his discrete glances at poets themselves as discrete as Dorn, Riding or Jim Morrison (another unknown, given an extraordinary culminating plug) tell us quite why Imagism was more important in the U.S. than here. On the vagaries of H. D.'s reputation, of interest to us now that the Carcanet Press have done so much to re-establish it here, Harmer is equally inexplicit. Jones, it may be said, does tackle all this within the space at his disposal and makes it seem very relevant to historical Imagism. As of course it must be, since the ripples belong to the stone.

The unsatisfactory delineation of the larger picture (compared with the assured treatment of the Imagists themselves) is to be found to a certain extent in Harmer's first chapter as well. Setting the scene with an attack on the Victorians, he writes:

> Compared with prose fiction English poetry was a dying art. Byron was almost the last man who wrote poetry as speech (with the possible and very different exception of the Brownings). Wordsworth's claim to do so is not confirmed by his work. A powerful exception was Burns in his dialect poems but, even more than D. H. Lawrence, he had reverted to literary idiom when composing in standard English. The vernacular is rediscovered in Wilde's "Ballad of Reading Gaol."

It is very hard to parry this kind of sabre-flashing, but whatever it is, it is not intelligible literary history. There's a bad misquotation of Housman, incidentally, and an indecisiveness about possessives ("Yeats's", p. 5; "Yeats' ", p. 75) which signals haste here. One has no very great quarrel with the picture which emerges (it's the C. K. Stead view: over-riding stagnation provided by Watson, Kipling and Newbolt) but it now seems a little predictable. Edward Thomas, for instance, is barely mentioned: is the single fact that he did not appear in *Georgian Poetry* at all significant in such a context? Harmer's treatment of the Georgians is a mixture of sense and prejudice. It culminates in the bizarre sentence: "The best British poets of the period, Hardy and Yeats, remained aloof." Dear me, shall literary history for evermore pay such lip-service to the claimed priorities of isms and other self-publicists? These years witness the poems of "Veteris vestigia flammae" and *Responsibilities*: what were Hardy and Yeats remaining aloof *from*? Poems are more interesting than movements.

# Remembering the Master

## *Accounts of Auden—By* PETER PORTER

THIS BIG MEMORIAL VOLUME, *W. H. Auden: a Tribute,* edited by Stephen Spender,[1] liberally filled with photographs (though there are many others which could have gone in), is as acutely moving for the public as it must have been for its contributors who knew Auden personally. But it is something more: a look back at the man who may well be the last of the internationally acknowledged English poets. On every page, whatever their nationality, these memorialists stress Auden's deep-seated Englishness—whether this is just social anecdote, as in Robert Craft's and Louis Kronenberger's accounts of his accent, or Hannah Arendt's and Stuart Hampshire's analysis of his particular moral insights. But it was an Englishness which mattered to Americans and Europeans, and it presented itself in proverbial and unparochial ways, so that, in an age where "English" English no longer dominated either literature or the performing arts, Auden alone among Englishmen took the centre of the world stage as a great teacher and virtuoso poet.

He did it by sheer force of mind and memorability of talent. He was, after all, late on the scene of England's loss of power. Eliot and Pound had fashioned their Modernist templates and Wallace Stevens canonised American poetry before Auden came down from Oxford. By the early Sixties, Edmund Wilson could hail the American Auden as the most accomplished poet in English since the great 19th-century masters, but, years earlier, in "The Omelette of A. MacLeish", he presented Auden as the leader of public schoolboys flying over America in comic aeroplanes. John Berryman, in *Love and Fame* and elsewhere, recalled the semi-impatience which well-instructed American poets felt for Auden's amateur authority; somehow this late arrival was able to impose a world-view which seemed to belong to Britain's 19th-century hegemony, and which was content to mix up

[1] *W. H. Auden: A Tribute.* Edited by STEPHEN SPENDER. Weidenfeld & Nicolson, £4.50; Macmillan, N.Y., $14.95.

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intellectually respected disciplines like Marxism and Freudism with prep-school jargon and musical comedy forms. Randall Jarrell, too, whose reviews of Auden are the best journalism ever devoted to him, was American enough to chide him for frivolity many times. Despite Auden's having lived among Americans for more than thirty years, his pre-lapsarian refusal to equate seriousness with solemnity made him a very alien figure in the States.

Yet most of the best criticism of his poetry has come from America, and the second part of this collection of reminiscences, which covers his years in New York and the holidays in Europe, is more interesting than the first, where various English friends remember the schoolboy, undergraduate, and dazzler of the Thirties. Wilson, Berryman and Jarrell are all missing from this tribute of course, and would be even if they were alive, since it is to the man rather than the poet. But it is a reasonably frank assembly of portraits and makes a pleasant change from the purely academic criticism of Auden which has been pouring from the presses for the past five years. When John Fuller's *A Reader's Guide to W. H. Auden* appeared in 1970, I rashly stated that I was surprised that there had been so little commentary on Auden's poetry. Since then, the academic strike rate has quickened: it has dawned on the desk men that his poetry is particularly susceptible to exegesis, since so much of it is preoccupied by ideas. In his memoir, a very different sort of commentator, Robert Craft, makes a similar point—"a conceptualiser in quest of intellectual order, he was a social, moral, and spiritual diagnostician above all."

ALL GENERALISATIONS about a talent as rich and various as Auden's are likely to be inadequate. For instance, can the author of the most memorably lyrical poems of the century (generally called by their creator "Songs and Other Lyrical Pieces") be denied an ear for the music of verse, as Robert Craft would so deny him? And should Mr Richard Johnson, in one of the most recent critical studies of Auden, *Man's Place*,[2] rebuke John Bayley for asserting that the ideas in the poetry are secondary to the general theatrical effects of the style? In general, Mr Johnson wants us to take Auden's ideas more seriously than we usually do, but he is all too willing to find symmetries of thought where poetical contrivance would seem to govern. However, he is at his best discussing those underrated poems, the "Bucolics", especially "Woods",

[2] *Man's Place*. By RICHARD JOHNSON. Cornell University Press, $11.50, £5.50.


# Closing Times

## Dan Davin

In *Closing Times* the novelist and publisher Dan Davin has set down first-hand recollections of seven of his friends, all writers, all recently dead: Julian Maclaren-Ross, W. R. Rodgers, Louis MacNeice, Enid Starkie, Joyce Cary, Dylan Thomas, and Itzik Manger. The unifying thread in what is in effect an informal autobiography is Dan Davin's own participation in the episodes chronicled, and his deep feeling for his friends, 'the makers whom death has unmade'. Illustrated £4.95

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dedicated to one of the contributors to Stephen Spender's anthology, Nicolas Nabokov.

It seems as if the gap between the ordinary readers of Auden's poetry and the academic specialists is likely to be wider than with most poets. Perhaps the missing element which might bring them together is a biographical one. If so, we may have to wait a long time for the facts to emerge, since Auden's well-known dislike of prying into writers' lives was reinforced at the end by his request that all who had received letters from him should burn them. But, in his later days, he also showed more willingness to reminisce about his family and friends, and an official biography is promised eventually.

Two points in Spender's compilation seem especially relevant to the case. The first is just a cryptic entry in the prefatory "Chronology", provided by his literary executor, Edward Mendelson. Headed "Probably 1939", it quotes from Auden's contribution to the 1956 anthology, *Modern Canterbury Pilgrims:*

> Providentially—for the occupational disease of poets is frivolity—I was forced to know in person what it is like to feel oneself in the prey of demonic powers, in both the Greek and the Christian sense, stripped of self-control and self-respect, behaving like a ham actor in a Strindberg play.

The second is in Hannah Arendt's reminiscences (by far the most distinguished and moving of the tribute's pieces):

> I finally saw the misery, somehow realised vaguely his compelling need to hide it behind the "count-your-blessings" litany, and still found it difficult to understand fully what made him so miserable, so unable to do anything about the absurd circumstances that made everyday life so unbearable for him. . . . He seems to me to have been an expert in the infinite varieties of unrequited love among which the infuriating substitution of admiration for love surely must have loomed large.

Miss Arendt also writes of Auden's "extraordinary unhappiness and . . . the extraordinary greatness, intensity of his poetry." Now, it would be critically useless as well as impertinent to try to turn Auden into a confessional writer or some sort of "*poète maudit.*" The advantage of re-reading him with the insight gained by some recognition of the unhappiness of his life (I found the letters rebuking Philip Toynbee for his *Observer* review, which posed just this question of how unhappy Auden was in later life, peculiarly priggish) is simply that we no longer have to believe all the many public statements he made about his great fortune and contentment; we go back to the texts of his poems, where human emotions are themselves, whatever rage for order his philosophical mind and poetic imagination imposed upon them. In brief, we can see him as a great poet, not as only a marvellous rejuvenator of orthodoxies.

> *But poets are not celibate divines:*
> *Had Dante said so, who would read his lines?*

Edward Mendelson's "Probably 1939" for Auden's plunge into the demonic points to the slightly uncomfortable watershed which divides these memoirs. We meet many names familiar as the dedicatees of Auden's books or of individual poems—his brother John, Gabriel Carritt (celebrated in the rugger Ode in *The Orators*), Michael Yates, whose gloss on the Auden/MacNeice expedition to Iceland is informative and entertaining, Sir William Coldstream and Cyril Connolly. There are also pieces about Auden at prep school and at Gresham's. Christopher Isherwood disappoints us, since he adds only a short reconsideration to the article he originally contributed to the Auden Double Number of *New Verse* in 1937. Interesting as this earlier section is, it lacks weight by comparison with the post-1939 commentary. No one attempts to describe the impact which the young Auden made on the England of the Thirties, the sense of the times having found a voice, Julian Symons's book, *The Thirties*, being the nearest we have to such a survey. *The Orators, Letters from Iceland, The Dog Beneath the Skin* and *Look, Stranger* reproduce that decade so definitively that further comment is perhaps unnecessary.

NOW THAT WE HAVE THE DEMON to add to Auden's perfectly plausible desire to escape from the English literary world's "family life", we can modulate into the vital American years (notably 1940 to 1947, the time of the long poems) more credibly. Here Ursula Niebuhr's memories and those of Anne Fremantle are vital. His return to the church must have been as much to escape the demon's clutches as it was to please mother or exorcise the wicked spirit of historicism. The theological Auden has been well enough charted, and, in my opinion, overvalued, but it is agreeable to meet him in the everyday world of religion, without a halo or the sinister effulgence of conversion. He esteemed the mystics but he was no more likely to become one than he was to go mad. In his selection of Herbert for Penguin Books, he remarks nonchalantly that he would like to have known the Caroline poet personally. One wonders if he'd have felt the same about Kierkegaard or even Goethe.

Maurice Mandelbaum's recollection of Auden at Swarthmore College introduces an aspect of him much less often mentioned than his return to Christianity—his teaching. He must have been

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a marvellous teacher—unafraid of showing what he knew, propounding theories whose audacity he had no desire to see turned into dogma, and, above all, illuminating his friends' and his students' moral natures by analysis, advice and example. Nicolas Nabokov's contribution pays eloquent tribute to Auden's power to suggest the solution to a moral dilemma without interfering in his friend's freedom of choice. Nabokov, too, manages to mix a flavour of "camp" (for so long piously kept out of all writing about Auden, following his own prohibition) with the morality, and, along with James Stern and Lincoln Kirstein, shows us the mysterious figure of the poet, in American uniform, travelling through the ruins of Germany in 1945.

Nabokov was to receive almost the last gift which Auden bestowed, the libretto of *Love's Labour's Lost*, in 1973. He and Robert Craft discuss Auden's musical collaborations, and indicate firmly the leading role played in them by Chester Kallman, who died so tragically soon after his friend. Kallman, on all the evidence a fairly undistinguished poet, became, as librettist, a very considerable figure. Many opera lovers regard the brothel scene in *The Rake's Progress* as one of the most perfect structures, musically and verbally, since Mozart. This, we are reminded, was conceived and executed in the libretto by Kallman. Craft seems to have loved and admired Auden sincerely, but his acidulated style permits him to spice his affection with observations such as "[he] came to rehearsals in a white linen suit, polka-dotted in front with Chianti stains."

AND SO THE PROGRESS CONTINUES, to the unhappy end of reiterated anecdotes, blessings too often counted and the inability of the admiring world to give the poet the serenity his old age desired. At Oxford, David Luke saw the very real generation gap which separated Auden from the new iconoclasts. One undergraduate said, "It didn't matter two shits what he did—we'd have thought him great." But another, and I suspect more representative, declared, "I wasn't the least interested in Auden, any more than I am in Picasso or Stravinsky or Casals or Shostakovich; our inspirations and models are different nowadays." That difference is all around us: Auden, who seemed so immediate for so long, is now a growth area of literary criticism. The authors of this book join with the great public in feeling his loss. The wonderful legacy of the works remains, but it is not only his friends who feel that a powerful protector has gone. For years, the world of the imagination was illuminated by Auden's presence, and those of us who hardly knew him or never met him grieve as acutely as do his close friends. He was our mentor too.

# *AUTHORS*

**Nadine Gordimer** shared the Booker Prize for her last novel, *The Conservationist* (Cape, 1974). . . . **Alasdair MacIntyre**'s article was read at a conference organised by the University of Texas Medical School at Galveston last year. It is appearing in the proceedings of that conference, *Exploration and Evolution in the Biomedical Sciences* (Reidel, 1975). We are indebted to the University of Texas for permission to publish it. . . . **Dr W. O. Henderson** has published numerous books on European and particularly German economic history in the 18th and 19th centuries, including *The Zollverein* and *Britain and Industrial Europe* 1750–1870. He was until recently Reader in International Economic History in the University of Manchester. His 2-volume biography of Engels was published in October (1974). . . . **Dr W. H. Chaloner** has collaborated with Dr Henderson in a number of translations from the German, particularly of F. Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (2nd ed. 1971). He is reader in Modern Economic History in the University of Manchester. . . . **H. J. Eysenck** is Professor of Psychology, University of London, and Director of the Psychological Department of the Maudsley Hospital. He is editor-in-chief of *Behaviour Research and Therapy*, and his numerous works range from *Sense and Nonsense in Psychology* (1957) to *The Measurement of Intelligence* (1972). . . . **Kenneth Minogue** is Reader in Political Science at the London School of Economics. **Malcolm Bradbury** is Professor of American Literature at the University of East Anglia. His most recent book of criticism, *Possibilities*, was published by Oxford University Press in 1973. . . . **Bernard Bergonzi** is Professor of English at the University of Warwick. His latest collection of essays is *The Turn of a Century* (Macmillan, 1973). . . . **Laurence Lerner** is Professor of English at the University of Sussex. His most recent critical book is *The Uses of Nostalgia* (Chatto & Windus). . . . **John Fuller** is a Lecturer in English at the University of Oxford, and a fellow of Magdalen College. His most recent book of poems is *Epistles to Several Persons* (Secker & Warburg, 1974). . . . **P. N. Furbank** is writing the official biography of E. M. Forster. He is General Editor of the New Wessex Edition of Hardy's novels (Macmillan), and is a Lecturer in English with the Open University. . . . **Peter Porter** is at present spending six months as Visiting Writer at the University of Sydney. His latest book, in collaboration with the painter Arthur Boyd, is *The Lady and the Unicorn* (Secker & Warburg, 1975). . . . **Don Cook** was resident correspondent for *The New York Herald Tribune* in Britain, Germany and France, and is now correspondent for the *Los Angeles Times*.

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