 to Indiana University Library. Lacks the erratum leaf.

Lost copies (copies that are known to have existed but of which no trace can now be found; Rex Warner may also have had a copy that has not been traced); these are listed in alphabetical order of their first known owners. Any of these could be among the lost copies numbered 1, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 13, 14, 20, 21, 22, and 23.

- [u] George Augustus Auden, Auden's father. Auden promised to retrieve this copy and give it to Spender after his father's death, but nothing more was ever said about it, and the copy has disappeared.
- [v] E. H. Jacob, about whom nothing seems to be known except that he received a copy of the book (he was perhaps the Professor E. H.

Jacob who was the father of E. F. Jacob, tutor in medieval history at Christ Church, Oxford, when Auden was there).

- [w] Louis MacNeice. A typed transcription of this copy was made in the 1930s by Ruthven Todd, who did not note the existence of any inscription or number. Auden probably gave this copy to MacNeice when they became friendly in Birmingham in the early 1930s.
- [x] Bertha Mills, the live-in cook of Harold Spender's family. Lady Spender recalls that she had a copy, possibly sold near the end of her life when she married the Spenders' manservant Captain DeVoto; this or copy [z] is perhaps the same as copy [e].
- [y] A. L. Rowse, who was told by Auden or Spender that the book was sold by subscription, and who seems to have been the only original recipient who paid for his copy. Rowse lent it to an unidentified friend, and it disappeared during World War II.
- [z] Peter Watson, publisher of *Horizon*. Lady Spender recalls that this copy was sold by Watson's friend Norman Fowler, or by Watson's estate; this or copy [x] is perhaps the same as copy [e].

It is not impossible that any one of these lost copies (except the one that belonged to Auden's father) could be the same as the surviving copy listed as unnumbered copy [e], but copies [x] and [z] are perhaps more likely than others to be the same as copy [e].

Further information about any of these copies, or about other copies that have not come to the compiler's attention, will be gratefully received and noted in future issues of the *Newsletter*.

E. M.

Notes and Queries

Something else that Auden never wrote

Newsletter 29 (December 2007) included a brief list of things that Auden never wrote but which are attributed to him. A misremembered line of his poetry, widely quoted online and in print, is a similar instance. Donald Rumsfeld, the first Secretary of Defense in the George W. Bush administration, compiled a set of “Rules” (printed in the *Wall Street Journal*, 29 January 2001), which included a sentence he attributed to Auden: “History marches to the drum of a clear idea.” In fact Auden wrote something rather different. In “Memorial for the City,” these lines appear toward the end of the poem’s rapid overview of European history:

In a national capital Mirabeau and his set
Attacked mystery; the packed galleries roared
And history marched to the drums of a clear idea,
The aim of the Rational City, quick to admire,
Quick to tire . . .

The point, of course, is that *in pre-revolutionary France*, history marched to the drums of the clear idea of the Rational City, and the result was the French Revolution, perhaps not the result that Mr. Rumsfeld would have chosen had been a minister at Versailles. Auden was *not* writing that history in general marches to a clear idea. Had Mr. Rumsfeld understood what the poem actually said, recent history might perhaps have marched in a slightly different direction from the one in which in he tried to lead it.

Recent and Forthcoming Books and Events

Alan Jacobs' edition of *The Age of Anxiety* has been published by Princeton University Press in the W. H. Auden: Critical Editions series. It includes an introduction and extensive explanatory and textual notes. Professor Jacobs is now preparing a similar edition of "For the Time Being" in the same series.

The Age of Auden: Postwar Poetry and the American Scene, by Aidan Wasley, has been published by Princeton University Press. It focuses on, among other things, Auden's influence on John Ashbery, James Merrill, and Adrienne Rich.

The Projection of Britain: A History of the GPO Film Unit, edited by Scott Anthony and James G. Mansell, has been published by Palgrave Macmillan on behalf of the British Film Institute. The book includes more than twenty essays on every aspect of the Unit's work, including some material about Auden's work for the Unit.

Two notable essays by Arthur Kirsch have appeared in recent numbers of *The Yale Review*: "Auden and Shakespeare" (January 2010) and "'To Choose What Is Difficult All One's Days': W. H. Auden's 'For the Time Being: A Christmas Oratorio'" (July 2010).

Alan Bennett and "The Habit of Art," a 2010 documentary film by Adam Low, was about many more things than the play and playwright in its title. Through interviews with Sherrill Tippins, Andrew Motion, Katherine Bucknell, and others, it explored the friendship between Auden and Britten and the reasons for its breakup. It also explored, through interviews with Bennett and the director Nicholas Hytner, the evolution of the play from its early drafts to its appearance on stage. The film was broadcast in the UK by the digital television channel More4 on 27 November 2010, and in 2011 won the Royal Television Society Award for Best Arts Documentary.

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