



ESSE-8: LONDON 2006

29 August – 2 September 2006

S32. W.H. Auden: His Work and His Legacy

Saturday 2 September: 9.30-11.30am

Co-convenor: Peter Howarth (University of Nottingham)

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Because 2007 is the centenary of Auden's birth, it seems fitting to reassess his work. Drama, documentary film, poetry, libretti, and nonfiction prose were all artistic forms Auden engaged with during his career. Given this range, we welcome presentations on any aspect of Auden's work. This includes his artistic legacy, which is to say the influence Auden has had on younger or more contemporary writers, writers who have found it necessary in their work to respond to Auden in some way.

Rethinking Later Auden

Kathleen Bell (De Montfort University)

"When truly brothers, / men don't sing in unison / but in harmony" (W.H. Auden, *Shorts* 1972-3). While the concerns of Auden's poetry derive from his time, their relevance is sharpened by early 21st-century debates. This is particularly true of the later (American) poems in the style Auden characterised as wry and monochrome. Their scope includes: political dissidence and the state; religion and sexuality; responsibility to the environment; and ethical questions raised by torture, injustice, and imperialism. This paper considers the relationship between Auden's poetry as a "way of happening" and the complex contemporary world of personal, public and international responsibilities.

Towards a Poetics of Europeanness: the Works of W.H. Auden

Rainer Emig (University of Regensburg)

Although "Europe" is metaphorical, its poetic potential is under-explored. Auden has approached European identities poetically – in mythological fantasies of a Nordic past, more political positionings during the Spanish Civil War, discussions of frontiers and depictions of dislocation and exile as well as "returns" to Europe in the post-war period. Far from representing personal efforts to piece together an identity, Auden's works prefigure poststructuralist and deconstructive attempts at (un-)defining identity: as translation, loss, even absence, but also reconstruction through acknowledging the Other – in his/her/its manifold aspects. The paper will explore these approaches, their problems and limitations as well as their potential.

Auden's "Orientalism" in the Late 1930s

Lawrence Normand (Middlesex University)

It may seem strange to use the word “orientalism” in relation to Auden since he was usually so scornful of Western intellectuals’ attraction to Eastern philosophy or religion. But for a few years in the second half of the 1930s he became interested in oriental religious beliefs and the interaction of Eastern and Western cultures. His preoccupation with the dilemmas of the modern self and its representation – fragmentation, entanglement with history, search for coherence – prompted an engagement with a variety of oriental sources. *The Ascent of F6* can serve as a case study of these formal and ideological experiments, which also point to future changes.

American Poetry and the Legacy of Auden

Aidan R. Wasley (University of Georgia)

When Auden emigrated to the US in 1939, his reconstruction of his own poetic identity helped define American poetry for the postwar generation in terms of what he called “the burden of choice” among the myriad contending inheritances faced by younger poets in the wake of Modernism’s shattering of notions of a unified native tradition. In the US, Auden constructed a new American poetry that accommodated and influenced countless young poets. By exploring both the intimate and wide-ranging textual and biographical links between Auden and his American inheritors, we gain access to a new framework for understanding models of literary influence and Auden’s place in 20th century American poetry.

Susannah Gottlieb (Northwestern University)

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