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MICHAEL O'NEILL

The 1930s poetry of W. H. Auden

1

A virtuoso craftsman, Auden is also a poet who communicates a strong sense of an idiosyncratic personal voice. Yet this voice can seem enigmatic in its inflections. In what follows, I shall examine and compare a range of poems from his 1930s work (the term covers poems composed between 1928 and 1939) to examine three issues: whether we can see Auden as maturing beyond or falling away from his early, electrifying stylistic brilliance; whether behind the deft stylist there is a poetic sensibility capable of engagement with his subjects; and whether Auden's poetry conforms to his pronouncement in his 'Introduction' to *The Poet's Tongue* that 'Poetry is not concerned with telling people what to do, but with extending our knowledge of good and evil, perhaps making the necessity for action more urgent and its nature more clear, but only leading us to the point where it is possible for us to make a rational and moral choice.'[1]

In making that statement, Auden was judiciously asserting his freedom from agitprop ideas of art common in the 1930s, a period remarkable for its political consciousness, its sense that poetry must engage with the pressing realities of its time. Out of the window goes the High Modernist longing, beyond any fragments shored against ruins, for a vanished ideal of aesthetic and political order; in comes a feeling that the true matter for art is the state of society and the individual's relationship with the social. Long gone is 'the Poet's Party', as Auden calls it in part 3 of his witty pastiche-cum-tribute, 'Letter to Lord Byron', a party marked by its elitist disregard for 'all those cattle'; instead, as the party gives way to the hangover (of which the First World War and the Wall Street Crash of 1929 might be regarded as cataclysmic symptoms), 'the sobering few / Are trying hard to think of something new'.

2

Early Auden thinks of 'something new' by disconcerting and challenging his readers with a poetry that purges sentiment and mimes a clinical aloofness.

The poetry draws on eclectic sources to create effects of urgency and warning. Among other influences, it gathers to itself and makes a first-hand synthesis out of Laura Riding's short-lined, Skeltonic riddlings, the stressed admonitions and dislocations of Anglo-Saxon elegiac poetry, the compressed lexical and metrical adventures of Gerard Manley Hopkins's poems (published for the first time in 1918) and the uses by Wilfred Owen of forms of rhyme in which consonance goes hauntingly awry.

A tight curb is kept on feeling in the early work. 'Taller to-day, we remember similar evenings' begins with a gesture towards memory, but it leads nowhere other than a conclusion in which the poem tersely refers to 'this peace / No bird can contradict: passing, but is sufficient now / For something fulfilled this hour, loved or endured'. The feeling of 'peace' is more affirmative than is usually the case in Auden's early poetry, but the writing is guardedly vigilant. It brings into play, even as it outlaws, the idea of 'contradiction'; it acknowledges that the peace is 'passing'; even if 'sufficient now', the 'peace' is only 'sufficient' 'For something fulfilled this hour', where 'something' may understate joy or indicate 'something' only of momentary significance. If the poem refers to sexual 'fulfilment', it leaves in doubt the poet's attitude, a doubt compounded by the final three words, where the phrasing 'loved or endured' makes of love and endurance comparable states. The writing approaches the personal through the passive voice and by way of reference to alternative experience; it has a strangely displaced feel, as though one were reading a translation from a work about a culture enigmatically like and unlike our own. The line, 'It is seen how excellent hands have turned to commonness', is studiedly concerned to repudiate the first-person singular. The 'peace' attained at the poem's close is set in the context of a culture governed by forces such as 'the Adversary' that 'put too easy questions / On lonely roads'. This 'Adversary' both resembles and sends up folkloric or legendary bogeymen, and the poem's chilling rhetoric, with its possibly parodic air of authority, may mock us. It may be a form of poker-faced ridicule, as though an exceptionally clever schoolboy were mimicking his earnest elders. The verse form avoids Modernist disregard for formal punctuation, but it elongates and shrinks the iambic pentameter in accordance with feeling. In its figurative activity, its relationship with past poetry is one of indebtedness amidst novelty: that 'peace / No bird can contradict' emerges from poems by Shelley, Keats, Hardy and Hopkins in which a bird contradicts or complicates the speaker's viewpoint.

If one compares 'Taller to-day' with another love poem, this time from the mid-1930s, one can see how Auden's style changes across the decade. 'Lay your sleeping head, my love' (written in 1937) shares with 'Taller to-day' an air of decisiveness common to all Auden's poems. However

oblique, however complex, an Auden poem asserts its right to exist from the start, often signalling its poetic self-confidence through a striking first line. The later poem has such formal self-confidence in abundance, organising its scalpel-sharp reflections on love, mortality and faithlessness in stanzas that achieve a gravely musical shape. Rhyme and off-rhyme serve as a marker of attempted control, of intelligence brought to bear on feeling, yet enjambment ensures that the poet's double vision unfolds as he wishes it to unfold. The poem has left behind the abruptness and reticence of the earlier poem in favour of a more subtly surprising relationship with traditional love lyric. As with the earlier poem, the addressee is likely to be male; never explicitly acknowledged by the poem, this must be inferred from what we know of Auden's biography, but may explain the feeling of exclusion transmitted by both pieces. In 'Lay your sleeping head', Auden employs the diction, tone and manner associated with tender love lyrics, but he administers a shock to the assumptions he arouses by speaking in the poem's second line of 'my faithless arm'. 'Faithless arm' disrupts tenderness, yet it creates it anew. The poet is aware that the love will not last, and that, in all probability, he will be the cause of its failure, but this awareness co-exists with a determination to acknowledge the beauty of the moment in the face of all that challenges that beauty. Even if 'the grave / Proves the child ephemeral', where the Greek-derived 'ephemeral' works to place a parallel instance of transience in a long cultural perspective, the poet still pleads on behalf of 'the living creature', asking that the lover may 'lie' in his arms. At the same time, positioned at the end of the line, 'lie' equivocates: it definitely means 'rest'; it may mean 'deceive'. Yet 'the living creature' is a phrase that only seems to depersonalise; certainly, it sees the poem's 'you' in a more generalised way, but that more generalised way is not at odds with an appreciation of the beloved's uniqueness. The stanza concludes with a recognition of the speaker's subjectivity, a recognition that is both confession and boast, as he depicts his lover as 'Mortal, guilty, but to me / The entirely beautiful'. 'But to me' does not undo the trochaic weight of the preceding adjectives, nor does it lay them aside; rather, it gathers them up into a phrase that posits an alternative, more inclusive awareness, one that values the beloved as 'The entirely beautiful', a phrase that is given a line of its own, in keeping with its glimpse of how one might view another 'entirely'.

The poem's succeeding stanzas balance tolerant disenchantment about Venus's 'tolerant enchanted slope' against the wish that 'from this night / Not a whisper, not a thought, / Not a kiss nor look be lost'. Even when Auden seems to abolish boundaries, often an image for division in his earlier work, the result is not to free human beings from the possibility of

error. So, when in the second stanza he asserts, 'Soul and body have no bounds', ensuing lines suggest that human beings ricochet between eros and abstract idealism in ways that Freud might describe as sublimation and repression. But Auden's lyric achievement is to allow the significance of what he concedes to be an 'ordinary swoon' to hold its own in the face of the poem's majestically unsorrowing acceptance of our time-bound condition: 'Certainty, fidelity / On the stroke of midnight pass / Like vibrations of a bell', Auden writes at the start of the third stanza, the august nouns so many Cinderellas stripped of their finery; by the start of the fourth and last stanza, the declaration is briefer and bleaker, and yet by no means nihilistic: 'Beauty, midnight, vision dies'. The line serves as the prelude to a renewed outbreak of hope that time which deceives will also save; 'Nights of insult' will take their allotted place among friendlier 'winds of dawn'. Both love poems engage, then, with their subject, at the centre of which is human emotion; both, in their differing ways, not only seek to call up emotion but also to investigate its full human significance. Auden's earlier work always jolts and imparts a strong verbal voltage; his later 1930s work, with its mimicry of traditional formal harmonies, often lulls initially. But whether jolting or lulling, the 1930s work shares a strong impulse to 'extend our knowledge' of ourselves.

3

That knowledge concerns itself centrally with mindscapes and landscapes. In his autobiography Stephen Spender writes evocatively of Auden's 'poetic landscape of deserted mines, spies, shootings – terse syllables enclosed within a music like the wind in a deserted shaft'.[2] Auden's 'poetic landscape' in his early poems serves as an objective correlative for a sense of England as a county riven by conflict and stratification, a place where something is distinctly rotten. On the look-out for symptoms, the poetry diagnoses, often nailing its discoveries through a curt use of the definite article, the Audenesque 'the', heard in the plea that an unnamed healer should cure 'the intolerable neural itch' in one poem, or, in 'Consider this and in our time', in the mockery of 'the insufficient units' who are 'Supplied with feelings by an efficient band'. These 'units' are incapable of the sufficiency glimpsed at the end of 'Taller to-day', and the 'efficient band' taunts them with their inadequacy. The units and their like are doomed, the poem suggests, to suffer 'A polar peril, a prodigious alarm'.

This alliterative mouthful of a line zestfully plays up – almost sends up – the possibility of an apocalyptic scenario. Eliot's end-of-civilisation-as-we-know-it moments, in 'What the Thunder said', implicate us all: 'We

who were living are now dying / With a little patience'. Haunted by and grieving for a coherent vision, Eliot opens his poem to surreal ghostings, snatches of gospel narrative, glimpses of hope, all conveyed in a grammar-defying sequence of juxtaposed images. When in 'Consider this' Auden imagines the disintegration of a moribund class, he does so in a language that implies an authoritative superiority on the part of the poet; if he manages to co-opt the idiom of Freud and Marx, pinpointing the psycho-social fault lines behind 'The convolutions of your simple wish', there is a gusto, a delight in the poetic performance.

That performance relies on switches of focus; verbal equivalents to wide-lens panning and sudden close-ups suggest the influence of the cinema in the opening five lines:

> Consider this and in our time
> As the hawk sees it or the helmeted airman:
> The clouds rift suddenly – look there
> At cigarette-end smouldering on a border
> At the first garden party of the year.

The syntax feels tightly wound; it makes sense, but seems to be under unusual pressure from an opening that breathes new life into the ancient injunction to 'Consider'. We must consider an undefined 'this' whose nature we assume inheres in the descriptive detail that follows, and we must consider 'this' as happening 'in our time'. This is not an admonitory poetry that stacks on the same cultural rubble-heap contemporary London and the ships at Mylae, as in 'The Burial of the Dead', the first part of *The Waste Land*. Rather, it impresses on us its relevance to an actual now.

Such relevance is the product of estranged perspective, the end of many expressive techniques in early Auden, keen to embrace the view taken by the 'hawk' or the 'helmeted airman'. The alliterative vigour of those phrases allows an older, native linguistic energy to reassert itself, one that has the effect of culturally relativising the present. A language associated with, say, Langland proves its relevance to 'our time', with the implication not that the supposed newness of 'our time' is a sham, but that it requires an intelligence familiar with earlier and other cultures as well as with the present to be brought to bear on it. The verse relishes estrangement, assuming the accents of the anthropologist exploring rituals of the tribe, such as 'the first garden party of the year'. Again, the image of the 'cigarette-end smouldering on a border' typifies Auden's ability to seize on a detail and invest it with portentous menace. At the same time he sidesteps deftly any suggestion that he is being histrionic; if 'smouldering' brings into place the idea of nursed or suppressed resentment, it is also a word that

neutrally describes the dying flame of a thrown-away cigarette; and if the 'border' suggests conflict, trespass and separation in many poems by early Auden, it refers here at a literal level to a garden border.

Auden's seriousness in his early poems, indeed, links with the elusiveness of pinning down how serious he is being. F. R. Leavis objected to the 'combination of seriousness and flippancy' in *Paid on Both Sides*; but the combination is one which, in various forms, shapes the communicative inflections of many of Auden's earlier poems. Leavis thought the combination bore a relationship to 'the stultifying division in [Auden's] own consciousness'.[3] The 'supreme Antagonist' / More powerful than the great northern whale' who materialises in the second paragraph of 'Consider' bears witness, however, not to a 'stultifying division', but to a capacity for mythmaking play that energises and refreshes the verse. In its sinister yet comic invasions, the 'Antagonist' is the poet's scourge and minister, his unholy double, sharing a keen capacity to scent out illness and corruption. Auden's syntax leaves one wondering whether an initial indicative has turned into imperatives in a passage such as the following:

> Order the ill that they attack at once:
> Visit the ports and, interrupting
> The leisurely conversation in the bar
> Within a stone's throw of the sunlit water,
> Beckon your chosen out.

The positioning of 'interrupting' mimes perfectly the polite insistence of the Antagonist's intervention, while the detail of the 'bar / Within a stone's throw of the sunlit water' makes strange the slang of the privileged class, even as it loiters conspiratorially in their company. Auden's capacity to shift moods and subject positions lends the poetry an edge of imperturbable knowingness that heightens, towards the close, into a gleeful ruthlessness. In the final paragraph, Auden again addresses 'you', though this time the addressee is not the 'Antagonist' but the Antagonist's victims, the 'Seekers after happiness' destined for the poem's twinned fates of 'explosion of mania' or 'a classic fatigue'.

Auden's diction continually keeps his reader on her or his toes. The to-and-fro movement between the volcanic 'explosion of mania' and the ruefully urbane 'a classic fatigue' illustrates the pervasive dimension of lexical surprise in his poetry. In later 1930s work, the poet's political voice takes on a different timbre. 'Out on the lawn I lie in bed' significantly shifts from addressing 'you' to speaking of 'we'; it has dispensed with the harsh and dissonant compressions of the earlier poem in favour of a well-paced lyrical movement, each six-line stanza a regulated dance of rhyming

octosyllabics and trimeters. At first sight, it seems a poem that does not wish to affront the traditional choir of English poetry, but to blend its voice euphoniously with it. Yet if Auden sidles up to the reader, he does so in order to deceive and disconcert. If the speaker's good fortune and luck compose the opening phase, lyric pastoral soon opens out to accommodate tragedy, warning and apocalyptic vision: all done, without an ostentatious shift in diction or tone. A key transition is the description of the moon in the line, 'She climbs the European sky'. Written in 1933, the year when Hitler came to power, the poem has no need to underscore the resonance of the adjective 'European'. As in 'Consider' Auden relies on estrangement; but whereas the hawk or helmeted airman seemed credited with powers of discernment, the moon gazes down 'blankly as an orphan': 'To gravity attentive, she / Can notice nothing here', writes Auden: it is 'we' who can or should be 'attentive' to, and yet try to hide from, the 'gravity' of a world in which 'our' worst fate is apparently to 'endure / The tyrannies of love'. Complicity in corruption is manifest in 'Consider'. In 'Out on the lawn' there is a gravely troubled acceptance of the fact that private happiness may well involve shielding the self from unpalatable historical truths. Auden brilliantly exposes the inter-dependence of personal and public in this stanza, where he speaks of how he and his friends,

> gentle, do not care to know
> Where Poland draws her Eastern bow,
> What violence is done;
> Nor ask what doubtful act allows
> Our freedom in this English house,
> Our picnics in the sun.

The stanza's tonal control is absolute; it mocks even as it sympathises; it understands even as it undercuts. 'Gentle' puns: it implies both reluctance to engage in conflict and the group's 'gentle' social status. The syntax tethers 'Our freedom in this English house' to the disinclination to 'know, / Where Poland draws her Eastern bow, / What violence is done'. The exposure of non-involvement is devastating, the more so because the poem allots the speaker's 'freedom' and 'picnics in the sun' their due. In the poem's final movement, Auden develops a conceit-like image of a revolutionary flood that will pour 'through the dykes of our content', yet he utters a secular prayer, as often in his 1930s work, that in the flood's aftermath 'this', his current happiness, may to the new 'strength belong; / As through a child's rash happy cries / The drowned voices of his parents rise / In unlamenting song'. The social reconstruction being imagined is part of the Utopian impulse that pervades poetry of the period; but Auden shows

himself to be aware of engaging in such a reconstruction: the conceit works as just that, a deliberately proffered conceit, and he tactfully absents himself from the joyous future. It is less to any socialist 'strength' that the poem pins its colours, for all its devastating critique of bourgeois individualism, than to an in-between state, one in which the poet can hear the 'rash' nature of future 'happy cries' and express a latent fellow-feeling with the parental 'drowned voices'.

Earlier, in part 4 of 'It was Easter as I walked in the public gardens', a poem demanding with characteristic urgency 'the destruction of error', Auden had envisaged 'our death, / Death of the old gang' and posited as a potential symbol of renewal a de-familiarised Christ-figure, 'deep in clear lake / The lolling bridegroom, beautiful, there'. It is among his most potent images, the more powerful for resisting easy allegory; we might note, too, that even in this intermittently vengeful fantasy the poet acknowledges that 'our death', too, is necessary. In 'Out on the lawn', the 'drowned voices' include, we cannot but feel, the voice of the poem we have been hearing, a voice which seeks to present itself as 'unlamenting song', but does, in part, 'lament' a culture which at the same time it argues must be radically transformed. The poem's impressiveness is at one with its poised authenticity, its capacity to sustain unflinchingly and unmelodramatically a full awareness of the poet's divided position.

4

Towards the close of the decade, poetry's function takes centre stage in Auden's work. In 'Spain 1937' historical crisis confronts him with a challenge to which he responds with a poem that seeks, as a line from 'August for the people and their favourite islands' has it, to 'Make action urgent and its nature clear'. Yet the poem, especially as first published (Auden rewrote it several times before disowning it), is among the great 1930s poems by virtue of its fusion of near-omniscience and final existential aloneness. It might have something of the air of a superbly finished propaganda piece, all the past condensed into brilliantly compacted phrases that yield pride of place to the present. So, a series of vignettes sums up the past as a gigantic, magnificent irrelevance to what is happening in Spain in the struggle between the Republic and Franco's Fascists: 'Yesterday', Auden writes, 'the installation of dynamos and turbines; / The construction of railways in the colonial desert; / Yesterday the classic lecture / On the origin of Mankind. But to-day the struggle'. Never in all his work is the definite article so superbly equal to the task of taxonomic condensation. The 'struggle', however, tests Auden's ethical as well as his playful

imagination. At one stage, as Edward Mendelson has argued, he may attempt to imply, through a sleight-of-hand involving natural images, that the decision to side with the Republic barely involves 'will' and is more the product 'of something very much like unconscious instinctive nature'.[4] So, those responding to the inner voice that Auden suggests makes up 'History', rather than any Marxist dialectic, 'Have heard and migrated like gulls or the seeds of a flower'. Yet the poem's ethical heart is the recognition that 'History' is not an 'operator', but the sum of human choices. At the close it is less Auden's omniscience that dominates our response, though we respond to the sharp perceptiveness of lines such as 'to-day the / Fumbled and unsatisfactory embrace before hurting', with its novel way of reminding us of human doubleness. Rather, it is the poet's aloneness. The final stanza has the effect of a bracing coda to many of the hopes advanced by Auden's political poetry in the 1930s, a coda that has about it a saddened undersong:

> The stars are dead; the animals will not look:
> We are left alone with our day, and the time is short, and
> History to the defeated
> May say Alas but cannot help or pardon.

The repetitions structuring the poem – of 'Yesterday', 'to-day', and 'Tomorrow' – fall away, yielding to 'our day', an interim that is ours, one charged with possibilities and the likelihood of further distress. Auden's later rejection of the last two lines, on the grounds that they 'equate goodness with success', ignores the fact that the lines betray his discomfort with any such notion.[5] The phrasing personifies History in a way that discredits personification as other than the poet's projective labelling. Auden sees personified History as hand-wringingly ineffectual, able to 'say Alas', though even the word 'Alas', denied speech-marks, seems only a mouthed act of ventriloquism, but unable to 'help' (should the 'defeated' warrant help) or 'pardon' (should the defeated require 'pardon'). The thrust of the lines is against any complacent reliance on 'History the operator' to do the work. 'Spain 1937' is, thus, concerned to 'Make action urgent and its nature clear'. It is evidently partisan, yet not propagandist; it posits the view that in any political struggle the outcome will determine the way the struggle is retrospectively seen. It does not equate goodness with success; but it does suggest that if goodness is to succeed human beings need to recognise that they have only themselves to depend on.

Despite the poet's fraught repudiations of this poem and 'September 1, 1939', each reveals Auden's concern, in lines from the later poem, to use his 'voice / To undo the folded lie'. Particular lies which 'September 1, 1939'

identifies are spelled out in the trochaically light-footed, intelligent measures of the same stanza: 'There is no such thing as the State / And no one exists alone'. Auden's flair for thinking in poetry is apparent here: the two statements may seem at odds, since if there is 'no such thing as the State', does that not mean that everyone is 'alone'? Conversely, if 'no one exists alone', how do they avoid being part of a 'State'? Auden's pointed wording provokes such questions, and also the further reflection that if we subscribe to a 'State' over and above ourselves, we risk the dangerous, inhuman nationalism that is responsible for the crisis dated in the title (two days before the outbreak of the Second World War) and for the fact that 'Waves of anger and fear / Circulate over the bright / And darkened lands of the earth'. 'Circulate' implies a fluidly global connection, while the last line and a half prepare us for the notion that 'no one exists alone'.

In this poem Auden mixes elegant generalisation with a powerful communicative pressure. A medley of authorities gives the sense of the poet as well read and incisive: the second stanza alone invokes 'Accurate scholarship' as a means of telling what 'has driven a culture mad', before invoking Freudian wisdom, too. Yet it is typical of the range achieved by the poem's voice that the stanza settles for a more homespun idiom of truth-telling: 'Those to whom evil is done / Do evil in return'. The lines allude to the Treaty of Versailles and the post-war reparations enjoined on Germany. They suggest, too, amid the poem's sophisticated ability to discern and indict 'Imperialism's face / And the international wrong', a trust in robustly commonsense ethics. That *sensus communis*, however, derives from individual experience, a mode of experience which 'September 1, 1939' both exalts and mistrusts. The poem begins by presenting Auden as seemingly alone, 'in one of the dives / On Fifty-Second Street', the American English speaking of his displaced identity. Soon, though, it links his fearful uncertainty with the moral bankruptcy of 'a low dishonest decade'. Auden is at once displaced stranger and spokesman by default for this decade. He seeks in much of what follows to trace to its source the human capacity for error, finding it in the supposedly normal wish 'to be loved alone' and in the ego-forged manacles that restrict the vision of 'the sensual man-in-the-street'. Complicity in political imperfection and crisis, Auden's great theme in his 1930s poetry, reappears as a concern of the poem, a complicity whose symptom is a longing to abnegate responsibility. We are all, the poem states with rigour and sympathy, afraid 'Lest we should see where we are, / Lost in a haunted wood'. And it is in this context that Auden frames his sense of his role as a poet and builds towards a final hope. 'All I have is a voice / To undo the folded lie' introduces his definition of the role; the final hope is conveyed through the rhyming admonition (which, *pace* Auden's later self-criticism,

works well in the poem) that 'We must love one another or die'. 'Die', there, means, one might suppose, less physical than moral death, a condition in which we cease to function as creatures capable of converting 'Hunger', struggle and alienation into something approaching a peaceable culture. Lest Auden seem too preacherly here, he adds in the last stanza a wryly qualified wish that he may be admitted to the company of 'the Just' dotted through our stupefied world like 'Ironic points of light'. Their capacity for 'irony' is evinced by the poem. Auden's irony is inseparable from his refusal to give way to 'Negation and despair'. If it involves simultaneous awareness of human weakness and a confession of his complicity in such weakness, it prompts a sense of human possibilities; 'composed . . . / Of Eros and of dust', he finishes the poem by expressing the desire, never absent from his best 1930s work, to 'Show an affirming flame'.

5

At the chapter's outset I posed three questions, which might be briefly rephrased thus: does Auden's 1930s work mature; does he engage with his subjects; and is his poetry able to escape didactic propaganda? It is incontestable that the earliest poems of the period, such as 'The Watershed', have a concrete and unparaphrasable warning power unmatched by any later poems. This power is illustrated by an image from the just-mentioned poem that speaks volumes about trespass and isolation: 'Beams from your car may cross a bedroom wall, / They wake no sleeper'. But the maturing intelligence of Auden's work is equally apparent, reaching a climax in the cunning, brave and eloquent defence of Yeats in 'In Memory of W. B. Yeats'. There, Auden anticipates much of the drift of his post-1930s work as he evolves a sophisticated poetics, one in which poetry 'makes nothing happen' (itself a nicely ambiguous form of words) and yet is 'A way of happening'. Often it is through his awareness of poetry as 'A way of happening' that thirties Auden achieves his fusion of emotional and conceptual engagement with his subjects: an engagement that illuminates the desperate murk at the heart of private psyches and public crises, and that fuses attention to the contemporary with a wider, longer cultural and ethical gaze. Unlike his Matthew Arnold, Auden did 'not thrust his gift in prison'; he made of it a uniquely resonant bequest to his readers.

NOTES

1 *The English Auden: Poems, Essays and Dramatic Writings 1927–1939*, ed. Edward Mendelson (London: Faber and Faber, 1977), p. 329. Unless otherwise indicated, this edition is used for quotations from Auden's work.

2 Stephen Spender, *World Within World* (1951; London: Faber and Faber, 1977), p. 52.
3 Leavis is quoted from *The Poetry of W. H. Auden: A Reader's Guide to Essential Criticism*, ed. Paul Hendon (Cambridge: Icon, 2002), p. 61.
4 Edward Mendelson, *Early Auden* (London: Faber and Faber, 1981), p. 319.
5 Auden's foreword to his *Collected Shorter Poems 1927–1957* (1966; London: Faber and Faber, 1969), p. 15.

Further reading

Hendon, Paul (ed.), *The Poetry of W. H. Auden: A Reader's Guide to Essential Criticism*, Cambridge: Icon, 2002
Mendelson, Edward, *Early Auden*, London: Faber and Faber, 1981
O'Neill, Michael, and Gareth Reeves, *Auden, MacNeice, Spender: The Thirties Poetry*, London: Macmillan, 1992
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