

‘A minor atlantic Goethe’:
W.H. Auden’s Germanic bias



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ABSTRACT

This thesis is an account of the poet and critic W.H. Auden's relations with Germany and Germans over the course of his life (1907-1973), presented through a selection of influences that have received little critical attention in the corpus of secondary literature to date. While these connections and influences are manifold and sometimes disparate, they can serve as a prism to tell Auden's life-story from a particular, relatively unexplored angle and to illuminate his work.

The thesis is divided into three chapters. Chapter One discusses Auden's engagement with German literature before 1928, his reasons for spending nine months in Weimar Berlin 1928-29, and the formative influence of this experience on his life and work. Chapter Two explores Auden's relationship with his 'in-laws', the famous family of Nobel Prize winning author Thomas Mann, and Auden's choice of an international life-style. Chapter Three discusses various other, later German influences on Auden: his visit to Germany with the US Army and its traces in *The Age of Anxiety*; issues concerning the German translation of this text; his Ford Foundation residence in isolated West Berlin; and his intellectual friendship with Hannah Arendt. Introduction and Conclusion embed these three specific chapters, deliberating the topic more abstractly.

A number of appendices bring together a wide range of unpublished sources – and their translations into English, if the original is composed in German. These and all other quotations from unpublished sources are based on my own transcriptions of the manuscripts, and – wherever no published translation is referenced – my own translations. Quotations from the Deutschlandfunk interview are based on my typescript of the audio-file, which, together with my translation of it, can be found in Appendix G. All of these texts have been produced to the best of my ability. I have neither edited them nor corrected Auden's grammatical mistakes in German. Translations of all German appendix material can be found in the appendix itself.

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ABBREVIATIONS FOR WORKS CITED

- CP W.H. Auden, *Collected Poems*, ed. Edward Mendelson (New York: Random House, 2007).
- EA Edward Mendelson, *Early Auden* (London: Faber & Faber 1999).
- Eng.A W.H. Auden, *The English Auden: Poems, Essays and Dramatic Writings 1927-1939*, ed. Edward Mendelson (London: Faber & Faber, 1977).
- Fir P.E. Firchow, *W.H. Auden: Contexts for Poetry* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2002).
- J29 W.H. Auden, Journal. Holograph notebook. Known as [Berlin] Journal 1929 Apr.- [?], Berg Collection, New York Public Library, W.H. Auden collection of papers.
- PI W.H. Auden, *Prose Volume 1: 1926-1938*, ed. Edward Mendelson (London: Faber & Faber, 1996).
- PII W.H. Auden, *Prose Volume 2: 1939-1948*, ed. Edward Mendelson (London: Faber & Faber, 2002).
- SW W.H. Auden, *Secondary Worlds* (London: Faber & Faber, 1968).

‘Personally I think that the more internationally [...] you
can think and feel, the more I admire you’.

W.H. Auden to Stephen Spender in 1933

INTRODUCTION

In the foreword to his ‘commonplace book’ *A Certain World*, W.H. Auden wrote in 1970:

Biographies of writers, whether written by others or themselves, are always superfluous and usually in bad taste. A writer is a maker, not a man of action. To be sure, some, in a sense all, of his works are transmutations of his personal experiences, but no knowledge of the raw ingredients will explain the peculiar flavour of the verbal dishes he invites the public to taste: his private life is, or should be, of no concern to anybody except himself, his family and his friends.¹

Despite being aware of Auden’s wish that critics and readers should devote their time to the study of his work instead of delving into the details of his private life, I realise – and should admit this immediately, both to the reader and to Auden – that this dissertation will undoubtedly reflect my fascination with the poet’s character and with the particulars of his ‘German life’.² Being a native German myself, Auden’s experience of Berlin in 1928/1929 and his life-long love for German literature have become the prism for my reading of his work. I can only hope that, nevertheless, this thesis will not prove to be ‘in bad taste’. Could one not reasonably consider oneself to be the friend of a dead poet after having spent half a decade of one’s life in his close company anyhow?

And while indeed Auden’s work does not require the spice of added flavours in order to be endlessly nourishing and wonderfully tasteful, it is still my conviction that an interest in the raw ingredients of one’s meal will always add an extra dimension to the taste experience. After all, even Auden granted that:

[...] our judgement of an established author is never simply an aesthetic judgement. In addition to any literary merit it may have, a new book by him has a historic interest for us as the act of a person in whom we have long been interested. He is not only a poet or a novelist; he is also a character in our biography.³

¹ W.H. Auden, *A Certain World: A Commonplace Book* (London: Faber & Faber, 1971), vii.

² Speaking about ‘German’ in such general terms, I am aware that I should be saying ‘German and Austrian’, but this is not practicable throughout the thesis. When suitable, I use the term Germanic.

³ W.H. Auden, *The Dyer’s Hand and Other Essays* (London: Faber & Faber, 1963), 4.

Being in this spirit, it is not the principal aim of this doctoral thesis to bestow aesthetic judgement on Auden's poetry, although I do discuss his work wherever this is relevant and insightful. Instead, it is biographical in nature and focuses on the trope 'Germany' in order to tell Auden's life-story from a new perspective. That every phase of Auden's life can be discussed in terms of Germanic influences is remarkable in itself.

In writing on 'Auden and Germany', there is the obvious temptation of looking for absolutes – for generalising statements arguing for the existence of a 'German Auden' – not least because this would give coherence to a thesis which otherwise needs to find more subtle ways of linking the many German 'elements' scattered throughout Auden's complex life and work. While there is no simple answer to the question, 'What did Germany mean to Auden?', I am making a case for Auden's obvious 'bias' towards Germany by presenting an abundance of diverse and often unconnected evidence. Much of the material has sprung from my own research; German archives seem to have been neglected by Auden biographers and scholars in the past, not altogether surprisingly.

Exactly because my chosen topic requires me to focus on Auden's relationship with Germany, it is crucial to note his great flexibility when it came to 'habitats'. As early as 1933, Auden wrote to Stephen Spender: 'Personally I think that the more internationally [...] you can think and feel, the more I admire you'.⁴ Nicholas Jenkins provides the statistics of Auden's international life in 'Historical as Munich':

Auden's life, both in mental and physical terms, was an extraordinarily mobile one. It is often still not easy to determine where he was when, whom he met where, what he was reading, and so on. With two passports, at various points he had long-term houses in five countries: England, Germany, the USA, Italy and Austria. He made twenty-nine separate journeys that lasted more than two months; twenty-six of those lasted more than five

⁴ Nicholas Jenkins, "Eleven Letters from Auden to Spender," in *The Map of All My Youth: Early Works, Friends and Influences*, ed. Nicholas Jenkins and Katherine Bucknell (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 63.

months, blurring the meaning, especially in his later years, of home and abroad, domestic and foreign, here and there.⁵

What this requires me to make plain from the outset, is that while Auden did have a self-identified ‘bias’ for Germany, the country’s language and culture – he himself coined the terms ‘pro-Kraut’ and ‘anti-Frog’ – Auden never identified himself as German or Austrian.

Of course, Auden’s lifetime spanned a period in German history that was uniquely changeful and uniquely terrible. This alone would have made any visitors’ identification with Germany complicated – what was Germany, after all? Certainly not the same in 1928 as in 1964. In any case, Auden was an individualist, not a nationalist. If anything, he was a ‘localist’: a Berliner, a New Yorker, an Ischian, a Kirchstetter. Most of all, he was always quite himself, pursuing the international life he had decided would allow him to create the work he aspired to create.

Auden’s wish to become ‘a minor atlantic Goethe’ (‘The Cave of Making’, CP, 692), as he put it in 1964, on the other hand, can be read as an identification with the German literary tradition – that of Weimar Classicism. A comparison of the two poets reveals many parallels: both were cosmopolitan at heart and turned traveling into a mode of living; both were drawn to sights of war while always keeping a comfortable distance; both disliked nationalist limitations, especially when it came to literature; both were interested in geology and science; both spent longer periods in Italy; and both had a love for light verse. As Goethe did, Auden thought of himself as a ‘Weltbürger’ who consciously left ‘home’: without cutting his ties completely, but with the hope to be creative within the bounds of self-imposed limitations rather than within the limitations of his culture, class, and nationality.

⁵ Nicholas Jenkins, “Historical as Munich - Auden at 100: Who Is He Now?,” *Times Literary Supplement*, February 9, 2007, 13.

Exactly a year after having arrived in the United States in 1939, Auden wrote in a letter to his friend E.R. Dodds, debating whether or not he should return to England: ‘You speak of England as roots, but after all what is my England? My childhood and my English friends [...]. In the Twentieth [century] to talk of roots is as meaningless as to talk of race’. And he continued by saying about his new home:

It’s a terrifying place and I daresay I’m no tougher than the rest, but to attempt the more difficult seems to me the only thing worth while. At least I know what I am trying to do, which most American writers don’t, which is to live deliberately without roots.⁶

But this was not quite true. Unlike the many German emigrants who arrived in America with Auden – his in-laws, the Mann family, for instance – Auden did have one very significant root to build on in his new country of choice: the English language. At no point in his life was he unable to get along speaking English, and even in Austrian Kirchstetten Auden is reported to have spoken English whenever he could.

About the German language, Auden said: ‘Ich spreche sie schlecht aber das ist deshalb, weil ich eine abergläubische Furcht des Dichters habe, ich könnte sobald ich einmal eine fremde Zunge vollkommen beherrsche, das Gefühl für meine eigene Sprache verlieren’.⁷ Auden never had ‘full command’ of German, as critics never tire to point out. Here, for instance, Auden transfers the ambiguity of the English word ‘tongue’ into German, where no analogous ambiguity exists.

Still, the recording of an hour-long interview, conducted with Auden in German by Deutschlandfunk in 1965, makes it possible for me to state – without having to rely on secondary accounts – that Auden’s German was in fact impressive for someone who

⁶ Kathleen Bell, “A Change of Heart: Six Letters from Auden to the Doddses,” in *The Map of All My Youth: Early Works, Friends and Influences*, ed. Katherine Bucknell and Nicholas Jenkins (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 111.

⁷ W.H. Auden, Europaisches [*sic*] Konzert: Ein Engländer [*sic*] sieht Europa. Typescript (carbon) of article with the author’s ms. corrections. 29 October 1962. Berg Collection, New York Public Library, W.H. Auden collection of papers. [‘I speak it badly but this is because I have the superstitious fear of the poet that I could lose the intuition for my own language once I have full command of a foreign tongue’.]

had not formally studied the language except for a few years of school grammar. While his German was never flawless, Auden was fluent and understood many of the language's nuances.

Auden felt that a language should be protected, served, and treated with scientific accuracy. Despite his 'superstitious fear' that speaking German fluently might estrange him from his own language, 'good mongrel barbarian English' ('The Cave of Making', CP, 693) – a statement that has the air of an excuse about it – Auden also wrote beautifully in *Secondary Worlds*: 'Anybody who loves language knows that he cannot fully understand his mother-tongue without a working knowledge of at least two other languages, just as one cannot understand one's mother country without having lived in at least two others'. (SW, 140)

I envision my thesis as a subchapter, of a much larger project one might label 'International Auden'. Traditionally, critics have often tried to make Auden's vast oeuvre more manageable through their projection of a 'Great Schism' onto the timeline of his poetry; 'English Auden' could thus be compared with 'American Auden' and a clear judgement derived. While this distinction worked as a useful tool imposing structure, it proved to be a dangerously limiting one as it resonated with existing pre-conceptions and prejudices. As P.E. Firchow points out,

[...] Auden is more than a double man, he is a multiple man, attempting to compress a whole world of identities into a single person and lifetime. His life represents an almost emblematic search for wholeness, for integrity, for a way of fusing the contradictions of private and public existence, just as in his work he sought to reconcile the often conflicting claims of individual and society. (Fir, 11)

Of course, every 'approach' or 'reading' has to impose certain limitations, which is the point of the exercise, but in my view, the reception of Auden's work – especially by his

contemporaries – has often been tainted with issues of nationalism particular to the 1930s.

Auden was treated with contempt for leaving England and moving to the United States at the onset of WWII, the reasons for which can hardly be appreciated in our post-nationalist age. ‘[P]unished under a foreign code of conscience’ (‘In Memory of W.B. Yeats’, CP, 245), Auden received harsh criticism for having ‘abandoned the sinking ship’ Britannia: especially so, because he had indulged somewhat his image as the left-wing ‘voice of the nation’ and thereby conditioned public expectation during the early 1930s. This has been aptly described by Kathleen Bell as a ‘Lost Leader’ phenomenon.⁸

With hindsight, it seems weirdly prophetic that in *The Orators* (1932), the ‘prophet’ receives ‘odd welcome from the country he so defended: “Coward, Coward”, “Deceiver”’ (Eng.A, 61). Correspondingly, Auden’s reputation and the reception of his work developed a life of its own – ‘modified in the guts of the living’ (‘In Memory of W.B. Yeats’, CP, 245) – leading to the creation in the public mind of a semi-imaginary poet who, again and again, seems at odds with the Auden one meets in letters and other private sources from the time, or in his poems. Ever since the early 30s, Auden was unable to shake off this public identity as ‘political Auden’ that reduced his complex character and oeuvre to only one of its manifold aspects.

This image has stuck until today. In a German/English edition of Auden’s poetry from 2002, for instance, Auden is introduced with the following short biography: ‘W.H. Auden, geboren 1907 in York, gestorben 1973 in Wien. Er studierte in Oxford, nahm am spanischen Bürgerkrieg teil und erlebte in China den chinesisch-japanischen Krieg

⁸ Katherine Bucknell and Nicholas Jenkins, eds., *The Map of All My Youth: Early Works, Friends and Influences* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 97.

[...].⁹ Birth, Oxford, Spain, China: a somewhat clichéd and uninspired summary of Auden's life between 1907 and 1939, to say the least.¹⁰ Why, for instance, would the editor of a poetry book for the German market choose not to mention Auden's stay in Berlin? While this seems a strange editorial choice to make, what it goes to show is the following: still today, critics, publishers, and journalists perpetuate the image of Auden as the voice of his generation; as a reporter-poet who was expected to remain faithfully attached to the British Isles while going off to foreign lands; as the political writer who could be found in Spain and in China to give the horrors a voice and a song. Of course, once a myth – an exaggerated and judgemental view on a matter – is established in the canon of secondary literature, it spreads easily and assumes the status of a truth.¹¹

How little Auden actually embraced this role often attributed to him though becomes apparent with hindsight and by comparison. In *Christopher and his Kind* (1976), Christopher Isherwood summarised Auden's trip to Spain:

The British Press had turned Wystan into big news. Even those editors who obviously regarded him with cynicism or illwill helped to publicize his journey – to his own embarrassment, for he was afraid of being prevented by the authorities from entering Spain. To thousands of young people he was now a hero – a Byron or at least a Rupert Brooke, going forth to war.¹²

Auden was never quite at ease with this role. His growing discomfort about concrete political messages which might be conveyed by his poems, the altering of rhetorically effective but 'dishonest' lines, his complete silence about his 1945 visit to Germany with

⁹ W.H. Auden, *Anhalten Alle Uhren* (München: Pendo Verlag, 2002). The biographical information is given at the very front of the book, without a page number. ['W.H. Auden, born 1907 in York, died 1973 in Vienna. He studied in Oxford, participated in the Spanish Civil War and experienced the Sino-Japanese War in China [...].'] Additionally, Auden's marriage to Erika Mann is mentioned as well as his emigration to America, and his work as a poet, public speaker, and critic.

¹⁰ Compare this, for instance, to Edward Mendelson's 'About the Author' in *Collected Poems* (2010), where Spain is not even mentioned as an important event during Auden's life.

¹¹ The same is true for a more recently publication: Joachim Sartorius's anthology of political poetry *Niemals eine Atempause: Handbuch der politischen Poesie des 20. Jahrhunderts* (2014). In this anthology, Auden is represented with German versions of the two 'political' poems he disliked most and later disowned: 'Spanien 1937' in the section on the Spanish Civil War, and '1. September 1939' in the section on WWII.

¹² Christopher Isherwood, *Christopher and His Kind, 1929-1939* (London: Eyre Methuen, 1977), 196.

the US Army, and his general inability to suppress a certain Public School attitude in those serious circumstances make this plain. Torn, as he was, between the demands of his own individualism and of his public image as a left wing engagé poet, and undecided about what exactly he considered to be the artist's duty during political crises, Auden's reasoning and behaviour during the 30s can be maddeningly inconsistent.

Today, as my generation embraces its opportunity to lead international lives without being judged for it, contemporary Auden scholars have already begun to establish what one could call 'tertiary criticism' by identifying biases in 'dated' criticism. A recent publication of that nature is *W.H. Auden in Context* (2013), edited by Tony Sharp.¹³ Still, it is important and necessary to further establish this more open-minded attitude towards Auden's life-style and eccentricity. In the end, the one central and centring element of Auden's life was the English language – a strange, perhaps, but important claim to make in the introduction to a thesis on 'German Auden'.

LITERATURE REVIEW

It is difficult to present a concise literature review for a topic as broad and multi-faceted as this. Since, so far, no book has been devoted to 'German Auden' exclusively, references to Germanic themes are scattered throughout the whole corpus of secondary literature on Auden. The sheer number of these sources precludes entering into too much detail; instead I provide a summary that serves to justify which key areas this thesis will cover, namely those misrepresented or not given much attention in the corpus of secondary literature. What a literary review of the existing body of Auden criticism shows quickly is that, unsurprisingly, certain Germanic topics have enjoyed a much greater critical interest than others.

¹³ Tony Sharpe, ed., *W.H. Auden in Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

Few texts are devoted to ‘Auden and Germany’ exclusively. The most extensive summary of various German literary influences on Auden’s work is H.M. Waidson’s essay ‘Auden and German Literature’ (1975).¹⁴ An impressive number of examples is condensed into the short space of his essay, which thus provides a useful basis for further research. To the day, he is one of very few scholars who have detected the references to Auden in the letters of Thomas Mann. There is a useful section on Rilke and *New Year Letter*, on Kafka, on the Kirchstetten poems; and again and again references to Goethe are listed – seemingly in every text ever written by Auden.

A German doctoral thesis devoted to Auden and German literature is Sigurs Dzenitis’ *Die Rezeption Deutscher Literatur in England durch Wystan Hugh Auden, Stephen Spender und Christopher Isherwood* (1972).¹⁵ Dzenitis chooses the comparative approach, examining the reception of German literature in England through Auden, Spender, and Isherwood, arguing that a study of the references to German literature in Auden’s work alone, in order to crystallise the poet’s picture of Germany, would hardly lead to a coherent picture because of the manifold connections and influences. He shows that the traditional picture of Germany in England has been that of a country of ‘Dichter und Denker’ [‘poets and thinkers’] and that at the beginning of the 20th century there was a growing interest in German authors such as Hölderlin, Trakl, Thomas Mann, Kafka, Brecht, and Rilke. The first part of the thesis gives an overview of Auden’s engagement with Germany, contrasting this with accounts of Spender and Isherwood, and gives evidence for Dzenitis’ main argument: that Auden’s engagement with Germany was from the beginning shaped by an interest in language and much less so in politics. In the second part of his thesis, Dzenitis examines the reception of Rilke by Auden and Spender. In the third part, he looks at more recent translations from the German. The

¹⁴ H.M. Waidson, “Auden and German Literature,” *The Modern Language Review* 70, no. 2 (April 1, 1975): 347–65.

¹⁵ Sigurs Dzenitis, *Die Rezeption deutscher Literatur in England durch Wystan Hugh Auden, Stephen Spender und Christopher Isherwood* (Hamburg: Lüdke, 1972).

thesis is thus somewhat narrow, focusing on Brecht and Rilke's stylistic influence, yet provides excellent in-depth textual analyses.

Various works aim to contextualise Auden's poetry in one way or another and can of course not be expected to explore all themes and influences as thoroughly as works with a more thematic approach. The first, Richard Hoggart's *Auden: An Introductory Essay* (1951) ignores Germany completely, apart from a few relatively brief references to Rilke and Brecht.¹⁶ Monroe K. Spears' *The Poetry of W.H. Auden: The Disenchanted Island* (1963), which gives a very insightful overview of Auden's poetry, is also rather limited when it comes to the influences of Germanic writers, though both the influence of Brecht on Auden and Auden's collaboration with Hans Werner Henze are discussed in detail.¹⁷ Rudolf Kassner and Hugo von Hofmannsthal are mentioned briefly, as well as Hannah Arendt. There are equally few references to German matters in *Auden: A Collection of Critical Essays*, edited by Spears.¹⁸ Of much greater scope is John Fuller's invaluable *W.H. Auden: A Commentary* (1998).¹⁹ The well-researched and extensive commentary gives very useful to-the-point explanations of lines from Auden's poetry in terms of (German) influences; these can be assembled by the researcher and used as a basis for his or her thematic discussion. While Fuller's account is full of the most detailed information, biographical and other, better researched than some biographies of Auden, and absolutely reliable as a basic source, the focus of his analysis always remains the explanation of individual poems. Most important in the context of the Auden canon are Edward Mendelson's books and prefaces to collections edited by him. While the executor of Auden's literary estate and editor of his texts has confirmed to me that the influence of

¹⁶ Richard Hoggart, *Auden: An Introductory Essay* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1951).

¹⁷ Monroe K. Spears, *The Poetry of W.H. Auden: The Disenchanted Island* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1963).

¹⁸ Monroe K. Spears, *Auden: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1964).

¹⁹ John Fuller, *W.H. Auden: A Commentary* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998).

‘Germany’ on Auden is a very important topic which needs to be revisited – he singled out Rudolf Kassner as a great subject – his own texts have other emphases.

The standard work of Auden criticism with a socio-political focus is Frederick Buell’s *W.H. Auden as a Social Poet* (1973), in which he shares his opinion that ‘[i]t is the social aspect of W.H. Auden’s verse that will ensure him an enduring and central place among major twentieth-century poets’.²⁰ Germany takes a prominent role in Buell’s account, primarily in his chapter ‘Germany and England’ that examines the conditions for Auden’s increasing politicization in Berlin and, subsequently, in England. Buell provides an in-depth comparison of Auden and Brecht and, in ‘Idea and Voice’, discusses Auden’s use of Rilke in *Journey to a War*.

In terms of specific topical accounts, Auden’s time in Berlin has possibly received the most critical attention. Of course, the various biographies on Auden all cover this period: Osborne’s account is basic and not well informed²¹; Carpenter’s chapter ‘Berlin’ is more elaborate and insightful, including various quotations from Auden’s unpublished Berlin Journal and various references to literary texts; Davenport-Hines tends to focus on the psychological aspects of Auden’s visit.²² Norman Page’s elaborate *Auden and Isherwood: The Berlin Years* (1998) has been criticised for its repetitiveness and chattiness, yet it provides a number of quotations from the Berlin Journal and a good narrative overview covering the ‘facts’, faces and places, of Auden’s Berlin year.²³ A brilliant German account of this can be found in Wolfgang Kemp’s book *Foreign Affairs: Die Abenteuer einiger Engländer in Deutschland 1900-1945* (2010).²⁴ Robert Beachy’s *‘Ich bin schwul’ W.H. Auden im Berlin der Weimarer Republik* (2014) is a great account of the general state of homosexual life

²⁰ Frederick Buell, *W.H. Auden as a Social Poet* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1973), 1.

²¹ Charles Osborne, *W.H. Auden: The Life of a Poet* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1979).

²² Richard Davenport-Hines, *Auden* (London: Vintage, 2003).

²³ Norman Page, *Auden and Isherwood: The Berlin Years* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998).

²⁴ Wolfgang Kemp, *Foreign Affairs: Die Abenteuer Einiger Engländer in Deutschland 1900-1947* (München: Carl Hanser Verlag, 2010).

in Berlin by the time Auden and Isherwood arrived in the city, although there are some factual mistakes in the passages about the two writers specifically.²⁵

Brecht and Rilke are the most established Germanic influences on Auden, being discussed in most critical accounts, not only those with an interest in German matters. Brecht and Auden had sporadic contact during the early 30s and collaborated during the early 1940s; additionally, critics have been debating the extent to which Auden's political plays were influenced by Brecht, or if the similarities are perhaps analogous. During Auden's lifetime appeared Margrit Hahnloser-Ingold's book *Das englische Theater und Bert Brecht* (1970).²⁶ John Willett's paper 'Auden and Brecht' (1983) is the primary source for Auden's own comments on the matter and a good summary of the subject.²⁷ Otherwise, comments on Brecht can be found in most extensive critical texts on Auden. I would like to point out J.E. Coombes' 'Constructing the Icarus myth: Brueghel, Brecht and Auden' (1986) as a more specific article which reveals a fascinating coincidence: that both Auden and Brecht were interested in the paintings of Brueghel around the same time.²⁸

Rilke's influence on Auden has been discussed even more often, which makes it impossible to paraphrase the content even of the specific publications there are: B.J. Morse's 'Rainer Maria Rilke and English Literature' (1948)²⁹, D.J. Enright's 'Reluctant Admiration: A Note on Auden and Rilke' (1952)³⁰, Peter Demetz's 'Englische

²⁵ Robert Beachy, *"Ich bin schwul": W.H. Auden in Berlin der Weimarer Republik* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2014).

²⁶ Margrit Hahnloser-Ingold, *Das englische Theater und Bert Brecht* (Bern: Francke, 1970).

²⁷ John Willett, "Auden and Brecht," in *Transformations in Modern European Drama*, ed. Ian Donaldson (London: Macmillan, in association with Humanities Research Centre, Australian National University, Canberra, 1983), 162–76.

²⁸ John E. Coombes, "Constructing the Icarus Myth: Brueghel, Brecht and Auden," *Word & Image* 2, no. 1 (January 1, 1986): 24–26.

²⁹ B.J. Morse, "Rainer Maria Rilke and English Literature," *German Life and Letters* 1, no. 3 (April 1, 1948): 215–28.

³⁰ D.J. Enright, "Reluctant Admiration: A Note on Auden and Rilke," *Essays in Criticism* II, no. 2 (1952): 180–95.

Spiegelungen R.M. Rilkes' (1956)³¹, E.C. Mason's *Rilke, Europe and the English-Speaking World* (1961)³², Volker Klöpsch's 'Die Versuchungen des Orpheus. Der Einfluss Rilkes auf das lyrische Werk von W.H. Auden' (1983)³³, R.A. York 'Auden and Rilke' (2000)³⁴, Karen Leeder's 'Rilke's Legacy in the English-speaking world' (2010)³⁵, to only name the most important texts. Auden himself wrote on Rilke in two reviews: 'Rilke in English' (1939)³⁶ and 'Rilke in Wartime' (1940)³⁷. Rilke influenced Auden's poetry from the mid-1930s onwards, but there are also some similarities between Auden's very early poetry and Rilke's work.

A younger academic who has engaged with some aspects of Auden and Germany in great depth is James Womack. A major part of his doctoral thesis, 'Spectacles for the Weaksighted; Braille for the Blind: Problems of Ideology in the Translations of W.H. Auden' (2006), is devoted to the analysis of Auden's translations from the German.³⁸ His appendix and discussions bring together a great variety of source texts and Auden's translations. Womack has also published an article entitled 'Auden's Goethe' (2008), which gives a great overview of Auden's dealings with Goethe both in his translations of Goethe's work and in his own poetry.³⁹

There is no account devoted exclusively to Auden's relationship with his in-laws, the Mann family. Auden plays a role in Andrea Weiss' book *In the Shadow of the Magic Mountain: The Erika and Klaus Mann Story* (2010), which provides some basic anecdotes of

³¹ Peter Demetz, "Englische Spiegelungen R. M. Rilkes," *Orbis Litterarum* 11, no. 1–2 (June 1, 1956): 18–30.

³² E.C. Mason, *Rilke, Europe, and the English-Speaking World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

³³ Volker Klöpsch, "Die Versuchung Des Orpheus. Der Einfluss Rilkes Auf Das Lyrische Werk von W.H. Auden," *Fu Jen Studies*, 1983, 77–109.

³⁴ R.A. York, "Auden and Rilke," *Revista Alicantina de Estudios Ingleses* 13 (2000): 205–19.

³⁵ Karen Leeder, "Rilke's Legacy in the English-Speaking World," in *The Cambridge Companion to Rilke*, Cambridge Companions to Literature (Cambridge University Press, 2010), 189–205.

³⁶ W.H. Auden, "Rilke in English," *The New Republic*, September 6, 1939.

³⁷ W.H. Auden, "Rilke in Wartime," *The New Republic*, July 8, 1940.

³⁸ James Womack, "Spectacles for the Weaksighted; Braille for the Blind: Problems of Ideology in the Translations of W.H. Auden" (University of Oxford, 2006).

³⁹ James Womack, "Auden's Goethe," *Essays in Criticism* 58, no. 4 (October 1, 2008): 333–54.

Auden's interaction with Erika and Klaus Mann during the late 30s and early 40s.⁴⁰ In her novel *February House: The Story of W. H. Auden, Carson McCullers, Jane and Paul Bowles, Benjamin Britten, and Gypsy Rose Lee, Under One Roof in Brooklyn* (2006), Sherill Tippins reconstruct the atmosphere at 7 Middagh Street, where Golo Mann lived temporarily and Erika and Klaus Mann socialised.⁴¹ This book is the result of excellent, thorough research, providing a scholarly bibliography and footnotes, and is actually a most useful source. Otherwise, there is a striking lack of criticism that engages with the Auden-Mann relationship, both amongst German and English literature specialists.

The most negative criticism of Auden's interest in Germany – so strikingly harsh that it deserves mentioning here – can be found in A.L. Rowse's *The Poet Auden: A Personal Memoir* (1987).⁴² Rowse claims that Auden's writing would have improved if he had gone to France and not to Germany, through balancing his natural tendencies, concluding: 'I had my own close contacts with Germany, which were more serious and altogether more significant than the frivolous ones of Auden, Isherwood and co., notably through my friendship with Adam von Trott'.⁴³ If anything, this suggests that Auden must have been confronted with a variety of opinions on his Berlin year after returning to England.

The academic with the most lasting interest in Auden's German side is P.E. Firchow; his writing has guided my own research and general approach. Particularly Firchow's *W.H. Auden: Contexts for Poetry* (2002) makes his interest obvious: two of the five chapters deal specifically with Auden's time in German-speaking countries ('Crossing Frontiers: Poetic Espionage in Late 1920s Berlin' and 'The Sage of Kirchstetten: Thinking and Thanking') while the remaining chapters address many other aspects of the topic. Firchow's obvious interest in the matter is possibly grounded in his assessment that

⁴⁰ Andrea Weiss, *In the Shadow of the Magic Mountain: The Erika and Klaus Mann Story* (University of Chicago Press, 2010).

⁴¹ Sherill Tippins, *February House* (London: Pocket, 2006).

⁴² A.L. Rowse, *The Poet Auden: A Personal Memoir* (London: Methuen, 1987).

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 30.

Auden: ‘is probably the most versatile and international poet of his generation – at least in the English-speaking world – international in the way he lived his life but also in the way he thought and wrote about it’ (Fir, 10-11). Regarding Auden as an essentially international poet, one necessarily has to be aware of and interested in his love for Germany and Austria. In ‘Crossing Frontiers: Poetic Espionage in Late 1920s Berlin’, Firchow explores Auden’s (and Isherwood’s) obsession with the world of spies and traces how Auden played with his readers’ association of words such as ‘enemy’, ‘frontier’, or ‘spy’ with Germany at the time, attempting to show more generally – his dominant psychologising streak – that ‘the enemy’ could in fact be found ‘within’. In *Strange Encounters: Anglo-German Literary Encounters from 1910 to 1960* (2008), Firchow discusses Auden’s later connection with Austria, although otherwise his focus is predominantly pre-World War II. In *Contexts for Poetry*, he also provides two very useful interviews that shed light on Auden’s time in Kirchstetten.

METHODOLOGY

Being influenced by Firchow’s work, my thesis is ‘an attempt to show how a certain type of critical methodology, which combines intellectual and social history, biography, and textual analysis, and that I call “contextualization,” helps to illuminate poems (or parts of poems)’ (Fir, 11-12), while also engaging with major issues of Auden criticism.

As this brief literature review goes to show, there is a lack of books dealing exclusively with ‘German Auden’. While a number of articles or book chapters have been written on specific aspects of Auden’s interactions with Germany or on the influences of German writers on him, it is precisely this scattering of information that has prevented ‘German Auden’ from entering people’s general awareness more compellingly. Of course, to synthesise all elements of this influence into one account would be a challenge – which is why this book, evidently lacking, remains unwritten.

My own thesis aspires to create a more holistic picture, presented chronologically, but cannot cover all facets of this particular perspective on Auden. Having evaluated how the existing body of Auden criticism presents his German connections, and knowing that it is beyond the scope of my thesis to research and discuss each of these numerous and sometimes sporadic connections in full, I will not engage with those topics that have received the most critical attention.

The two German poets who have been written about most in relation to Auden, and by a great number of critics, are Brecht and Rilke. Auden's engagement with Goethe, too, and Auden's translations of German texts has been discussed extensively, especially by Womack and Waidson. Likewise, Auden's translations of texts by Ernst Toller have been discussed both by Womack ('Spectacles', pp. 89-99) and by Dzenitis (pp. 57-71). The theories of Marx and Freud have been examined in most critical accounts on Auden's early work, as approaches attacking the conventional thought-systems prevalent during Auden youth – those he himself urgently wanted to break away from. Firchow shows convincingly in *Contexts for Poetry* that it would not be fruitful to trace the influence of Kafka on Auden's writing (Fir, 205). He has also written extensively about Auden's time in Austria.

What I have set out to do, then, is to first of all trace Auden's interest in Germany to the very beginning of his life. Most accounts of Auden's time in Berlin rely on his own statement in the 1960s that he had had 'no German' when he first visited Germany. This has been taken to mean that Auden had never studied German, yet Auden did take German at school for at least two years. Similarly, the myth that Auden himself chose Berlin as the destination of his year abroad is at the very least assailable, as is the notion that Auden, the 'founder' of a group, was one of the first writers to fall in love with Berlin and profit from the city's openness towards sex. Unlike Christopher Isherwood, Auden did not even 'promote' the city in his writing, and in fact there was a long-standing line of

English-speaking writers who had already ‘discovered’ Berlin by 1928. In this thesis I put into context those claims, half truths, and inaccurate statements that critics have been perpetuating.

Many aspects of Auden’s visit to Berlin in 1928-1929 are fascinating, and the year alone would provide ample material for a thesis. Since much ground has been covered already though, I will not reiterate the ‘facts’ and provide another descriptive account of Auden’s life in Berlin. Instead, Chapter One focusses on how both Auden’s sense of self and his writing changed during his time in Germany. This is shown through a juxtaposition of Auden’s unpublished Berlin Journal and his poetry from the time (primarily ‘1929’ and the six German poems Auden wrote after his return to the UK from Berlin). In doing so, I begin to think about Auden’s ‘occasional’ poetry of which ‘1929’ is the first example; others follow during the course of this thesis.

Chapter Two discusses Auden’s relationship with various members of the Mann family and forms the heart of the thesis in every way: over the course of my research, I came to realise just how neglected this topic has been to date. While the Manns are mentioned by Auden’s biographers and some critics – at least the fact of Auden’s marriage to Erika Mann is – these accounts tend to give the false sense that the Manns were not very important to Auden. Similarly, in German accounts on the Manns, Auden appears as a footnote. There is much to say about this curious relationship and even half a thesis barely suffices to trace all the links there are.

Auden’s friendship with the Manns is of particular personal importance because it has made me aware of a phenomenon I call ‘Academic Chinese Whispers’. It is clear that, more often than not, accounts referring to this relationship do not rely on truly primary sources, such as letters or diary entries. While these have to be taken with a pinch of salt, too, personal second-hand accounts, assumptions, and claims can quickly take on a facsimile of truth if they are repeated and copied often enough. As a researcher, it is

challenging to build on the secondary literature that exists while remaining suspicious of the ‘facts’ presented. In the case of Auden’s relationship with the Manns, the information published to date hardly suggests that one could discover nearly as much on this subject as one can. Although I never anticipated this, the Manns – and many of them there are – took over my thesis, and I am very glad they did.

Chapter Three engages with a few German connections from Auden’s later life. First, it links Auden’s visit to Germany with the US Army in 1945 and his long poem *The Age of Anxiety*, though not re-telling the story since it has been documented in detail by Auden’s biographers and, most importantly, by James Stern in *The Hidden Damage* (1947).⁴⁴ Interesting is the fact that Auden had agreed to write the book together with Stern but did not. Auden’s silence in the face of WWII horrors is striking, but in tune with his stand-point, crystallising from the 1940s onwards, that the artist did not have a duty to report about political crises and human suffering in his work. In relation to this, I show that Auden’s experience did leave its mark on his long poem *The Age of Anxiety*, written between 1944 and 1946. Issues concerning the translation of this work into German are discussed, also its reception by Ingeborg Bachmann and Gottfried Benn. Benn’s letters show that during the early 1950s, Auden returned to Germany for readings. His enthusiastic promotion of Auden’s work first made Auden known in Germany.

A consequence of this was that the Ford Foundation and the City of Berlin invited Auden to spend half a year in Berlin in 1964-1965 as an artist-in-residence. Through my interest in the Manns, I came across a letter by the German critic Klaus Geitel, who knew Auden personally and is still alive today at age 90. I interviewed him in his Berlin flat. Geitel provided some new information about Auden’s Ford Foundation residence in Berlin and other interesting stories of his meetings with the poet. A written summary of the interview has already been published in the 37th *Auden Society Newsletter* (October 2014).

⁴⁴ James Stern, *The Hidden Damage* (London: Chelsea Press, 1990).

Chapter Three concludes with a brief discussion of Auden's intellectual and personal relationship with the philosopher Hannah Arendt. Various unpublished letters between the two are accessible online through the Hannah Arendt archive; these show that Arendt and Auden influenced one another profoundly. Their relationship was a close one until Auden's death.

Throughout the chronological, narrative discussion of some elements of Auden's 'German life' in this thesis, more general questions that have moved Auden critics in the past are being addressed. Most importantly, in this context, is Auden's life-long interest in the relationship between art and life, in art and suffering, and in the question what the artist's duty was in times of political turmoil.

Generally, I tend to engage with Auden's poetry in specific contexts and in connection with certain events or certain persons. As a result, the poems mentioned tend to be 'occasional'. This made me wonder whether Auden's more 'occasional' poetry actually deserves the name, and if Auden is ever truly occasional in his work – or 'political' for that matter. I am discussing Auden's own distinction between the 'primary world' we live in and 'secondary worlds', created by humans with a conscious – or unconscious – aim and purpose in mind: through 'secondary worlds' we immortalise our visions and assert power.

Wherever possible, I have preferred not to rely on secondary accounts but to source as much original and unpublished material as possible. Unpublished letters and their translations, when originally written in German, can be found in the Appendix. The Deutschlandfunk radio interview, in particular, has been an invaluable source. In 2009, the station's editor Denis Scheck kindly provided me with a copy of the archive recording and the station gave me permission to publish a transcript and translation with a short introductory text. (Hannah Arnold, "An Interview on German Radio, 1965," *The W.H.*

Auden Society Newsletter 36 (July 2013): 6–29.) I will not recapture everything I have written there in this thesis and, when quoting from it, refer to it as ‘Deutschlandfunk interview’.

CHAPTER ONE

‘... A STRANGER TO STRANGERS OVER UNDRIED SEA’

1.1 AUDEN’S ENCOUNTERS WITH THE ‘GERMANIC’ WORLD PRE-BERLIN

A thesis exploring the influence of a language and culture on a poet has to begin by summarising his or her ‘command’ of and exposure to this particular language. This alone is a difficult task. Languages are fluid. The assessment of a person’s language competence is a tricky undertaking even if he or she can be tested deliberately. How should one possibly judge a person’s language skills with hindsight though, on the basis of a few testimonies? Discussing the early exposure of a person to a language, it is additionally important to think about the context in which the language was taught and what attitude students and teachers would have had towards its country of origin. This is especially important when 20th century Germany is concerned since its reputation in the world varied greatly during this period.

In the case of W.H. Auden, critics and biographers have so far ‘solved’ – or rather avoided – the problem of truly assessing ‘Auden’s German’ in two ways. The majority have tended to claim or imply that Auden went to Berlin in 1928 after graduating from Oxford without ‘knowing any German’, echoing statements by Auden himself, who claimed in 1963 when talking about his decision to move to Berlin: ‘I knew no German and hardly any German literature’.⁴⁵ He formulated this similarly in an interview conducted by the German writer Horst Bienek for the radio station Deutschlandfunk two years later: ‘Ich kannte kein Deutsch, keine deutsche Literatur’ and ‘ich habe sehr wenig Deutsch in diese [*sic*] Zeit gehabt’.⁴⁶

Various writers and biographers such as Humphrey Carpenter, Charles Osborne, H.M. Waidson, and Edward Mendelson have woven this statement into their narrative of

⁴⁵ Erwin Koeppen, *Wystan Hugh Auden Und Die Deutsche Literatur* (Marburg: Philipps-Universität, 1978), 7.

⁴⁶ Appendix G, p. 284. [‘I did not know any German, no German literature’. (Ibid., p. 295.)]

Auden's legendary Berlin year, taking Auden at face value. Later critics have taken these secondary accounts at face value. Even Golo Mann, Auden's brother-in-law who knew his German first hand, states in his memoir essay about Auden: 'He had learned German in Berlin, before 1933'.⁴⁷

Other critics have addressed the question by referring to a few snippets of evidence taken to prove Auden's early interest in and interaction with German 'cultural products'. One example is his use of quotation from a poem by the German 'nonsense' poet Christian Morgenstern in the 1927 preface to *Oxford Poetry* written by Auden and Cecil Day-Lewis. Another is Isherwood's account in *Lions and Shadows* (1938) of the fictional character 'Weston' – evidently Auden – reading out a Morgenstern poem at the same time as playing a Sophie Tucker record:

Weston had put a record of Sophie Tucker on to the gramophone, [...] but I couldn't hear much of it, because he began, at the same time, to read aloud a poem by Morgenstern despite my protests, that I didn't understand a word of German.⁴⁸

Wolfgang Koeppen, for instance, relies on this account in *Wystan Hugh Auden und die deutsche Literatur* as evidence for Auden's early interest in German literature, without acknowledging at first that it does not refer to Auden directly.

Auden's love for light verse makes it likely that he would have enjoyed Morgenstern's work. Yet this does not give away much about the state of his German at the time or about the extent of his engagement with and understanding of Morgenstern. Nevertheless, Koeppen deduces: 'Isherwoods Äußerungen lassen erkennen, daß Auden

⁴⁷ Golo Mann, "A Memoir," in *W.H. Auden: A Tribute*, ed. Stephen Spender (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1975), 100.

⁴⁸ Quoted, for instance, by: Koeppen, *Wystan Hugh Auden Und Die Deutsche Literatur*, 7.

schon in Oxford ein erstes Interesse an deutscher Literatur entwickelte und daß er zumindest über Grundkenntnisse der deutschen Sprache verfügte'.⁴⁹

While this happens to be true, a basic knowledge of German pronunciation and the right intonation might have sufficed for Auden to read out the Morgenstern poem in a manner that would have made an impression on his friend. And while the fact that Auden and Day-Lewis use the second stanza of Morgenstern's poem 'Kronprätendenten' ('Pretender to the Crown') – from the collection *Galgenlieder* – does suggest that there is some truth in Isherwood's account, it is still not giving much insight into Auden's knowledge of German at the time. Auden and Day-Lewis quote the passage in the original German: a proof of their wish to appear accomplished in German but not necessarily of their level of accomplishment.

Generally, the preface is a youthful piece of writing of which Day-Lewis later said that it was 'largely a piece of self-mockery'.⁵⁰ This both suggests that one should not take the text too seriously and serves as a simple explanation for the strange use of Morgenstern's quotation. The second stanza, as it is used in the preface, seems quite out of context without the next stanza of the poem:

Im Winkel König Fahrenheit
hat still sein Mus gegessen
– 'Ach Gott, sie war doch schön, die Zeit,
die man nach mir gemessen!'⁵¹

In the third stanza following the second in the poem, 'Réaumur' personified joins his two fellow temperature units. In the context of the preface though, taken out of its original context, the function of the quotation remains entirely obscure.

⁴⁹ Ibid. ['Isherwood's statements show that already at Oxford, Auden developed his initial interest in German literature and that he possessed at least a basic knowledge of the German language'.]

⁵⁰ Humphrey Carpenter, *W.H. Auden: A Biography* (London: Unwin Paperbacks, 1981), 70.

⁵¹ PI, 4. This is a translation of the content rather than the style of the poem:

In the corner King Fahrenheit
has quietly eaten his mush
– 'Oh Lord, wasn't it nice, the time
that was measured according to me.'

Despite all this, it does seem as if the Morgenstern passage had a particular significance for Auden and resonated with him for years. As John Fuller points out, ‘an English version’ of the poem ‘surfaces at the end of the unpublished poem “There is a danger” (August 1930) and in the Commentary to “In time of War” (1939)’.⁵² In the Commentary, the Morgenstern quotation surfaces and reappears with the function of critiquing (British) elites. About ‘[o]ur leaders’, Auden states that

[...] we know them now
 For humbugs full of vain dexterity, invoking
 A gallery of ancestors, pursuing still the mirage

Of long dead grandeurs whence the interest has absconded,
 As Fahrenheit in an odd corner of great Celsius’ kingdom
 Might mumble of the summers measured only by him.⁵³

Here, the hidden nod to Morgenstern serves an obvious textual function without needing much of an explanation, although of course Auden himself ‘invokes’ an ancestor – Morgenstern – to supply him with an analogy.

Two further early references to German texts have been singled out. John Willett supplies one piece of evidence in ‘Auden and Brecht’ (1983): ‘Gabriel Carritt, who was one of Auden’s closest Oxford friends, told me that Auden had lent him books on Toller and Brecht, and was already talking about the latter before leaving for Germany in August 1928’.⁵⁴ There are no direct sources strengthening this claim, yet it is not unlikely that Auden had heard about Brecht and Toller at the time. Furthermore, a reference to Thomas Mann’s novella *Der Tod in Venedig* (*Death in Venice*) in Auden’s unpublished 1927 notebook shows that he knew of his future father-in-law during his Oxford days. Both suggest that even then, Auden was interested in German literature from the opposite ends of the stylistic spectrum. What remains unclear in both cases is

⁵² Fuller, *W.H. Auden*, 3.

⁵³ W.H. Auden, *Journey to a War*, Revised ed. (London: Faber & Faber, 1973), 268.

⁵⁴ Willett, “Auden and Brecht,” 163.

the extent to which Auden actually engaged with German texts by the authors in question.⁵⁵

In the end though, such speculations about the quality of Auden's German pre-Berlin – based on such few snippets of evidence – must necessarily remain unsatisfactory. One simple but important piece of information on the other hand provides more clarity: Auden took at least two years of German before going to Berlin in 1928. While at his preparatory school St Edmund's the curriculum had only included classics, maths, French and divinity⁵⁶, the archivist of Gresham's School, Holt, wrote in an email from 23 April 2014 – in response to my query from 15 April whether Auden had received any German teaching during his years at Gresham's:

[Auden] attended from 1920 to 1925 and certainly had German teaching for his first few years here but I am not sure about sixth form. I am afraid I could not find any information about types of German literature he might have studied.⁵⁷

I was also told that Auden's German teacher at Gresham's was Major John C. Miller, who had been at the school for many years when Auden arrived. He was the first housemaster of Farfield – Auden's own house at Gresham's – which means that he could have had an especially strong influence on Auden and on Auden's interest in all things German.

How Auden liked his German teacher would have had a crucial impact on his first attitude towards German, as everybody who has been taught both by good and bad teachers knows. There is not much information on Miller and no conclusive evidence as to Auden's attitude towards the man, but interestingly, Miller is described as having been 'one of the four masters who helped Howson [G.W.S. Howson, headmaster from 1900]

⁵⁵ A more thorough discussion of Auden's reference to *Der Tod in Venedig* can be found in Chapter Two, pp. 161-169.

⁵⁶ Rosamira Bulley, "A Prep School Reminiscence," in *W.H. Auden: A Tribute*, ed. Stephen Spender (New York: Macmillan, 1975), 31.

⁵⁷ Information kindly provided by the archivist of *Gresham's School* on 23 April 2014.

rebuild the School on the foundations of unity and loyalty, truth and honour'.⁵⁸ While Howson had brought Gresham's to a new level of prestige, Carpenter writes:

[b]y the time that Auden arrived at the school, Howson's 'Honour System' (as it was called) was in the hands of his successor as headmaster, J.R. Eccles, who lacked Howson's powerful personality. He was a fussy, precise, bustling bachelor with the manner of an over-energetic scout leader.⁵⁹

Auden later criticised the 'Honour System' severely, going as far as to compare his school with a Fascist state.

Of course it is possible that Miller's kind disposition, for which he is remembered, won Auden over nevertheless – despite the fact that he was not only a German teacher but a 'keen sports organiser' and 'also responsible for establishing the Cadet Corps at Gresham's'.⁶⁰ Auden, by contrast, strongly disliked sports and so Robert Medley recalls



⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Carpenter, *W.H. Auden*, 25.

⁶⁰ Information and photo kindly provided by *Gresham's School*. In the picture, Major John C. Miller is the bearded gentleman on the far right.

his surprise at the time that Auden, ‘the most unlikely of soldiers, should voluntarily choose to go to the Annual OTC (Officers’ Training Corps) Camp’ where the Gresham boys trained together with boys from other public schools.⁶¹

While it is unclear whether Auden’s surprising enthusiasm was due to the influence of his German teacher, one is reminded of Auden’s strangely contradictory behaviour during the 1930s, oscillating between a Pacifist belief in his vocation as a poet and the guilty feeling that he, too, should be ‘doing his part’. All one can observe is that Miller never became a part of Auden’s school mythology, unlike Eccles who left enough of an impression on Auden for him to write in 1929 Berlin: ‘He is a housemaster and a bachelor | But refuses to keep dogs | So he is dying of cancer’ (J29). Quite possibly, Auden neither exalted nor condemned his German teacher, which suggests that, at the very least, he did not dislike his German lessons because of Miller.

It is equally difficult to reconstruct the attitude towards Germany prevalent amongst the Gresham boys, the quality of the German teaching they received at the time, and the light in which their teachers would have presented Britain’s former ‘enemy country’ in their lessons. One source possibly reflecting this is the school’s magazine *The Gresham*. Articles written and published during Auden’s years at the school give no evidence that Germany was demonised by boys or teachers. Most references to Germany are in the inconspicuous context of music, and in the 1921 issue an article mentions the donation of German works to the school library: including literary histories by Scherer and Meyer – probably Wilhelm Scherer’s *Geschichte der deutschen Literatur* (1883) and R.M. Meyer’s *Die deutsche Literatur des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts* (1910).

Striking though is the tendency at the time, whether in England or in Germany, to think in national stereotypes. One contributor writes in a review of a lecture on the Public School Hymn Book, for instance: ‘The spirit of the English nation is one that

⁶¹ Robert Medley, “Gresham’s School, Holt,” in *W.H. Auden: A Tribute*, ed. Stephen Spender (New York: Macmillan, 1975), 42.

craves for rhythm, differing immensely from that of the Germans, whose stately slow chorales are typical of their whole constitution'.⁶² Firchow suggests that Auden must have heard a great deal of this kind of stereotypical and 'patriotic rhetoric at his preparatory school during the Great War' (Fir, 44). There is of course the anecdote of Auden being reprimanded for asking for a second piece of bread with the words 'Auden wants the Huns to win' at St Edmund's School.⁶³ About St Edmund's, Auden writes in part four of *Letter to Lord Byron* (1936):

The Great War had begun: but master's scrutiny
 And fists of big boys were the war to us;
 It was as harmless as the Indian Mutiny,
 A beating from the Head was dangerous.
 But once when half the form put down Bellus,
 We were accused of that most deadly sin,
 Wanting the Kaiser and the Huns to win. (CP, 107)

Anti-German rhetoric was omnipresent in England at the time. Günther Blaicher writes about the word 'Hun' in *Das Deutschlandbild in der Englischen Literatur* (1992) that after the beginning of WWI:

[...] wurde dieser Ausdruck von der englischen Kriegspropaganda benutzt, um in Verbindung mit den sich ausbreitenden Gerüchten über deutsche Greuel in Belgien die Vorstellung zu erwecken, 'daß sich Großbritannien in einem Krieg für die Zivilisationen gegen einen wilden und brutalen Feind befand, der weder Mitleid noch Menschlichkeit besaß'. Die Vorstellung vom Deutschen als Hunnen diene der moralischen Mobilmachung der Briten.⁶⁴

Indeed, even writers had been using the term without qualms. Blaicher points out that both Lord Byron and Thomas Campbell had already used the word 'Hun' to stand for

⁶² 'Lectures', *The Gresham*, April 1920, Vol. VIII, No. 10, 184. All issues of *The Gresham* were accessed via *Gresham's Digital School Archive* (<http://greshamschoolarchive.websds.net/Main.aspx>).

⁶³ Tony Sharpe, *W.H. Auden* (London: Routledge, 2006), 16.

⁶⁴ Günther Blaicher, *Das Deutschlandbild in der englischen Literatur* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1992), 24. ['[...] this expression was used by the English war propaganda to awaken the impression, in combination with the spreading rumours about the German atrocities in Belgium, "that Great Britain was engaged in a war to save civilization from a wild and brutal enemy, who knew neither pity nor humanity". The idea of the German as a Hun served the moral mobilization of the British citizens'.]

Austrians, and he quotes Arnold Bennett writing to John Squire on 25 September 1914: ‘Yes, my dear Squire, I deeply agree with your objection to that infernal word “Hun”, but I think our objection is literary. The word is a most damnable cliché, [...]. But I think it is a fairly descriptive word’.⁶⁵ Even a sensitive mind like Edward Thomas, much admired by Auden, noted in his diary on 24 February 1917 while at the French front: ‘Why do Huns not retaliate on Arras guns?’.⁶⁶ Blaicher concludes: ‘Im 18. und 19. Jahrhundert konnte im englischen Sprachgebrauch die Bezeichnung Hunne auf jeden Menschen angewandt werden, der sich unzivilisiert aufführte [...]’.⁶⁷

H.M. Waidson goes as far as to claim that because of a Shandy-esque association, Auden ‘found himself disposed to a sympathetic interest in that country, which became associated with forbidden pleasure’.⁶⁸ Although this may be based on a later comment by Auden himself, it seems rather far-fetched and a hindsight interpretation based on the myth that Auden had actually chosen Berlin as the destination of his year abroad. The word ‘Huns’ was used widely in reference to Germans at the time and Auden would have heard it in many contexts unrelated to ‘hidden pleasures’.⁶⁹

If there was any coherent attitude towards Germany at Gresham’s at all, it seems to have been one of civilised, sportsmanlike competitiveness, judging by the more political pieces in the school magazine in which young men snobbily but politely comment on current events. The editorial of the 11 June 1921 issue of *The Gresham*, for instance, is a most balanced piece and even voices a rather clear-sighted criticism of British politics: ‘Well, we have been given the new world we were promised; it is indeed

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Quoted in: Matthew Hollis, *Now All Roads Lead to France: The Last Years of Edward Thomas* (London: Faber & Faber, 2011), 324.

⁶⁷ Blaicher, *Das Deutschlandbild in der englischen Literatur*, 23. [‘In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the English language usage allowed one to apply the term Hun to every human being who acted in an uncivilised manner [...]’.]

⁶⁸ Waidson, “Auden and German Literature,” 347.

⁶⁹ Andreas Musolff provides an extensive discussion of the use of the word ‘hun’ in reference to Germans in: “‘Beat Back the Hun!’: How an Act of ‘Self’-construction was Turned into an Exemplary Case of ‘Othering’,” *Angermion* 7, no. 1 (December 2014): 75-90.

an inspiring sight. Industrial war on a scale hitherto unthought of, a murder campaign in Ireland unlike any previous convulsion, an offer by England to help Germany suppress Poles'.⁷⁰

After Auden left the school, there continued to be a growing interest in Germany until 1933, with students visiting the country and speakers coming to Gresham's to give talks. Auden had the opportunity of forming his own political opinions in an open, varied environment – although he claims not to have been interested in politics at the time and would have been able to escape political discussions easily at school, as an article written in the year of his arrival at Gresham's suggests:

While Mr. Lloyd George preaches 'class war' to his Liberal supporters, and the progressive party in the School carry debate after debate, the term moves on with silent indifference. In this quiet corner of rural England the majority of the School viewed the recent revolution in Germany, and the disturbances in Ireland, with the lazy attention of a child watching the eccentric antics of some mice.⁷¹

Even at Oxford, Auden later said, he and his peers 'were politically ignorant and indifferent. There were, of course, individual undergraduates who were neither – those I met personally were Socialists – but they were intending to enter politics as a career, and the rest of us thought of their social concern as a professional speciality in which we could not be expected to share'.⁷² Auden's inconsistent behaviour during the political 30s shows that Auden struggled to free himself from this attitude, despite his life-long concern for the fate of individuals and despite the frequent labelling of Auden as a 'political poet'.

While it is hard to judge how good Auden's German would have been after his German classes with Major Miller, he went through at least two years of formal instruction in German before going up to Oxford. He must have possessed a certain

⁷⁰ 'Editorial', *The Gresham*, June 1921, Vol. IX, No. 5, 79.

⁷¹ 'Editorial', *The Gresham*, April 1920, Vol. VIII, No. 10, 181.

⁷² W.H. Auden, *Forewords and Afterwords* (London: Faber & Faber, 1973), 514.

understanding of the language: of Germanic sentence structure, for instance, which would have helped him with his Old English. Having learnt German for a not insignificant amount of time must have made a difference to Auden's engagement with the language in Berlin – even if he had forgotten most of his German by the time, which is unlikely. To the contrary, the references to Morgenstern and Mann suggest instead that he maintained an independent interest in Germany and its language and literature.

It has often been claimed that Auden's love for the Germanic saga world – his father had read these stories to his sons – and the belief, shared between father and son, that the Audens had Icelandic ancestry – gave Auden a positive mindset towards Germany and determined his choice of Berlin as the destination of his 'year abroad'. While this is a rather fruitless speculation, it must have been crucial indeed that George Augustus Auden himself had enough German to 'translate works on archaeology and antiquities' into English.⁷³ He must have had good connections in Germany and known of educational innovators such as Rudolf Steiner, given that he followed 'German experiments with open-air schools, considering the opportunity for exercise, good nutrition, and lack of nervous strain they provided to be important for child health and development'.⁷⁴

Strikingly, his first trip to a German-speaking country – which also happened to be his first visit to any foreign country – took seventeen-year-old Auden to Austria: the country where he would die 38 years later. George Augustus Auden took his youngest son, who had recently left school, to the Salzburg festival where in 1968 the famous poet W.H. Auden would deliver the opening speech. As early as 1925 then – not too long after Auden's walk with Robert Medley during which he decided to devote his life to poetry – Auden encountered the German poet and dramatist Hugo von Hofmannsthal

⁷³ Carpenter, *W.H. Auden*, 8.

⁷⁴ G. Davey Smith, "Commentary: W.H. Auden, G.A. Auden and Psychosomatic Aetiology," *International Journal of Epidemiology* 31, no. 6 (December 1, 2002): 1137.

whose play *Das Salzburger große Welttheater* (1922) was one of the major performances at the festival and Auden and his father are most likely to have attended it, given that the alternative was opera. As Auden pointed out later, when he had fallen in love with the genre and begun to write libretti himself, opera was not an art form that was regarded highly by his parents. Hofmannsthal would influence Auden greatly so that when he wrote his ‘Austrian’ opera *Elegy for Young Lovers* over thirty years later, he dedicated it to him.

After their visit to Salzburg, Auden remained in Austria on his own, lodging with a woman called Hedwig Petzold in Kitzbühel. It was clearly his parents’ hope that he would improve whatever German he had learnt by then. Over a year later in 1926, during his first Christmas holiday at Oxford, Auden revisited Austria for three weeks together with his close friend W.L. (Bill) McElwee. The two stayed at Frau Petzold’s house in Kitzbühl again and this time, it is said, Auden had an affair with her.

This was the extent of Auden’s Germanic adventures before Berlin. The sum-total does not seem to come to ‘no German’, as the myth goes. While it is one thing for Auden to assess his ability to speak German pre-Berlin with hindsight in this way – which is not surprising perhaps, given that by the 1960s he had translated entire books from German into English – it is quite a different matter for literary critics to simply assume that Auden had never studied German at school.

1.2 WHY BERLIN?

Another matter that needs to be reassessed is the extent of Auden’s initial enthusiasm for the idea of moving to Berlin. The general story is that Auden deliberately chose lewd Berlin as a destination for his ‘year abroad’ because it was exciting and cheap, and, most importantly, not in France. Auden himself much later called going to Berlin his ‘first personal choice’, and most accounts rely on this statement, for instance those by

Waidson and Page.⁷⁵ Possibly though, Auden was not quite as excited about his upcoming time in Germany as biographers and critics often imply.

The first piece of evidence for this is an undated letter to his brother John – which is dated 1927 in John Auden’s pencil handwriting but which must have been composed after Trinity Term of 1928 since evidently his brother had already graduated from Oxford – is surprisingly negative and downbeat:

I think I am as indifferent about my future as at present one can hope to be. Fortunately for the parents. They wrote nice things. Absolutely nothing tangible happens. I am going to Berlin for a year which I shall loathe. Then I shall teach in a secondary school for a year and then go to Sedbergh. If not, I don’t know. A friend is printing my poems, a few copies for my friends. I will send you one when they are ready. I am now developing an interest in the poetic drama, to be something like a charade. I have done a short one [...]. I am looking forward to 1930.⁷⁶

And after having signed the letter, Auden added a quick line which – unlike many of his comments – seems to come straight from the heart, without having been checked and intellectualised first: ‘Thank God Oxford is over. I feel soiled’.

This particular comment goes to show how unpleasant Auden’s memories of Oxford were immediately after his graduation and how – this term is probably not too far-fetched – depressed he was at the time, pretending not to care about his future. Having received only a third-class degree amplified Auden’s ‘inferiority complex’ and his feelings of guilt – A.L. Rowse states: ‘Wystan did have a feeling of guilt all the time he was neglecting to do any work for Schools’⁷⁷ – knowing how much worry this was causing his parents, not to mention his homosexuality. Despite having previously written in a letter that he knew ‘what kind of degree he would receive’, Auden, too, must have felt that he had let himself down. More generally, his ‘going down’ from Oxford left 21-

⁷⁵ Waidson, “Auden and German Literature,” 347; Norman Page, *Auden and Isherwood: The Berlin Years* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998), 8–9.

⁷⁶ W.H. Auden, Undated Letter. Letters to John Auden. Berg Collection, New York Public Library, W.H. Auden collection of papers.

⁷⁷ Rowse, *The Poet Auden*, 12.

year-old Auden in a state of emotional turmoil and still far from sure how he wanted to lead his life, unmotivated, and going through what today would probably be called a phase of anxious depression.

The content of his letter to John Auden probably would have surprised Auden's fellow students at Oxford who knew him as an overly poised person, always ready to give advice and lecture, and not letting on that he himself might have doubts about his future. Later, however, he would write about his undergraduate years: 'Despite the pleasures of friendship and intellectual discovery, I do not look back on them with any nostalgia. Beneath the fun I was always conscious of a dull, persistent, gnawing anxiety'.⁷⁸ Nostalgia requires a sense of identification – genuine or projected with hindsight – and Oxford, that bastion of a tradition and morality which had no public place for homosexual males, could not give Auden a clear sense of direction.

Given the enormous conceptual clash between what Auden must have felt even then to be the right way of living and feeling, and the life his parents, traditional in many ways, might have envisioned for him, it is not surprising that Auden found himself in a state of profound uncertainty, worry, and depression after his graduation, as the letter to his brother John makes plain. While Auden 'often spoke with affection of his parents', the Audens were concerned about their son's sexuality and this had caused severe tensions during the previous years.⁷⁹

The extent of Auden's – and, presumably, his parents' – worries about his future is reflected in the fact that soon after his graduation, Auden travelled to Belgium in order to find a diagnosis and cure for his 'condition'. In a letter to David Ayerst he reported, that he had been to 'Spa for 3 weeks, staying with a psychologist'.⁸⁰ Not much is known

⁷⁸ Auden, *Forewords and Afterwords*, 513.

⁷⁹ Auden's mother wrote to his friend A.S.T. Fisher, for instance: 'I do not know how much you know of his past life, but there has been much to cause both his father and me real anxiety'. (Quoted in: W.H. Auden, *Juvenilia: Poems, 1922-1928* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), xxxii.)

⁸⁰ Carpenter, *W.H. Auden*, 82.

about this, but possibly Auden was undergoing some kind of psychological treatment in order to cure both the cause and the symptoms of his homosexuality. It has to be kept in mind that at the time, Freudian and other psychoanalysts still mostly explained homosexual tendencies in their patients as a repression of heterosexuality caused by certain events in their childhood. Auden seems to have been only too keen to believe in the conformist picture projected onto him after his brief analysis, writing optimistically to Isherwood: 'Libido, it is proved, is definitely towards women'.⁸¹

Before he left for Berlin, Auden thus briefly came to believe in the Freudian promise that he could be happy in a heterosexual relationship with a woman if he worked through his childhood complexes: this is indicative of Auden's – and his parents' – underlying wish for him to lead a conventional life. The culmination of this hope for conformity was Auden's engagement to the nurse Sheila Richardson from Birmingham about whom even his friends did not know anything much.

Thus it was crucial both for Auden's sexual and creative development to spend time abroad exactly when he moved to Berlin. With hindsight, he wrote: 'At nineteen, I was self-critical enough to know that the poems I was writing were still merely derivative, that I had not yet found my own voice, and I felt certain that in Oxford I should never find it, that as long as I remained here, I should remain a child'.⁸² But it was not only Oxford, it was his feeling of being caught up in 'inherited' ways of thinking reserved to those of his class and nationality.

Despite all his precociousness, Auden was of course no autonomous adult yet, but a young graduate haunted by anxious worry. That he was highly aware of this is made plain by another letter to his brother John from Oxford in which Auden had complained: 'Why must one do academic study during the very years when the only

⁸¹ Davenport-Hines, *Auden*, 73.

⁸² Auden, *Forewords and Afterwords*, 513–514.

thing one really wants is to know “Who am I?”⁸³ This bears a strange resemblance with Auden’s 1960 book review of Erik H. Erikson’s⁸⁴ ‘Study in Psychoanalysis and History’, *Young Man Luther* in which he paraphrases – seemingly without finding any fault with it – the following theory of the psychoanalyst:

In the lives of those persons who merit a biography, there are normally, according to Dr. Erikson, three periods of psychological crisis: the crisis of Identity, the crisis of Generativity, and the crisis of Integrity. [...]

In the Identity crisis, the young man or woman is trying to find the answer to the question ‘Who am I *really*, as distinct from what others believe or desire me to be?’ This is a crisis of consciousness.⁸⁵

It is not surprising that Auden would have approved of Erikson’s theories: not only do they sound like something Auden himself could have devised – and in fact Auden’s paraphrase even reinforces Erikson’s text ever so slightly – but Erikson’s tool for structuring a life-story could have been invented for Auden just as well as for Luther. In Auden’s case, the ‘identity crisis’ – his conscious attempt of reconciling the ‘remnants of his childhood’ with his ‘anticipated adulthood’ to ‘forge for himself some central perspective and direction, some working unity’⁸⁶ – did indeed centre around the problems of tradition and continuity. It manifested itself in a tension between his urges for conventionality and individuality while his main complexes at the time were caused by his sexuality.

Thus the narrative of Auden’s Berlin story has to be rewritten: Auden, the celebrated visionary ‘leader’ of a group of young Englishmen who fabulously chose Berlin over Paris in fact arrived in Berlin without a clear sense of what he wanted to do

⁸³ Davenport-Hines, *Auden*, 51.

⁸⁴ Erik H. Erikson was born in Copenhagen to a Jewish mother and her Danish lover. Erikson grew up as Erik Homberger, as this was the family name of his German stepfather, in Germany. In the late 1930s, he moved to America and changed his name to Erikson.

⁸⁵ Auden, *Forewords and Afterwords*, 81.

⁸⁶ Erik H. Erikson, *Young Man Luther: A Study in Psychoanalysis and History* (New York; London: Norton, 1993), 14.

with his life and somewhat deflated after going down from Oxford with a third. Only once Auden arrived in Berlin did his enthusiasm for the city grow rapidly.

Quite clearly, Auden's parents played no little part in encouraging their son to study languages and to embrace foreign cultures, and their own bias was towards the 'Germanic' countries. The following passage in his *Letter to Lord Byron* suggests that Auden did not talk his worried parents into letting him move to Germany's frivolous capital but that in fact it was they who suggested Berlin as a destination for their son's 'year abroad' in the first place:

Three years passed quickly while the Isis went
 Down to the sea for better or for worse;
 Then to Berlin, not Carthage, I was sent
 With money from my parents in my purse,
 And ceased to see the world in terms of verse. (CP, 111)

Another piece of evidence supports this. When he first arrived in Berlin, Auden took up lodgings with the family of the well-known German architect Hermann Muthesius: a striking fact whose significance has mostly been overlooked.

Two things in particular suggest that it was not Auden's own idea to move to Berlin. First of all, it seems unlikely that Anna Muthesius – whose husband had been killed by a street-car in the year prior to Auden's visit, and who lived with her three sons and one daughter in a stunning villa – would have advertised for lodgers: they were a wealthy family and probably would not have needed the money. 'Haus Muthesius', at Potsdamer Chaussee 40, quite far outside the city centre, had been built by Hermann Muthesius in 1906/1907 on the east bank of the Wannsee – as of yet unsoiled by history. The villa was far from being a normal 'bourgeois' home, contrary to the superficial description of it in many accounts: indeed, it was one of the most impressive examples of art-deco architecture in Berlin.

Hermann Muthesius was a great Anglophile, a friend of Charles Rennie Mackintosh, and had lived in London between 1896 and 1903 as an attaché at the German Embassy. This makes it likely that there was some kind of connection between the two families, whether it was direct or through mutual acquaintances, and that this triggered the Audens' decision to send Wystan to Berlin when they recognised he was going through a difficult time. It is more likely than Auden's ending up at this unique place in Berlin by chance.

What supports this theory, too, is that not long after his arrival in Berlin, Auden moved from the distinguished environment to Fürbringerstr. 8 in Kreuzberg: one of Berlin's most popular areas nowadays but a fairly seedy district in Auden's time. Norman Page, the one critic who has acknowledged how unique Auden's 'German host family' was, states about the Muthesiusses: 'It was, then, not just any dull bourgeois family but a lively, gifted, artistic and creative household that Auden entered in October 1928'.⁸⁷ While it is unclear how lively the household actually would have been a year after their father's Hermann Muthesius's death, the family was indeed part of Berlin's high society, by all accounts, being friendly with the likes of Albert Einstein and Max Reinhardt. Anna Muthesius must have been an impressive woman in her own right. Since she had been a professional soprano before her marriage, one wonders whether Frau Muthesius and Auden would have been able to share their passion for music. Clearly, this was a fascinating set-up for anyone who was keen to get to know a foreign place through exposure to 'the right circles'.

Obviously, however, the last thing Auden wanted at the time was to join in with 'German family life' and the kind of dinner parties he knew from home; nor did he want to help the family improve their English. It is highly indicative of Auden's character that he was admirably immune to the lures of comfort and fame even in his early twenties,

⁸⁷ Page, *The Berlin Years*, 101.

when he was still at the beginning of a less than certain career. Auden was never one to network or sweet talk, and he stuck to his views. Most of all, he was not at all concerned about keeping to members of his own class: he was looking for a different kind of company – which he was quick to find in the many gay-bars and brothels of Weimar Berlin. In a letter from Berlin, he wrote, fairly blasé: ‘The German proletariat are fine, but I don’t like the others very much so I spend most of my time with Juvenile Delinquents’.⁸⁸

Thus Auden’s choice of what he called a ‘slum’ as his stomping ground was a deliberate one: he could have chosen to associate with German intellectuals instead. Unlike Auden, the American composer and author Paul Bowles – with whom Auden would share a house in Brooklyn ten years later and who lived in Berlin around the same time as Auden did – quickly connected with writers like Gottfried Benn, who later translated Auden’s *Age of Anxiety*. Given Bowles’s example, it is probably fair to say that Auden would not have found it hard to connect with the German intellectual scene.

Instead, Auden chose his Berlin year to be a time of self-recontextualisation. The one thing he knew for sure, despite being unsure about the practicalities, was that he would be a ‘great poet’, as he had told his tutor when arriving at Oxford. Even in 1928, Auden was confident enough about his ‘calling’ to feel that social connections and famous writer friends would not make him a great poet, that instead he needed to gain life experience and faith in himself, in order to be able to connect with his innermost self. Thus Auden was not interested in laying the foundations of a connection with the German intelligentsia.

When it came to his sexual explorations, too, he preferred the reality of gay bars to the intellectualisation of homosexuality. In the first entry of the Berlin Journal, Auden wrote about the famous institute of Magnus Hirschfelder, whose museum he visited

⁸⁸ Carpenter, *W.H. Auden*, 95.

when Christopher Isherwood lodged at the institute: '[...] lets [*sic*] have nothing of this pornography for science'. Villas, museums, and the intellectuals frequenting them were not the contexts where Auden felt he could learn about himself, having been through too many years of institutionalised learning.

This explains Auden's decision to abandon the comforts of the Villa Muthesius only a few months after his arrival in Berlin, and it also makes it unlikely that he himself had chosen his host family in the first place. His change of mind happened too suddenly for this to be plausible, even if he only realised after his arrival in Berlin that the family villa's location and the family's respectability made nightly pick-ups and affairs impossible.

Contrasting with the beautiful museal villa he had abandoned in every possible way, Auden's new 'cheaper house', was located just around the corner from his favourite brothel, the Cosy Corner. His change of abode is reflected in the poem 'This Loved One', written in March 1929:

Before this last one
Was much to be done,
Frontiers to cross
As clothes grew worse,
And coins to pass
In a cheaper house,
Before this last one,
Before this loved one.
(CP, 36)

Strikingly, the 'frontier' Auden felt he had crossed was not so much the natural border constituted by the channel, dividing Britain from Germany geographically, but the social class barrier between the 'cultivated' villa and the thrilling red light district. In their upper-middle-class behaviour, Germans and Britons certainly did not differ much.

While nine months spent in most foreign places would have allowed Auden to gain distance from the island of his childhood and youth, Berlin was a particularly lucky

choice: cultural, sexual, and creative deviation went hand in hand in this city where all norms seemed to run havoc. Leaving his patrial comfort zone – in both senses of the word – allowed Auden to gain a new integrity and deeper self-knowledge. It constituted a breaking with ‘habit’, according to his own definition of the word in his Berlin journal as: ‘the inheritance of thoughts and emotions. Parental authority’. (J29) Distance from the former can give rise to a new kind of awareness by contrast, through the exhibition of oneself to a strange culture and its strange traditions; but in any case, distance from the latter will increase one’s personal autonomy. Auden even went as far as to define in another entry his ‘real “life-wish”’ as ‘desire for separation, from family, from one’s literary predecessors’, reminiscent of James Joyce’s character in both *Dubliners* (1914) and *Ulysses* (1922), Stephen Dedalus. Evidently, issues caused by his parents’ class and his wider family’s pretensions played a major role.

Viewed from this angle, it is not surprising that Auden’s nine months in Germany – not a long time after all – had such a profound impact on him, inspiring him to maintain a lasting interest in German culture and literature. Auden came to love German (he himself spoke of having fallen in love with the language) because Berlin allowed him to experience exactly that freedom and independence from pre-determined paths he had yearned for. Suddenly, and unexpectedly, he found himself in an environment where he was able to escape the moral codex of the English middle class and the feelings of guilt it had inspired in him. His new ‘Kiez’ made it easy for Auden to fully immerse himself in the active gay scene for which Weimar Berlin was famous.

1.3 OTHER MYTHS

Another academic myth that exists within scholarship surrounding Auden’s life and work is the general association between Auden, Berlin, and his projected identity as the determined group leader that carries most accounts about Auden’s time in Berlin. In the

logic of these readings, Auden's 'choice' of coming to Germany – contentious, as we have seen – is presented as an exceptional one. Comparing Yeats with Auden, even Firchow – who tends to produce differentiated and well-informed criticism of Auden's interaction with Germany – states, for example, that Auden was '[...] an intellectual/sexual tourist who first discovered Berlin for a literary generation – for the “found” or politically engaged generation that arose after the preceding one had lost itself in Paris’. (Fir, 149)

While Firchow's more vague claim that Auden 'was among the first poets of the post-Great War generation to take up residence in Berlin' (Fir, 10) might just about hold, Auden did not 'discover' Berlin for the literati of his generation, not to mention the long-standing line of English-speaking intellectuals and writers who had been visiting Germany for centuries. Historically, this is not surprising, given that in 1714, George I had succeeded Queen Anne on the throne and become the first Hanoverian king of England. Garold N. Davis shows in *German Thought and Culture in England 1700-1770* (1969) that during the eighteenth century, many English men of letters were attracted to 'Germany', particularly places like Hamburg, Göttingen, and Hanover.⁸⁹

One English writer who spent nearly a year in Germany – over ten years before Auden's birth – was 'George Eliot', whom Blaicher calls 'die wohl beste Deutschlandkennerin unter den englischen Literaten des 19. Jahrhunderts'.⁹⁰ Aged thirty-four, Marian Evans decided to accompany her married lover George Henry Lewes on a research trip to Germany in July 1854, knowing that this scandal would make it impossible for her to publish under her own name from this point onwards.⁹¹ The official reason for the trip was that Lewes needed to collect information for his

⁸⁹ Garold N. Davis, *German Thought and Culture in England, 1700-1770; a Preliminary Survey* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1969), 81.

⁹⁰ Blaicher, *Das Deutschlandbild in der englischen Literatur*, 157. ['probably the member of the English literary scene in the 19th century who knew Germany best'.]

⁹¹ Gerlinde Röder-Bolton, *George Eliot in Germany, 1854-55: "Cherished Memories"* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 1.

biography of Johann Wolfgang Goethe, yet it was also a sort of honeymoon: while in England, the relationship was frowned upon, in Germany the two were free to travel and live like man and wife. As Auden later would, Evans spent time in Berlin and wrote about her memories – ‘Recollections of Berlin’ – in her diary. Like Auden’s, her journal was never published. Unlike Auden, Evans was critical of certain elements of German life.

There is also the case of Mary Annette Beauchamp, who was born in Australia but moved to the UK aged four. After their chance meeting in Florence, she married Graf Henning von Arnim in 1891 and thus became a German countess. Anonymously, she published the bestseller *Elizabeth and her German Garden* (1909) in the UK.⁹² Bursting with floral autobiographical descriptions of her German life, the book shaped the British image of Germany profoundly.

Arnim’s observations tend not to be unkind, yet they also convey a curious sense of distance. Her neighbour, for instance, she calls ‘a pattern of what a German country lady should be [...] not only a pretty woman but an energetic and practical one, and the combination is, to say the least, effective’.⁹³ She continues later on: ‘To most German Hausfraus the dinners and the puddings are of paramount importance, and they pride themselves on keeping those parts of their houses that are seen in a state of perpetual and spotless perfection, and this is exceedingly praiseworthy’.⁹⁴ And about her grandfather, she writes: ‘He was a good German (and when Germans are good they are very good)’. Efficiency, practicality, and a liking for heavy food and cabbage (‘cabbage salad is a horrid invention’⁹⁵) are presented as quintessentially German characteristics, as well as a tendency to be overly correct, law-abiding, and patronising. Elizabeth states

⁹² Elizabeth von Arnim, *Elizabeth and Her German Garden*. (London: Macmillan, 1909).

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 53.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 107.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 69.

that coming 'within the reach of the arm of the law [...] is what every German spends his life trying to avoid'.⁹⁶

Elizabeth and her German Garden influenced at least one person's image of Germany profoundly. Still in New Zealand at the time, ten-year-old Katherine Mansfield devoured the book written by her cousin Mary Annette Beauchamp when her uncle brought it as a gift.⁹⁷ Possibly, the reading also inspired her later interest in women's rights and in leading an independent life. Marriage and gender issues are discussed throughout *Elizabeth and her German Garden*.

In 1909, after having studied in the UK for a few years and having become pregnant, Mansfield travelled to Germany. She knew German and was meant to deliver the child quietly during her stay, but had a miscarriage. In 1911, her book *In a German Pension* appeared, presenting the goings-on in a pension offering cure treatments, and not in the most favorable light. A few years later, Mansfield actually refused to have the book reissued: despite the fact that in 1914, when the general mood in Britain became anti-German, she was urged to do so and she needed the money. Still in 1920 she wrote: 'I could not for a moment entertain republishing the *Pension*. It's positively juvenile, and besides that, it's not what I mean; it's a lie. Oh no, never!'⁹⁸ This is strangely reminiscent of Auden's refusal to include his 'dishonest' 30s poems in his *Collected Poems*.

While Mansfield pokes fun at a certain stratum of German society, those able to afford to spend leisurely months at the spa, E.M. Forster's *Howards End* (1910) playfully discusses the role of Weimar Classicism in the shaping of German identity, particularly German intellectualism. In the novel, this is discussed through the case of the Schlegel siblings who have a German father and an English mother and are said not to be

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 193.

⁹⁷ Blaicher, *Das Deutschlandbild in der englischen Literatur*, 181.

⁹⁸ Katherine Mansfield, *In a German Pension* (London: Penguin, 1964), 8.

‘Germans of the dreadful sort’.⁹⁹ Though living in England, they have grown up with a father whose pride in the German contribution to European culture always remained unbroken. Through the Schlegels, Germany is presented in the traditional light, as a place of idealism and learning. In the novel, this ideal is broken up through the comments of English characters. The uncle of Mr Schlegel states, for example: ‘Your poets too are dying, your philosophers, your musicians, to whom Europe has listened for two hundred years. Gone. Gone with the little courts that nurtured them – gone with Esterházy and Weimar’.¹⁰⁰ And the English aunt of the Schlegel sisters airs her prejudices: “‘The Germans’”, she said, “are too thorough, and this is all very well sometimes, but at other times it does not do.”¹⁰¹ Fascinatingly, Forster had spent a few months in Germany during 1905, ‘in “the land of *Ach* and *Ja*’, four of them at Nassenheide, Pomerania, in the mildly improbable role of tutor to the children of the Gräfin von Arnim, better known as “Elizabeth” of the German garden’.¹⁰²

Five years later after the appearance of *Howards End*, Dorothy Richardson described in her novel *Pointed Roofs: Pilgrimage* (1915) the trials and tribulations of seventeen-year-old Miriam Henderson who moves to Hanover for half a year to both teach English and learn German in a boarding school for girls. Like *Elizabeth and her German Garden* and *In a German Pension*, *Pointed Roofs* is another great example of a book that shows Germany through the eyes of the foreign visitor. Fascinating in this context are Richardson’s descriptions of how Miriam develops during her time in Germany, which are reminiscent of Auden’s development: she is learning to look at herself in the mirror with kindness and realizes that ‘[s]he was English and free’.¹⁰³ Germany for

⁹⁹ E.M. Forster, *Howards End* (London: Edward Arnold, 1973), 26.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 27.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹⁰² Oliver Stallybrass, “Editor’s Introduction,” in *Howards End* (London: Penguin, 2000), 8.

¹⁰³ Dorothy M. Richardson, *Pointed Roofs: Pilgrimage* (London: Duckworth & Co., 1915), 180.

Miriam becomes a place of self-acceptance, freedom, and confidence to embrace this freedom.

Despite the anti-German sentiment and the anti-German rhetoric that was instrumentalised by politicians and newspapers to strengthen British morale during WWII, the general mood towards the country was not necessarily congruent with the attitude in ‘educated’ families who had personal relations to, or memories of, Germany. Unlike after WWII, Germany maintained its image as a place of learning amongst certain parts of certain classes. Despite the war, it was still good form to spend time in Germany or send one’s children there to learn German. Blaicher points out that after WWI, some members of the English war generation developed a pro-German disposition while the Treaty of Versailles inspired anti-French feelings.¹⁰⁴ Writing about his undergraduate days at Oxford from 1919, Robert Graves for instance remembers in *Goodbye to All That* (1929):

Pro-German feeling had been increasing. With the war over and the German armies beaten, we could give the German soldier credit for being the most efficient fighting-man in Europe. I often heard it said that only the blockade had beaten the Fritzes [...]. Some undergraduates even insisted that we had been fighting on the wrong side: our natural enemies were the French.¹⁰⁵

Auden’s preference for Germany over France was not as out of tune with the prevailing mood after WWI as it has been implied, both by him and by critics. As for the popularity of Germany as a travel destination, it was not unvisited territory at all, to say the least

Berlin especially enjoyed a reputation – particularly amongst homosexuals – as being worth a visit. Members of the Oxbridge scene – whether current student, fresh graduates, or dons – could leave behind but later return to their ‘inconspicuous’ existence as students or teachers whose sexual preferences were swept under the carpet

¹⁰⁴ Blaicher, *Das Deutschlandbild in der englischen Literatur*, 213.

¹⁰⁵ Robert Graves, *Goodbye to All That* (London: Cassell, 1961), 259.

of convention. In Berlin, they could find whatever they were looking for. Golo Mann remarked that Auden visited Berlin at a time ‘when the German capital exercised so strong an attraction on young Englishmen’.¹⁰⁶ Prominent English speakers visiting Germany included Ernest Hemingway, Thomas Wolfe, Rupert Brooke, T.S. Eliot, and especially D.H. Lawrence who, like Auden, married into a famous German family, the von Richthofens. Both Lawrence and Eliot were major influences on Auden’s early work. Norman Page lists others who visited Berlin around the same time as Auden: ‘Paul Bowles and Aaron Copland, Francis Bacon and Aleister Crowley, William Plomer and Harold Nicolson, Robert McAlmon and John Lehman’.¹⁰⁷ David Herbert, a friend of Paul Bowles, visited Berlin in 1927.

Already in the year before Auden’s birth, the promiscuity of Berlin had been made public by none other than James Joyce. In his short story ‘A Little Cloud’, published in *Dubliners*, the anti-hero Little Chandler is reunited with his dashing friend Ignatius Gallaher, who has returned to Dublin after years spent on the continent. Little Chandler comes to the conclusion: ‘There was no doubt about it: if you wanted to succeed you had to go away’.¹⁰⁸ Entangled in this is his budding wish to become a poet and live a more artistic life, and at the pub, he is both shocked and fascinated by Gallaher’s reports of continental debauchery:

– I’ll tell you my opinion, said Ignatius Gallaher, emerging after some time from the clouds of smoke in which he had taken refuge, it’s a rum world. Talk of immorality! I’ve heard of cases – what am I saying? – I’ve known them: cases of...immorality. ...

Ignatius Gallaher puffed thoughtfully at his cigar and then, in a calm historian’s tone, he proceeded to sketch for his friend some pictures of the corruption which was life abroad. He summarized the vices of many capitals and seemed inclined to award the palm to Berlin.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁶ Golo Mann, “A Memoir,” 100.

¹⁰⁷ Page, *Auden and Isherwood*, 3.

¹⁰⁸ James Joyce, *Dubliners* (London: Cape, 1967), 79.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 85.

Despite being enthralled by his friend's new grandiosity, Little Chandler is sorely aware of his vulgar sides and intellectual inferiority and is able to see through his ebullience: 'Gallagher was only patronizing him by his friendliness just as he was Ireland by his visit'.¹¹⁰ Still though, on coming home, Little Chandler continues to question his life, reads Byron, and again feels the strong urge to write poetry: to develop self-regard and be well regarded by others. Yet family life encroaches on him: 'It was useless, useless! He was a prisoner for life'.¹¹¹

In a way, Little Chandler's situation in 'A Little Cloud' exemplifies the life-choices Auden faced in 1929: engaged to a nurse and having undergone some kind of analysis, he seems to have been ready to embrace the kind of life his parents had envisioned for him. While he never bragged about the benefits of 'immorality' like Gallagher in the short story, Auden's Berlin life made it possible for him to know firmly that he did not want to be trapped in a life tailored by Middle-class conventions.

Twenty years after Joyce, the American writer Robert McAlmon published a book of Berlin stories entitled *Distinguished Air: Grim Fairy Tales* (1925), which are said to eclipse Isherwood's stories in their lewdness. The book is out of print now though and this forbearer of Auden and Isherwood forgotten in relation to Berlin.

Evidently then, Berlin had not only been visited by a great number of English-speaking writers by 1928, it had also been 'advertised' in their works of literature for over twenty years. More concretely still, there was a range of young Oxford graduates who had seen Berlin before Auden, as Robert Beachy points out in *'Ich bin schwul': W.H. Auden im Berlin der Weimarer Republik*.¹¹² Brian Howard, who overlapped with Auden at Christ Church College and was a model for Evelyn Waugh's character Anthony Blanche in *Brideshead Revisited*, visited Berlin in 1927, for example. Another notorious

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 88.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 93.

¹¹² Beachy, "Ich bin schwul."

Oxford character, Maurice Bowra, the self-proclaimed head of the ‘Homintern’ and vice-Chancellor of Oxford between 1951-1954, first came to Berlin in September 1928 in the company of John Sparrow of New College. Provided with ‘addresses and letters of introduction’ by Bob Boothby, who described the city and its nightlife as ‘Paradise’, Bowra and Sparrow explored this paradisaical Berlin and were thrilled: in the ensuing four years, Bowra went on ‘annual pilgrimages to the German capital’.¹¹³

And yet it is Auden, not Bowra, who is remembered for having ‘discovered’ Berlin for his generation of intellectuals and homosexuals. Without wanting to discuss the biographies of those English-speaking writers shaped by Germany I have alluded to in detail, what they make unmistakably clear is that Auden was not quite so special in choosing Berlin. Similarly problematic is the related notion of the ‘Auden group’ since, according to Auden, there was never a group to speak of.¹¹⁴

Equally strange about this established view of Auden as ‘King’ of Berlin is that he published virtually no poem or other text that was evidently ‘about Berlin’ – thus this strange flux between facts and fictionalisation was not even caused by a literary hype; at least not one about a text by Auden, that is. Given how intertwined the creative lives of Auden and Isherwood were at the time it seems likely that Isherwood’s Berlin novels *Mr Norris Changes Trains* (1935) and *Goodbye to Berlin* (1939) have been and are being associated with Auden. Quite simply, too, the story of ‘Auden the discoverer of Berlin’ was likely conditioned by the stylisation of Auden as the mouthpiece of his generation,

¹¹³ Leslie Mitchell, *Maurice Bowra: A Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 137.

¹¹⁴ See Deutschlandfunk interview: ‘Ja, natürlich man ärgert sich immer, wenn man so von eine Gruppe spricht, weil es scheint als wie eine Apparat, nicht, und natürlich wir waren persönlich befreundet, und wir waren ungefähr das gleiche Alter. Doch jeder war ganz anders, eigenartig [*viz*: einzigartig], nicht. Natürlich aber die Journalisten haben sehr gerne von eine Schule oder eine Gruppe [*sic*] zu sprechen. Wir waren sehr gut befreundet. Wir sind noch befreundet’. (App. G, p. 285.) [‘Yes, of course one is always annoyed if people speak about such a group because it seems like a machine, you see, and of course we were friends, and were about the same age. But each of us was very different, individual, you see. But of course journalists like to speak of a school, or a group. We were very good friends. We are still friends’. (Ibid., p. 295.)]

being ‘applauded, for many years, as its representative voice’, as Terry Eagleton puts it, and focused on.¹¹⁵

Clearly though, Auden himself was accountable for the creation of this image to a degree. In the early 60s, he made the following statement in different contexts:

The first personal choice I can remember making was my decision, when my father offered me a year abroad after I had gone down from Oxford, to spend it in Berlin. I knew no German and no German literature, but I felt out of sympathy with French culture, partly by temperament and partly in revolt against the generation of intellectuals immediately preceding mine, which was strongly Francophile. It is a decision I have been very thankful ever since that I took.¹¹⁶

This retrospective statement has to be regarded in the light of Auden’s tendency to turn his life-facts into a fiction of sorts: to align them according to a certain order and logic with hindsight and to make them more black-and-white than they really are.

With a greater number of personal manuscripts available in libraries today, we can read Auden’s statement more critically than earlier critics – and know ‘I knew no German and no German literature’ to be a false statement in this extreme form. Auden had studied German at school for two years and shown at least some independent interest in German literature. Similarly, we have reason to suspect that it was Auden’s parents who suggested a trip to Berlin in the first place.

While Auden’s statement is of course not a hard ‘lie’, it is interesting to note that thirty years after having left Berlin, Auden turned reality – soft, ambiguous, manifold – into fiction, a story. And stories – ways of narrating circumstances – are powerful tools.

¹¹⁵ Terry Eagleton, *Exiles and Émigrés: Studies in Modern Literature* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1970), 179.

¹¹⁶ Auden, *Forewords and Afterwords*, 521. Auden makes an almost identical statement in the 1965 Deutschlandfunk interview: ‘Also, der intellektuellen Generation vor mir, für diese Generation alles war französische Literatur. Ich war ein bisschen satt davon. Ich kannte kein Deutsch, keine deutsche Literatur. Aber ich dachte: “Nein, ich will nicht nach Paris gehen. Wo soll ich gehen. Ich soll nach Berlin kommen.” Also bin ich nach Berlin gekommen. Und ich bin sehr froh, dass ich diese [*sic*] gemacht habe. Es war sehr zufällig’. (App. G, p. 284.) [‘So, I was thinking, where should I go. Well, the intellectual generation before me, for that generation French literature was everything. I was a bit fed up with it. I did not know any German, no German literature. But I thought: ‘No, I don’t want to go to Paris. Where should I go? I should go to Berlin’. So I came to Berlin. And I am very glad I did. It was pure coincidence’. (Ibid., p. 295.)]

Given the right twist, or through accumulation over time, they can give birth to something like a parallel reality. This is true for Auden's Berlin year, as the story told by Auden was being perpetuated and gained strength with every repetition and simplification. Osborne, for instance, writes: 'He knew no German and was ignorant of German literature, so thought he could make good use of a year spent in Germany'.¹¹⁷ Even subtle changes in how 'a fact' is presented have an impact on the reality visualised by the reader.

In this way, an image has been created in secondary literature of Auden as the determined, young adventurer who left his country to embrace a foreign culture that had been neglected by previous generations of literati, although this is clearly an exaggeration. It seems that by the 1960s, Auden truly believed his own simplified memory of his former Berlin reality, a natural process since we live in and with the stories we invent about our lives: past, present, future. For writers, this is all the more important and problematic because the line between real-life stories and fictional stories can be narrow.

In Berlin, Auden's poetry first began to reflect the poet's experiences at the time; similarly, Isherwood fictionalised his life in the capital. However individualist and self-confident Auden may have appeared to his peers during his time at school and at Oxford, it was only through an exposure to a foreign place and the development of a personal life-style – in Auden's case the decision to move to a 'cheaper house' – this complete break with habit and separation and the ability to 'wander' and 'wonder'.

It is possible that the key to the question how exactly Berlin influenced Auden – an impossible question in many ways as it is difficult enough to know exactly how we ourselves are influenced by our own environment, let alone to assess the impact upon

¹¹⁷ Osborne, *W.H. Auden*, 58.

another person of their surroundings, where both are unknown to us – lies in Auden's swift departure from the Muthesius home: a striking fact and in many ways symbolic.

In 1928, intellectual Germany was not the stratum of German society Auden felt he could learn from most. This is the truly striking aspect of his interaction with the 'boys' of Berlin: that he did not 'use' them, as many Berlin sex tourists would have. Furthermore, Auden was convinced there was something only the boys could teach him. The journal makes clear that he was overly respectful with them, even when they robbed him. Opening himself up to the new, to experience, to his senses in this way without being constricted by class thinking, Auden was able to come into his own and to access more aspects of his self.

Whatever his expectations for Berlin, the city plunged Auden into a reality, an environment that was different, independent, free. It was this experience that opened him up to the possibility of living abroad in the future and loosened his ties with England. This effect is reflected in Auden's poetry from the time, which has a different feel to it than the still rather imitative verses he wrote previously. While Isherwood's writing, being fiction, reveals its rootedness in Berlin easily, the influence of Germany on Auden's poetry can be traced through his transformation of real-life events into journal entries, and finally into verse. Although none of his collected poems are such that a reader without additional information would necessarily understand them to be tributes to Berlin, Auden's German life had such a profound influence on his thinking that this is also reflected in his poetry.

1.4 THE 1929 JOURNAL

A link between Auden's experiences in Berlin and his poetry from the time is the journal he kept during the second half of his stay – a particularly remarkable manuscript, both because not many of Auden's personal notebooks have survived and because it is

unpublished. The quarto notebook containing the journal was found by his friend David Luke – a Lecturer in German and translator – shortly after Auden’s death in Vienna on 29 September 1973 on the floor of the brewery cottage in the grounds of Christ Church College, which Auden had inhabited during his last years in Oxford. But a sticker on the inside of the cover pages shows that it had been purchased at a store located at Königgrätzerstraße 84 in Berlin-Kreuzberg, close to where Auden lived in 1929. The black covers of the journal are well preserved and the lined paper, while being slightly yellowed, does not look like eighty years old either. Auden’s handwriting indicates a quick and highly concentrated mind that tended to move ahead of the writing hand: rarely does Auden make mistakes or alter what he has written.¹¹⁸

Reading the journal, one is aware that it is a collection of private thoughts and intended for Auden’s private use only. At the same time though, it is already a step towards the poetry Auden came to write while he was in Berlin and shortly afterwards. Deliberating the Journal’s importance for him at the time, it is helpful to have a closer look at Auden’s distinction – formulated in his and Day-Lewis’ preface to *Oxford Poetry* in 1927 – between ‘public’ events and their influence on the creative, ‘private’ realm of the poet and his work. Auden would always maintain an interest in this abstract distinction – although his ideas about the degree to which a poet should reflect current events in his work would change. Many years later, in an essay-fragment entitled ‘Essay on his poetic development’, which is contained in Auden’s *Holograph notebook 1965-68*, Auden formulated: ‘every work of art is a secondary world [...] a re-shaping of the primary world’.¹¹⁹ He also discussed this topic in his four T.S. Eliot Memorial Lectures,

¹¹⁸ The 1929 Journal is owned by the Berg Collection. While parts of it have been quoted in secondary literature, it is not going to be published soon, according to Prof. Edward Mendelson who holds the copyright as the executor of Auden’s estate. The reasons he gave for this decision are that it is almost impossible to decipher some of the journal entries, and that he has a policy of first publishing those materials Auden had intended for publication.

¹¹⁹ W.H. Auden, Essay on his poetic development. *Holograph notebook 1965-68*. Berg Collection, New York Public Library, W.H. Auden collection of papers.

delivered at the University of Kent in 1967, and these were published as *Secondary Worlds* in the following year. In the book, Auden acknowledges that he derived the terms ‘primary’ and ‘secondary world’ from an essay on fairy tales by J.R.R. Tolkien. He writes:

When we say that the primary world is the objective world outside ourselves, we mean that it is a social and public world [...]. The primary world contains everything that has not been made by man, including himself, and, also, whatever of man’s historical past is still on hand as reified in a humanly fabricated world of languages, mythologies, legends, creeds, tools, works-of-art, etc. Though made by man, his past is no longer in his power to alter. (SW, 50)

‘Secondary worlds’ on the other hand, according to Auden, ‘come into being because we choose to make them and are not subject to natural death’. (SW, 51) Unlike the ‘primary world’, ‘secondary worlds’ are created by humans with a conscious – or unconscious – aim and purpose in mind: through them, we immortalise our visions and assert power. Auden emphasised that the origin of poetry, a particular artistic ‘secondary world’, had to lie in the ‘primary world’.

Needless to say, a clear-cut distinction like this is in itself problematic: because ‘historical past’ cannot be extracted from a myth or a legend like a well-defined object, for example, and because one wonders at which point a legend – told as a story – ceases to be a secondary world and becomes part of the primary world.

Using Auden’s distinction in this context though, it becomes evident that he did not simply record anecdotes from his life in Germany in his Berlin journal, reconstructed events and encounters which, according to his definition, would be primary. Instead, he organised his thoughts in such a way that the document gives the impression of being somewhat secondary. The journal is no ordinary diary but a strange example of the genre: it reflects Auden’s tendency to mythologize his life, to observe it as

if from a distance, with his ‘Hawk’s vision’¹²⁰, and to abstract his experiences (the public chaos). His use of this ‘technique’ might have been prompted by Isherwood’s arrival in Berlin; after all, the Journal begins with the sentence: ‘Christophers [*sic*] visit will serve as well as anything else as the introduction to this journal. Wherever one starts there will be loose threads [...]’. (J29)

Already at school, Auden and Isherwood had invented their own common linguistic and mythical territory, and similarly they would turn Berlin into a mythical world, elements of which then made their way into their respective works. While this is more obvious in the case of Isherwood’s ‘fictitious works’ – some of which are heavily based on his experience of Weimar Berlin – several of Auden’s poems, too, and even the journal, are populated by those mythical creatures and places he had chosen for the accoutrement of his German world in reality as well as in his texts: Auden does not write about Layard and the boys like a non-writer. His journal can be thought of as an intermediate form between his primary and his secondary worlds: it is a first step towards art, and there are clear correlations between journal entries and Auden’s poems from the time. ‘1929’, for instance, is full of direct and indirect references to some of the characters mentioned in the journal: John Layard, Auden’s guru of self-liberation, appears, as well as Auden’s ‘flame’ Gerhart Meyer, a sailor from Hamburg. And most importantly, Auden wrote a series of six poems in German which pick up on themes from the journal.

Thus, in a way, the journal allows us to observe how art can be formed in the mind of its creator through the metamorphosis of a set of experiences into text – but also of language from the spoken word to ‘memorable speech’, Auden’s definition of

¹²⁰ Auden adopted this term from Thomas Hardy and describes his theory in ‘A Literary Transference’ (PII, pp. 42-49, specifically p. 46).

poetry.¹²¹ The journal's hybrid nature is reflected in its retrospective beginning. Its entries start on what is most likely to be 23 March 1929. This, however, cannot be verified because the first few passages are not accompanied by specific dates, only by the days of the week. David Luke suggests that 'Auden was prompted to keep a written record [...] by his first meeting with Gerhart on Easter Sunday, 31 March'.¹²²

Gerhart – with whom Auden had an affair and who 'allowed' Auden to make his first experiences as the 'more loving one' – dominates the first fifth of the journal. This would explain why Auden labelled it 'April' while beginning it with a passage about Christopher Isherwood's visit in late March. His conscious distinction between the primary and the secondary world corresponds with a later journal entry in which he states: 'To me writing is the enjoyment of the living'. Edward Mendelson points out:

The journal itself illustrates his theory. Although the entries for the first few weeks appear in the form of a diary, they were demonstrably written out at the end of the period they cover, as a literary reconstruction of past events. Auden did not know at the time that Boswell had used the same technique in writing out his journals two centuries before. (EA, 69)

While he was still in Berlin, Auden thus recorded, analysed and re-lived his Berlin life in his journal: already in the spirit of a writer who knew that his experiences were his capital. Strikingly, he wrote in an entry after one of his lovers had left him: 'How one likes to suffer. Anyway writers do, it is their income'.

1.5 '1929' – 'THE ACCOUNT OF GROWING, OF KNOWING'¹²³

Clearly, Auden considered himself a writer by 1929, the second half of his stay in Germany. He was no longer limited by the restraints of undergraduate life – practical as

¹²¹ This can be found in Auden's preface (written together with John Garrett) to *The Poet's Tongue* (PI, pp. 105-109, specifically p. 105).

¹²² W.H. Auden, "*The Language of Learning and the Language of Love*": *Uncollected Writings, New Interpretations* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 104.

¹²³ Deleted line from the manuscript version of '1929'. From: W.H. Auden, *Poems. April 1929 – March 1930*. Holograph notebook. Berg Collection, New York Public Library, W.H. Auden collection of papers.

well as mental ones – but enjoyed a complete freedom of choice – with all its benefits and responsibilities. This new state of mind is mirrored in Auden’s work from the time. ‘Local’ and ‘occasional’ topics and language started to be accommodated in Auden’s poetry, and this influence can still be detected in work written years after Auden’s return to Britain, since he kept travelling to Germany until the Nazi seizure of power in 1933.

Previously, Auden’s poetry had been imitative rather than imaginative and rarely suggests that a particular occasion in the ‘primary world’ had moved Auden to write. His dedication to Christopher Isherwood at the beginning of the original manuscript of ‘1929’ shows that, quite consciously, Auden had not yet written ‘occasional poetry’ and that now, for the first time, he was moved to do so in Berlin:

This is almost the first time Christopher
That I have tried my hand at occasional verse
Probably not your idea of poetry...
But the lines came, offering us apology
Out of the happiness of a spring day
Out of my personal affection for you
And lastly out of my admiration for your art.¹²⁴

A line of ‘occasional poems’ pervades this thesis: not surprisingly perhaps, since the poems relevant in its context are usually concerned with specific occasions or persons: ‘1929’, ‘Spain’, ‘In Time of War’, ‘Epithalamion’ for Elisabeth Mann, the elegies for Freud and Toller...

In the case of all these poems, the question arises just how occasional Auden’s ‘occasional poems’ can actually be considered to be. Would they make sense without the given context and without additional biographical knowledge? In the case of ‘1929’, the title of the set of poems does set the scene quite distinctively; but even standing on its own, the line ‘It was Easter as I walked in the public gardens’ (I, 1) provides a more specific setting than all of Auden’s juvenilia put together. This, however, does not say

¹²⁴ Ibid.

much: like the ‘occasional’ poems Auden would write from this point onwards, ‘1929’ transcends the occasional quickly and works through greater, vaguer concepts and abstractions.

The main point I want to raise about ‘1929’ – Auden’s first longer, serious, and ‘philosophical’ composition, which can be grouped with later examples such ‘New Year Letter’ – is the following: what is remarkable about Auden’s sequence is the appearance of a distinctive ‘I’ from whose perspective most passages of the four poems are conveyed, a novelty at the time and a rarity throughout Auden’s oeuvre. Few of Auden’s poems feature a clearly identifiable ‘I’ subject, with even so much as a fragmentary identity or story – ‘September 1, 1939’ is a later example.

In ‘1929’, the reader is immediately pulled into the ‘stream of consciousness’ of the ‘I’, his mode of telling his story: the beginning sets the reader up in this way, not unlike the traditional opening narrative of a fairy-tale does. We encounter the ‘I’ as someone undergoing a process of liberation, seeing the world in the light of his newly won freedom. He (or, indeed, she – but I will assume a male identity, for simplicity’s sake) projects his enthusiasm on a cloud that he perceives to be ‘moving without anxiety on open sky’.¹²⁵ In the manuscript-version of ‘1929’, the first line is followed by two which Auden later omitted and where the ‘I’ is said to be:

[a]lone and curious as any puppy
Who has scampered away out of call of his master.¹²⁶

While these lines present the ‘I’ as independent and curious, one gets the sense that his freedom is not a given: like a dog who has run away from his owner, one imagines, the ‘I’ has to distance himself from the boundaries which previously limited him – by travelling and living abroad: ‘Shadow know not of homesick foreigner [...]’ (II, 10). Of

¹²⁵ CP, 46. Anxiety is one of the most common themes throughout Auden’s oeuvre. A topical analysis of Auden’s work with this focus would be most fruitful.

¹²⁶ Auden, *Poems. April 1929 – March 1930*. Berg Collection.

course, the word ‘master’ bears strong public-school connotations. Auden’s own schoolmaster, as we have seen, refused to keep dogs and – this is both a logical non-sequitur used for comical effect and a fine example of Auden’s ‘cause-effect’ logic from the time – died of cancer for it. In the same logic, the scampering escape of the ‘I’, away from curtailment of creativity and self-suppression, is towards a life that is independent and healthy. Analogous to this is Auden’s decision not to continue on the track of middle class respectability.

‘1929’ is a young poem full of movement, conveying a sense of unsettledness and development throughout. The theme of time and its passing is omnipresent, in the sequence’s structure which vaguely follows the four seasons of the year as well as in direct references: in Part II, the phrase ‘time passes’ occurs twice. The ‘I’ is said to be moving at the beginning of Part I as well as at the end of Part IV, in accordance with the movement of the seasons, the passing of time:

[...] he every hour
 Moves further [...] and must so move
 [...] | along the track which is himself
 (III. 8-10, 24).

This is a particularly beautiful image, the self as its own life-clock: the ‘I’ ‘must’ move and develop, since this is a fact of existence, but is limited by his ‘self’. The realisation is that, since he cannot change who he is in essence, he must make the most of what he has been given and rejoice in it.

In Part II, the ‘I’ – contemplating existence – realises that life offers permanent change and decides that the development of his personality thus should be continual and never ending, too: he knows that change occurs first in his thinking and then, through the application of it, in his actions (‘Coming out of me living is always thinking | Thinking changing and changing living’, II. 1-2). He identifies primarily as a ‘thinker’, growing aware of his autonomy and of the responsibilities arising from it, ‘being no child

now nor a bird' (II. 59). It is in this that the influence of Berlin on Auden becomes most obvious. Introspective and contemplative, '1929's focus on the mystery of existence and self development suggest its emergence from a mind that was itself experiencing a phase of transition.

While any place outside England would have given Auden the opportunity to experience himself in a new context, the fact that he 'chose' (or was sent to) Berlin was truly fortunate. Strikingly, those from whose culture he felt he had to distance himself made his trip possible in the first place. Auden's own post-Oxford liberation had various triggers, both 'practical' and 'theoretical'. While his interactions with the Berlin 'boys' did their part in increasing Auden's self-acceptance, the psychologist John Layard supplied him with a corresponding theoretical framework that helped to 'justify' his way of living. That both elements influenced Auden tremendously is evident from the Berlin journal.

Auden had met Layard in October 1928, soon after his arrival in Berlin: their mutual friend David Ayerst had introduced them. Layard appears not only in the Journal, but also in '1929' when, in his state of exploration, deliberating the change of the world's conditions and seasons, the 'I' is confronted with a mysterious 'solitary man [...] weeping on a bench' (I. 10). The latter can be identified as John Layard since he is described to be '[h]elpless and ugly as an embryo chicken' (I. 12). In their respective discussions of '1929', John Fuller, Norman Page, and Michael Kilby have already pointed out that this phrase occurs in Auden's journal entry on April 6th: 'Gerhart has not returned, so I go to the station [...]. On return I find John waiting [...]. John looks awful, like an embryo-chicken'. (J29) Here, the Berlin journal entry allows us to trace directly how Auden turned his Berlin experiences into poetry – via the journal's intermediate space – but only few people would have 'understood' this private reference before secondary texts appeared with explanations.

Layard famously supplied Auden with ‘New doctrines’, as Auden puts it in Part IV of his *Letter to Lord Byron*, influencing Auden profoundly with his theories on individual liberation.

I met a chap called Layard and he fed
New doctrines into my receptive head.

Part came from Lane, and part from D.H. Lawrence;
Gide, though I didn't know it then, gave part. (CP, 111)

Already previously, Auden's thinking had been influenced by psychological texts, especially in the work of Freud. In Berlin, his indoctrination with the theories of Homer Lane through Layard and his sympathy with the psychologist's belief that love was a prerequisite for personal growth allowed him to see Freud more critically than ever before: ‘The trouble with Freud is, that he accepts conventional morality as if it were the only one’ and ‘the error of Freud and most psychoanalysts is making pleasure a negative thing’ (J29).

The ‘doctrines’ reinforced Auden's belief that illnesses had psychosomatic origins and made the autonomous individual the centre of all things. Layard believed that this was not a hedonistic choice but that it was morally wrong to act against one's natural impulses – instead of subordinating them to social norms – since they were good. According to Layard, a person's denial of them led to illnesses, which thus had to be regarded as self-inflicted. The enjoyment of all instincts and senses of the body, on the other hand, was crucial for the preservation of one's health. Love was considered to be the biological basis and energy for any kind of growth, physical or mental, because it was seen as one's strife for self-perfection through the other.

Adopting the belief that it was right to act upon one's urges allowed Auden to recognise the importance of developing such autonomy himself; that in order to be a happy human being and, more importantly, a successful poet, he had to act in

accordance with what was right for him as an individual – as opposed to following the conventions of a certain class and society – and to explore his sexuality fully and guiltlessly.

This view left its impact on ‘1929’, in Auden’s juxtaposition of two ‘camps’ in ‘1929’. On the one hand, there are those who ‘look only back [...] in tears’ (I. 15-17) and represent failure in general, because they lose themselves in passive contemplation and worry. The ‘friend’s analysis of his own failure | Listened to at intervals during winter’ (I, 20-21), which could well be a reference to Layard, falls into this category, too. He gets labelled as one of ‘all those whose death | Is necessary condition of the season’s setting forth’ (I. 13-14). If one reads the word ‘condition’ as being a prerequisite – for ‘the season’s setting forth’ – then the symbolic ‘Death of the old gang’ (IV. 28) becomes a necessity for life to be able to move forward, for optimism and positive development.

The ‘old gang’s’ way of life is contrasted with the ‘success of others for comparison’ (I. 23), namely Kurt Groote and Gerhart Meyer – the Truly Strong Men – who represent success, being unreflectively content and ‘in tune’ with themselves (to the extent of selfishness, as Auden’s stories about his dealings with them in the journal show). This is associated with happiness, fearlessness, and strength. Theirs is an exemplarily positive state of being to which the ‘I’ is attracted, searching for his proper place in a world which changes around him, while the backwardness of ‘the old gang’ is presented as a deterrent: his ‘emphasis’ is ‘on new names’ (I. 7). Even a passage in *The Age of Anxiety* is reminiscent of this: ‘What would it feel like to be a success? Here is someone who is nobody in particular, there even an obvious failure, yet they do not seem to mind. How is that possible? What is their secret?’ (CP, 449).

This juxtaposition between ‘loss of self’/weakness and ‘selfishness’/strength underlines the significance of Auden’s use of the ‘I’ in his poem: just as he began to consciously claim new spaces for his self in Berlin, Auden started to claim the space of

the poetry he wrote. This is evident from the poem sequence alone, without additional biographical information: the I's separation from 'the old gang' triggers a feeling of oneness with the world and peace in him, culminating in his decision 'to love [his] life' (I. 57). One could line this up with Auden's journal entry of 23 March: 'I do enjoy my life immensely, more than most I think, not just because one tries to understand'. (J29)

While the influence of John Layard was one reason for Auden's 'Thinking changing and changing living' (II. 1-2) in Berlin, the other change-inducing element was the time Auden spent interacting with the famous 'boys' who have entered literary history through him. Through overcoming his inhibitions and thus putting Layard's theories into practice, Auden was able to see himself in new ways. It was the fact that the boys did not share his nationality, class, or language that granted Auden the space and freedom he needed to come into his own: through having his own behaviour reflected and interacted with in new and unexpected ways.

The Journal gives evidence of Auden's internal posing, his conscious play with identity. He recorded, for example, his first visit to the legendary Berlin 'Passage', one of the rougher pick-up places for boys:

I overcame my fear enough to march up to the boy in the passage when I saw him again and say, 'Bist Du frei nexte Donnerstag?' Her stared coldly at me as he couldn't hear what I said. I repeated it and he lowered his eyes. 'Ja.' 'gut. Um 4 Uhr dann'. and swept off brandishing my cigar picturing myself as the Baron de Charlus. Actually I was a middle class rabbit. (J29)

Auden observed his own development with a surprising amount of self-awareness, consciously developing his self-image as the young poet as his nod to Proust shows. Not only in reference to John Layard, Auden's journal entries from Berlin document how variable Auden's state of mind was during his early twenties. They often fluctuate between extreme states: at times overly confident ('I am the king of Berlin'); at times unnecessarily self-loathing ('my conceit is really appalling'). While he allowed himself to

develop infatuations with certain boys and to pursue his phantasies, he never forgot what he remained to them always: a paying customer.

In the end, the occasion celebrated in '1929' is the 'weaning' of the 'I', the young pup, who has moved as a 'stranger to strangers' and whose time in the 'strange country' is presented in somewhat colonial terms. The new language is a personal language of the self, a way of communicating with the self, which, in the 'strange place', needs not hide behind the ingrown masks of familiar culture and class:

He loves what he hopes will last, which gone,
 Begins the difficult work of mourning,
 And as foreign settlers to strange country come,
 By mispronunciation of native words
 And by intermarriage create a new race
 And a new language, so may the soul
 Be weaned at last to independent delight.
 (III. 25-31)

The embracing of 'independent delight' is contingent on the completion of the process of weaning, the leaving behind of familiar attachments and 'habits'. To let go of this stable system is described as a painful choice; change requires the mental work of 'mourning', perhaps mourning the death of the 'old gang', after all. Out of this somewhat traumatic experience, however, grows something new: the 'I' considers himself to be 'one certain of good' at the very end of the sequence (IV. 22), which, after all, ends with the words 'beautiful, there' (IV. 34). After the 'I' has been resurrected from his temporary burial in a lyrical cocoon, contemplating the relationship between life and self, he reappears with an increased awareness of his soul's contours, embracing a state of simple beautiful presence, which is presented as the requirement for love, true openness, just as the death of one's old selves is.

1.6 THE SIX GERMAN POEMS

Quite clearly, this sharpening of his sensitivities in Berlin allowed Auden to open up to the playfulness of a life in poetry anew. ‘1929’, with its unusual ‘I’ narrator, is one example for this. Another more peculiar example is a set of six poems Auden wrote in German. During the summer holidays of 1930, having returned to Britain after visiting Christopher Isherwood who remained in Berlin until 1933, Auden transformed his memories of Weimar Berlin into verse. More so than ‘1929’, these are thus truly occasional poems: bawdy, never intended for publication, and written out of ‘homesickness’ for the nonchalance of his Berlin life: in the language of his experiences.

The six poems’ obvious topic is ‘new men making another love’ (‘The Wanderer’, CP, 63): they are all explicitly sexual, except for poem 4, and, so the context suggests, addressed to young men. While poems one, two, four and five do not explicitly address a male lover and could also refer to a woman, the other two do: ‘Der arme Junge’ (‘The poor boy’ ([3], p. 8), ‘ein schöner Junge’ ([6], p. 14)). Their nature is far more narrative than Auden’s poems generally tend to be, each telling a separate story: while the first three are complaints, the latter three are flirtatious and positive. Each of them is a study of a relationship between a man and a boy. All this could make one jump to the conclusion that the poems are examples of Auden’s secondary ‘enjoyment of the living’ and that their creation was an act of commemoration: the celebration and poetic elevation of a past life. The strong ‘I’ – despite its shape shifting – is reminiscent of Auden’s voice in the *Journal* and of ‘1929’.

The poem sequence is in a way an inverse version of Rupert Brooke’s ‘The Old Vicarage, Grantchester’, a poem written in Germany out of a nostalgic longing for the English countryside. While in Brooke’s Germany ‘tulips bloom as they are told’, in his beloved English gardens the plants grow in whichever way they want to and ‘das

Betreten's not verboten'.¹²⁷ Evidently, 'The Old Vicarage' is not an objective account but a highly personal one, and in both this and its nostalgia the poem resembles Auden's six German poems.

That these were indeed written in German makes them stand out from Auden's oeuvre: except for a few snippets in the Journal, they are the only surviving source from which we may derive a sense of Auden's German during and after his months in Berlin, and they may be the one single case of Auden writing verse in a language other than English. Much later, he would state in an interview with two Fulbright exchange students at NYU, Suresh Raichura and Amritjit Singh: 'I never wrote any German verses. I don't think one can write poetry in another language'.¹²⁸ Whether by this time Auden had simply forgotten about the six poems or whether he never considered them to be serious efforts, in 1930, Auden's readiness to experiment with verse had not been limited by such truisms.

It is important to note that the German poems were only published long after Auden's death, in 1990, in *The Map of All My Youth* along with an insightful introduction and English translations by David Constantine. They were never intended for publication but a private poetic gift for Christopher Isherwood to whom Auden sent them from Britain in 1930. In an often quoted passage from his contribution to *W.H. Auden: A Tribute*, Isherwood claims that 'after two or three months in Berlin, [Auden] began to write poems in German', referring to those six.¹²⁹ Dzenitis, who did not have

¹²⁷ Rupert Brooke, *The Collected Poems of Rupert Brooke: With a Memoir*. (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1918), 245, 246.

¹²⁸ W.H. Auden, Interview with W.H. Auden [by] Suresh Raichura and Amritjit Singh. Typescript (photocopy) draft with Amritjit Singh's annotations and corrections. Berg Collection, New York Public Library, W.H. Auden collection of papers.

¹²⁹ Christopher Isherwood, "Some Notes on the Early Poetry," in *W.H. Auden: A Tribute*, ed. Stephen Spender (New York: Macmillan, 1975), 77.

access to the poems when he wrote his doctoral thesis in the early 1970s, calls this statement ‘more than an anecdote’.¹³⁰

Constantine, however, shows that Isherwood’s claim about the six German poems is inaccurate since they were written after Auden had moved to Scotland to teach in Helensburgh. John Fuller points out convincingly that the line ‘Es regnet auf mir [*sic*] in den Schottische Lande [*sic*]’ is evidence for this.¹³¹

While Constantine’s criticism is valid with regard to the six poems, Isherwood’s statement is not false: already at the beginning of 1929 Auden had indeed recorded several ‘occasional’ poem-fragments in the journal that were composed in German. One such was written on April 15th. At this point, Auden had become disillusioned with his flame Gerhart:

Sage was Du willst kurz und bestimmt
Laß alle schönen Worte fehlen
Wer nutzlos uns die Zeit nur nimmt
Bestiehlt uns und Du sollst nicht stehlen.¹³²

In this short poem, the ‘I’ commands another person – the context suggests that the ‘I’ is a paying customer and the other a rent boy – to stop playing games with him. As he points out, their time together is limited and the ‘I’ does not feel they are making good use of it. The ‘stealing’ could be read metaphorically, as a rhetorical device to emphasise that instead of talking, the other should make love to him – presumable he has been paid for this after all. Alternatively, this could even be meant literally: Auden’s ‘boys’ often stole from him if they had the opportunity.

¹³⁰ Dzenitis, *Die Rezeption deutscher Literatur in England durch Wystan Hugh Auden, Stephen Spender und Christopher Isherwood*, 20.

¹³¹ All references to the six poems and all English translations – the literal rather than the poetic ones – are taken from: David Constantine, “The German Auden: Six Early Poems,” in “*The Map of All My Youth*”: *Early Works, Friends, and Influences*, ed. Katherine Bucknell and Nicholas Jenkins (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 1–15. [‘It’s raining on me in the Scottish lands’. ([2], p. 6.)]

¹³² My literal translation of this verse:

Say what you want to say succinctly and with determination
Let all the pretty words be missing
Who only takes time from us without use
Steals from us and Thou shalt not steal.

The direct and matter-of-fact language employed by Auden in the fragment – exactly the kind of language the ‘I’ asks his lover to use in the first two lines – is a good example of Auden’s rare poetic voice in German: it possesses a lack of ornamentation which reflects the direct nature for which the inhabitants of Berlin are renowned. Looking back in 1963, Auden stated: ‘ich habe der [*sic*] Berliner so gerne, er ist nicht verendet, diese Kessheit, der Humor, das hatt ich sehr gerne’.¹³³ Auden must have been exposed to the Berlin accent and idiom on a regular basis, mostly through his interaction with those working-class boys he met ‘brothel crawling’. The influence of the Berlin dialect on Auden’s German could be one reason why the language of the six poems has a rather unstudied air. Another is Auden’s difficulty with the German cases and the abundance of slang vocabulary he employs. In the case of his use of personal pronouns it is impossible to tell whether Auden attempted to write in Berlin slang on purpose or whether he got his cases mixed up: typical of ‘Berlinerisch’ is the use of personal pronouns in the dative case (‘mir’, ‘dir’...) when, grammatically speaking, their accusative version (‘mich’, ‘dich’) would be required (‘Man wartet of *Dir* in den feinen Dielen [...]’, [1], p. 4).¹³⁴

Clearly though, many of the colloquial elements in the six poems were intentional. They are occasional verse and consciously written in the language and tone Auden associated with situations he versified. This claim is supported by the fact that in 1965, after he had bought his house in Austria, Auden consciously imitated the Austrian accent in his poem for the poet Joseph Weinheber, using the phrase ‘*in Ruah lassen*’ where the high-German would be ‘*in Ruhe lassen*’, meaning ‘to be left in peace’ (CP,

¹³³ Note: Where Auden says ‘verendet’ (‘perished’) I assume he means ‘verändert’ (‘changed’). (App. G, p. 292.) [‘I like the ‘Berliner’ so much, it has not changed, this pertness, this humour, I liked that very much’. (Ibid., p. 302.)]

¹³⁴ Giving Auden the benefit of the doubt wherever his German departs from the requirements of High German, I thus refrain from marking these cases with a *sic*.

757).¹³⁵ This alone suggests that both this fragment in the Journal and the six German poems have to be read in their proper context to reveal their true meaning. The tone, vocabulary, and situations of the German poems reflect the environment that taught Auden to be more playful, just as they themselves constitute a case of youthful poetic playfulness.

In acquainting oneself with the gay scene of the late Weimar period and its own special culture one is struck by the extent to which Auden's German poems were influenced by this particular social group and their language. The 1920s were the high time of gay literature, journals, magazines, and it is likely that Auden was a keen reader of those. In the Deutschlandfunk interview of 1965, he stated: 'Ich bedaure mich [*sic*], dass es gibt keine gute Zeitung hier jetzt, weil früher es gab viele gute Zeitung [*sic*]'.¹³⁶ While Auden probably did not consciously have gay media in mind when reminiscing about the abundant newspapers and journals in Weimar Berlin at this point, the period is famous for its prolific production of these. Of course, though, the Third Reich put an end to this development soon after it had begun and as a consequence, post-War Germany had to be shaken out of its intolerance again through the protests of 1968.

It is unclear, of course, how well Auden would have understood German gay literature and magazines in 1928, with only his school German to draw from. Even if he might not have understood much to begin with, though, it is evident that he learned quickly. After all, there only would have been a limited core of vocabulary relating to

¹³⁵ Auden's 'relationship' with the Austrian poet Joseph Weinheber, Kirchstetten's local poet before Auden, who had lived in the house next to the one Auden bought, should be explored more. The line itself, as Fuller points out in his commentary, is Weinheber's imaginary reply to Goebbel's imaginary question what should be done to the cultural landscape of Austria. (Fuller, *W.H. Auden*, 509.) Auden's poem continues: '[...] the young | condemn you unread'. ('Joseph Weinheber', CP, 757) This reinforces Fuller's hypothetical scenario, based on the poem, that Auden might have put the individual over politics and have found Weinheber 'good to talk to about verse over a glass of white wine' (Fuller, 509). It is beyond the scope of this thesis to explore Auden's time in Austria, but an in-depth comparison between Auden's poetry and Weinheber's would be useful. In Kirchstetten today, which calls itself 'Dichtergemeinde Kirchstetten' ('Poets' Parish Kirchstetten'), the curious visitor can enjoy visits both at the 'Weinhebermuseum' and the 'Audenhaus'.

¹³⁶ App. G, p. 293. ['I regret that there are no good newspapers here anymore now, because there used to be many good newspapers'. (Ibid., p. 302.)]

the culture of Berlin's gay scene, which Auden would have picked up easily given his immersion and interest in it at the time. The six German poems reinforce this: they are composed of gay-scene vocabulary that Auden picked up from either the 'boys' or the magazines – or both. Towards the end of his stay, Auden must have been able to pick up on and engage with the issues brought up in German gay literature like a native. It is also likely that he discussed them with Christopher Isherwood, and also with John Layard in their conversations about the nature of homosexuality. These sources, dealing with gay issues openly, were something the Englishmen could not have found in their native Britain.

One book in particular can help us to contextualise Auden's German poems, so striking are the similarities in setting, vocabulary, and content. John Henry Mackay's gay cult novel *Der Puppenjunge* (1926), published two years before Auden's arrival in Berlin and thus as representative as can be, is uniquely helpful in shedding light on his experience. Unlike Auden's few references in the *Journal*, the novel provides detailed descriptions of the practices in the kind of Berlin brothels Auden frequented. It is so gripping an account that one is left feeling like one has dipped into Weimar Berlin for the duration of the read; this is an enlightening but not always enjoyable experience as Mackay based his fiction on a great number of interviews he conducted with rent boys and was thus able to see beyond the façade of 20s' easy loving.

In the novel, a young boy named Günther runs away from his foster home and explores Berlin. When running out of money he comes across the Passage, a famous gay pick-up place, and gets invited by a man to come with. Too exhausted to refuse and somewhat curious, he follows the man to his flat where he is initiated into the sex business. Shortly afterwards, the pimp Atze – another new acquaintance – introduces Günther to the unwritten rules and practices of the trade. While Günther quickly assimilates to street life, a man called Hermann Graff falls madly in love with him and

attempts to help him into what he considers a 'normal' life: with a job and a roof over his head, i.e. living with him. The book ends tragically as both Günther and Hermann, having fallen in love after many complications, are put into prison.

Mackay, who was half-Scottish and had grown up with his German mother after the death of his father, settled in Berlin in 1892. By the turn of the century, he had established himself as a poet and writer and felt he needed to lend his voice to the struggle for sexual equality. Under the pseudonym 'Sagitta' he published a range of texts that were part of a series called *Die Bücher der namenlosen Liebe*, a reference to Oscar Wilde who quoted the phrase 'love that dare not speak its name' from Lord Alfred Douglas's poem 'Two Loves' during his 1895 trial. Against great resistance, Mackay fought for the public recognition of homosexuality and self-acceptance amongst homosexuals by exposing in his work his own process of coming to terms with his sexuality. After WWI, the public mood had changed significantly and a new edition of Mackay's work could be announced publically in newspapers though it was still published under pseudonym.¹³⁷ At a time when homosexuality was widely debated and some extreme opinions voiced, Mackay was moderate and wanted all forms of love to be recognised as equal. Like Auden, he was critical of Magnus Hirschfelder and did not appreciate those who tried to elevate homosexuality unnecessarily, whether as a science or as being superior to heterosexuality. Magnus Hirschfelder himself reviewed *Der Puppenjunge*, and very favourably so.

Auden, too, was aware of the book's existence. This fact is interesting because it proves the depth of his entanglement with the German gay movement: not only as a fleeting visitor who could afford to buy sex from unemployed youths, thanks to a favourable exchange rate, but as someone who had both a personal and an intellectual

¹³⁷ Hubert Kennedy, "Der Dichter der Namenlosen Liebe," in *Der Puppenjunge: Die Geschichte einer namenlosen Liebe aus der Friedrichstrasse* (Berlin: Männerschwarm Verlag, 1999), 345.

interest in the matter, visiting the Hirschfelder museum and being familiar with recently re-published cult gay novels.

In his Berlin Journal, Auden refers to *Der Puppenjunge* on the first Wednesday after beginning the Journal, quoting Isherwood as having said to one of their ‘boys’ during a row: ‘Du bist kein Puppenjunge. Du bist mein Freund’. (J29) This shows that both Auden and Isherwood knew Mackay’s book three years after it had appeared and suggests that they were keen to keep up with what the German gay scene was producing. The 1999 edition of *Der Puppenjunge* even uses Isherwood’s praise for promotional purposes, quoting on the flap his statement that the book was an authentic representation and that he had always loved it.¹³⁸

Auden’s reference to Isherwood’s exclamation in the Journal can lead into a discussion of the six German poems. Reading Mackay’s novel, one cannot help noticing significant overlaps between Mackay’s authentic gay-scene vocabulary and the sort of vocabulary Auden used in his poems. *Der Puppenjunge* sheds a new light on Auden’s six German poems by providing an insight into the social environment that shaped Auden, practically and linguistically. It allows us to realise to what degree Auden absorbed and adapted Berlin gay culture and its vocabulary. In 1930, Auden’s homesickness for Berlin, the poetic trigger for his creation of the sequence, necessitated the emergence of a voice that was suitable to express his experience. Evidently, this voice could only be a German one, in precisely the kind of German Auden had picked up together with his Berlin flames.¹³⁹

As Auden often pointed out, each of his poems offered – ideally – the solution both to a problem of content and a problem of style. In the case of the German poems,

¹³⁸ Katherine Bucknell told me in a conversation that the correspondence between Auden and Isherwood is full of references to the book, too. Sadly, I have not been able to travel to California to see the letters and will have to work with the information I have.

¹³⁹ At the same time, Constantine has pointed out: ‘Of the sonnets, all but one use the Shakespearean rhyme-scheme’. There are several references to Shakespeare in the Journal, too. (Constantine, “Six Early Poems,” 3.)

the stylistic problem was the construction of a sequence in a specific German voice that suited the subject matter. The fact that Auden was writing such verse in German at the time but, as far as it is possible to tell, not in English is potentially interesting.

In his recent book *Ich bin Schwul*, Robert Beachy goes as far as to claim that it was only possible for Auden to say ‘I am gay’ in German; that he could say ‘Ich bin schwul’ because it was easy to do so for him in Berlin at the time.¹⁴⁰ Beachy’s title is a reference to Auden’s Berlin Journal where he writes:

In the Tube I had an encounter with a whore. I stared at her feeling ‘I’m the king of Berlin.’ She promptly came and stood beside me till I got out. I wanted to make her an 18th century bow and say ‘Entschuldigen Sie, Madam, aber ich bin schwul.’
(J29)

The passage in its entirety shows that Beachy’s reference is misleading. Auden never actually said the magic words but fancied himself doing so. Still, Beachy’s point is worth considering.

Ten years later, Charles H. Miller, who shared a house with Auden at Ann Arbor, observed about his friend: ‘I was interested to note that he used the word “queer” in private and “homosexual” in public and at-homes, although he used neither in his classes. I recall his first forthright “I am a homosexual man,” in a time when such assertions were rare’.¹⁴¹ Clearly, post-Berlin, Auden was more directly vocal and open about his sexual preferences than most people were at the time. This is supported by various other accounts. The question arising from all this is whether Auden – who later in part traced his homosexuality to Public School practices – had already been able to make similarly affirmative statements beforehand or not. It seems unlikely that he would have, given his letter to Isherwood from 1928 (‘Libido, it is proved, is definitely towards women’).

¹⁴⁰ Beachy, *Ich bin schwul*, 17–19.

¹⁴¹ Charles H. Miller, *Auden: An American Friendship* (New York: Scribner, 1983), 57–58.

Even without a definite answer to this question, everything suggests that Berlin and the German language – and the fact that Auden only used it in a specific, personal context at the time, engaging with German gay culture – gave Auden a freedom to explore and experiment, with his sexuality, his creativity, his personality that he could not have experienced in Britain. This, in turn, made it impossible for him to hide his nature post-Berlin. The German language, which Auden undoubtedly connected with homosexual encounters, seems to have played some role in this liberation process.

In the context of Auden's life, all this is an extraordinary occurrence. In the context of Berlin, however, Auden's experience was in no way extraordinary. The social scene that fascinated Auden had been thriving for over a decade. Some of the situations described by Auden in his Journal, as well as the six poems, could have been based on *Der Puppenjunge* rather than on real-life experiences. Of course it is no surprise that all traces of Auden's German from the time are full of 'gay scene' vocabulary, as this was the primary context of his interaction with the language then. Interestingly, even Auden's second Berlin Journal from 1964 begins with a list of 'rude' German words, as if Auden had wanted to remind himself of the old days (see Chapter Three, p. 242). A sense of what 'the old days' were like and what tensions Auden processed at the time is conveyed in the six German poems.

The first poem of the sequence, 'Lacrimae Rerum', addresses the mercenary nature of the relationships Auden had in Berlin. It is set in a bar where the 'I' and his companion spend a last hour together before they have to part, as it turns out because the boy's services are required by a rich man. Since those Berlin boys who were quite happy to 'go' with men in exchange for food and money often spent their days in certain bars 'until pickup time' – bars where somewhat shady customers were tolerated – such a bar is probably the unlikely setting for a poem entitled 'Lacrimae Rerum'.

The Latin quotation of the title stems from line 462 of the first book of Virgil's *Aeneid*. In the passage, seeing depictions in a temple at Carthage, Aeneas reminisces about the battles fought at Troy and expresses his hope to meet compassionate people in the world. He has only just begun his epic journey, which – as the reader, unlike Aeneas, knows – will find its glorious grand finale in the foundation of Rome. Aeneas is only embarking on his journey at this point though and does not know where it will lead him. ‘*Lacrimae rerum*’ can be translated as ‘the tears of things’ or ‘the tears in things’.

‘*Lacrimae Rerum*’ is a suitable title for a poem describing its ‘I’s problem that his boy keeps expecting money and gifts he is unable or unwilling to give. Because thus ‘things’ are essentially what stand in between the ‘I’ and his ‘boy’, one can imagine that these must be a source of grief to him. Like in the fragment, the ‘I’ is expressing his eagerness to make the most of their last hour (‘*Lass’ uns die letzten Stunde sturmfrei sein*’).¹⁴² The sexual connotations of the colloquial word ‘sturmfrei’ clash with his statement in the first lines that he and his boy should enjoy their time together, drinking their wine and coffee. ‘*Sturmfrei*’, however, suggest that the ‘I’ actually has other quite specific hopes for this last hour. The second stanza summarises the dilemma:

Weil ich kein Geld hab’ komm ich nicht in Frage,
Du liebst dein Leben und ich liebe Dich.¹⁴³

The third stanza further explains the tensions between the ‘I’ and the boy:

Man wartet auf Dir in den feinen Dielen,
Die Stunde geht vorbei, beeil’ Dich nun;
Von Kohlen haben diese Dicken vielen [*sic*],
Mein Traum von Dir mit Dir hat nicht [*sic*] zu tun.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴² [1] p. 4. Constantine renders this as: ‘Let’s have this last hour to ourselves’. (Ibid.) The word ‘sturmfrei’, which he does not translate directly, is worth discussing. As a word, ‘sturmfrei’ is a relict from medieval warfare. A castle was ‘sturmfrei’ when it had not been attacked by an army (in the past) or was built so safely that it could not be taken over by an army. Today, the word is usually used in the phrase ‘sturmfreie Bude’, Bude being a barrack or hut, which denotes the state of affairs teenagers enjoy when their parents are sure not to be at home for a period of time and they thus have the place to themselves. There are sexual connotations.

¹⁴³ Ibid. [‘Since I’ve no money there’s no question of me, You love your life and I love you’.]

As his hour with the lover comes to an end, the ‘I’ cannot help but think of the next ‘customer’ whom the boy will be visiting shortly. He imagines this unknown ‘rival’ to be immensely rich and is clearly frustrated about his own less fortunate situation. Although he would probably like to make time stand still, he does the opposite: he urges the boy to hurry, in order not to be late for his date. The last two lines of the poem – ‘Und dass ich traurig bin ist komisch blos [*sic*]; | Es schadet nicht, mit Dir ist gar nichts los’¹⁴⁵ – come across as an act of defiance: while the ‘I’ wants an exclusive relationship with the boy, reason tells him that the connection between them barely transcends the sexual and the mercenary, and he is trying to enjoy what he has. This dilemma culminates in his true but suspiciously aggrieved-sounding statement that his dream of the boy has nothing to do with the reality of their relationship. It is also what inspires his pretence to be bored by him.

In the context of this kind of poem, Auden’s choice of the Latin quotation as its title is of course striking, while at the same time being in accord with his life-long love for light verse and the interplay of serious and silly elements in his poetry. The clash of Latin learnedness and the poem’s topic – the trials and tribulations of male prostitution – create the impression that Auden had developed an ironic distance to those topics taken so seriously at his schools and university, and maybe also to the institutions themselves. Juxtaposed with the poem’s context, this simple phrase thus creates a strong effect: within the space of the poem both of Auden’s worlds were united and forced to coexist, just as they had started to in his life.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid. [‘They are waiting for you in the fine parlours,
The hour is passing, hurry now;
Of money these fat people have a lot,
My dream of you with you has nothing to do’.]

¹⁴⁵ Ibid. [‘And that I’m sad is funny merely;
It does no harm, you are not worth my while’.]

‘Chorale’, last in the sequence of German poems and the only non-sonnet, is reminiscent of ‘Lacrimae Rerum’ in that it similarly juxtaposes ‘new’ and ‘old’ life. Auden’s choice of form may in this case have been influenced by Bertholt Brecht who often used chorales in his plays, for instance in ‘Die Dreigroschenoper’, a performance of which Auden attended in 1928. David Constantine states: ‘Perhaps Auden knew of the “Großer Dankchoral” in Brecht’s *Hauspostille*? Certainly he had heard the ‘Großer Dankchoral’ with which Act 1 of the *Dreigroschenoper* begins’.¹⁴⁶ But irrespective of the parallels with Brecht, Auden’s instructions that ‘Chorale’ should be sung to the tune of the chorale from Bach’s *Matthäuspassion* traditionally sung to the words ‘O Haupt voll Blut und Wunden’ (‘O Sacred Head, Sore Wounded’) is as striking as his choice of a Latin title for the first German poem.

With his choice of this specific tune as the setting for a bawdy poem in German, Auden established a connection between the union of the sinner with Christ on the one hand and the sexual union of the ‘T’ and his lover in Berlin on the other. Without the nod to Bach, ‘Chorale’ would simply be a fairly obscene poem expressing the vexation felt by the ‘T’ about being separated from his lover and thus deprived of sexual fulfilment, an opportunity for Auden, so it seems, to remind himself of the many rude German words he had learned in Berlin. Together with the unlikely theme tune though, the poem becomes an act of derision that would have been pure blasphemy in the eyes of, for instance, Auden’s mother. While at first sight, this might seem like Auden’s foray into Berlin’s underworld had made him reckless and keen to shock, I feel the case is more complex.

The last stanza of ‘Chorale’ picks up the religious theme of the Passion Chorale when the main character swears that he will be ‘fromm’ in England without his lover. It is important to recognise the religious nature of this word: it has no meaning in an

¹⁴⁶ Constantine, “Six Early Poems,” 2.

irreligious context. Thus Constantine's translation of it as 'well-behaved', even in his literal translation, is misleading. Better translations might be 'pious' or 'devout'. Auden himself knew the proper meaning of the word, at least in 1963 when he used it in reference to his parents' religiosity: 'meine Eltern waren fromm und ich bin als Christ erzogen'.¹⁴⁷ This suggests that, consciously or not, Auden created a link between homosexual love and impiety in 'Chorale': the lover is 'fromm' without his lover while in his company he lives in sin.

Five years before his death, on 27 January 1968, Auden stated in a letter to his Italian translator, Aurora Ciliberti:

Though reason tells me that homosexuality is a derangement of nature, and, as a Christian, I must acknowledge that to be homosexual is to be in sin, I must honestly say that I have never had any feeling of guilt about the matter, nor felt in any way 'alienated' from normal people. But then I am in the fortunate position of having a vocation in life which is more important to me than personal relations.¹⁴⁸

Throughout his life, Auden equated homosexuality with sin despite 'living in sin' relatively openly, though not as demonstratively perhaps as Christopher Isherwood. 'Chorale' suggests that despite his 'wild' Berlin year, despite the fact that at the time he had distanced himself from the faith of his childhood, despite the fact that he dissolved his engagement and chose the life of an artist over that of a family man, Auden retained the feeling that homosexuality was something negative.

Nevertheless, Auden's experiences in Berlin were of course meaningful and life-changing: they provided him with a reason for self-reflection. The six poems leave one with the sense that in writing these- for him, unusual- poems, Auden intellectually processed his carefree German period, which by this time had come to an end. While they could be interpreted as blasphemous or disrespectful, Auden's use of the Chorale

¹⁴⁷ App. G, p. 286. ['My parents were devout and I was brought up as a Christian'. (Ibid., p. 296.)]

¹⁴⁸ W.H. Auden, Letter to Aurora Ciliberti on the 27.01.1968. Berg Collection, New York Public Library, W.H. Auden collection of papers.

setting and the Latin title ‘*Lacrimae Rerum*’ may also be read as being indicative of Auden’s inability to quite let go of his own middle class education and background. This is equally true for Auden’s term ‘The Pure in Heart’, which he used to refer to the carefree boys who behaved in accordance with Layard’s doctrines, and were thus according to Isherwood ‘without worries or inhibitions [...] entirely without fear [...] and without sexual guilt. Above all, he was profoundly, fundamentally happy’.¹⁴⁹ Strikingly, the term is of course derived from the King James Bible version of the Gospel of Matthew, specifically Matthew 5:8. While through the influence of Berlin and her boys Auden had given up on his aspirations of leading a conventional, married life – indulging instead in trial-and-error ‘relationships’ with rent boys, which existed more in his imagination than in reality – he would always remain a child of his culture, generation, class, and education. It is telling that unlike Isherwood, Auden left Berlin after 1929, and even more so that he rejoined a quintessentially British environments, the public school.

Clearly though, Berlin and its gay culture resonated with Auden even after his return to England. Both the setting of ‘*Lacrimae Rerum*’, written in England, and the vocabulary used by Auden are reminiscent of *Der Puppenjunge*. ‘Feine Dielen’ is a rather strange reference to a posh house, and the slang word ‘Kohle’ for money sounds picked up straight from the streets of Berlin – or indeed from Mackay’s book. The lines ‘Denn jede Liebe hat ihr [*sic*] eigene Lage | Und jede Art von Liebe denkt an sich [...]’¹⁵⁰ corresponds with a passage in Mackay’s preface to the second edition of *Die Bücher der Namenlosen Liebe*, which appeared in 1924 and probably would have been the one Auden read:

¹⁴⁹ Carpenter, *W.H. Auden*, 91.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid. [‘For every love has its own situation
And every sort of love thinks of itself [...]’.]

Denn im Grunde versteht doch Jeder nur seine eigene Liebe und jede andere ist ihm fremd und unverständlich, wenn nicht unheimlich. Auch hier kann nur das Begreifen des Rechts auf gleiche Freiheit, die Duldung fremder Wesensart als letztes und höchstes Kulturergebnis, heilend wirken.¹⁵¹

If, indeed, Auden had Mackay's words in mind when writing 'Lacrimae Rerum', he changed their meaning profoundly since Mackay does not at all suggest that love is selfish. To the contrary, he argues that while everyone can only know his own way of loving, he should be aware and respectful of those who love differently, i.e. every other individual. Auden on the other hand presents love as selfish while retaining the premise that every love has to be treated as a new case. In a way, this is the 'theme' of the six poems, which reflect six different kinds of 'love'.

In fact, the situation described in the poem is so strongly reminiscent of Graff's feelings at one point in the book that it could have been written from his perspective as 'the more loving one' in *Der Puppenjunge*. In the novel, Graff is pursuing Günther for the most part of their relationship, while Günther is primarily interested in him as an easy source of money, shuns him when he cannot give him money, and quite simply misunderstands his loving gestures. While this might seem counterintuitive, the power-relationship between them is out of balance, with Graff having to accept Günther's brazenness in his great love if he wants to continue seeing his 'beloved', whom he has only met a few times and does not know well at all. At this point in the story, Graff's love is primarily fantasy and projection.

Der Puppenjunge is valuable in giving the reader a sense of the dynamics existing between boys and their various older customers, describing their respective dependencies and independencies. He describes how the attitude of the customer could range from strictness and insistence on his wishes being fulfilled in cases where the boy

¹⁵¹ Kennedy, "Der Dichter der Namenlosen Liebe," 348. ["Because really, everyone only understands his own love and every other one is foreign to him and incomprehensible, if not uncanny. Here, too, only the true comprehension of one's right to equal freedom, the tolerance of dispositions foreign to one as the last and highest achievement of culture, can have a healing effect'.]

was more dependent and reliant on the other's money, to boundless tolerance when he was infatuated with the boy. Similarly, Auden's poems explore a range of dependencies.

In poem three, the 'I' describes his feelings towards his 'boy' who goes from lover to lover without having a 'real' relationship. In a way he seems to pity him for his detachment and his obsession with material goods. All that he gains from their relationship are presents and the association with 'his name', but nothing more profound. At the same time though, the 'I' seems bitter, making a sardonic comment about the boy's 'mies [*sic*] Figur'¹⁵² and summarising their relationship thus:

Er kann uns küssen und nicht kennen lernen;
So sind wir nicht allein und nicht zusammen.¹⁵³

The speaker assesses the relationship with his lover realistically: they do not get to know the essence of each other despite being intimate, which, of course, is an unalterable consequence of the kind of relationship they have. Still, their physical union does function as a temporary anaesthetic for his feeling of essential loneliness. Thus, the 'beloved' or at least 'desired' one is turned into a mere projection screen at a time when the 'I' has already left behind the world of cheap love in Berlin. In the journal, Auden shows an awareness of this process when he describes his growing infatuation with Gerhart as 'the gradual replacement of feeling by phantasy'. Partly, this must have been a substitute for the development of 'real', deep relationships with them, which Auden desired but failed to achieve. Thus he writes in another entry about Gerhart: 'He seems to belong to another world and might go up in smoke any moment'.

It is probably fair to say that although Auden seems to have felt strongly about some of the 'boys' he slept with in Berlin, he was always aware of the fact that these relationships were not truly romantic but mercenary. At the end of 'Chorale', the last

¹⁵² [1], p. 4. ['his miserable figure'.]

¹⁵³ [3], p. 8. ['He can kiss us and not get to know us
So we are not alone and not together'.]

poem in the series, for instance, the mercenary nature of the kind of relationships lead by the 'I' is emphasised when he states that far away in England he will save 'Blubber und Geld' for a time when he will return to his boy.¹⁵⁴ 'Blubber' might again be a word used by the Berlin boys at the time – unless Auden intended to refer to what in German is called 'Lebertran' (wale-fat) – while 'Blubber' is not a word commonly used to refer to 'spunk', as Constantine has it, now. Interesting is the ambiguity that would only have been detected by the English speaking writer and reader: the word hides the English expression 'to blub'. Thus there are two associations hidden in the line. The 'I' might be saving 'spunk' and money while anticipating his next visit to Berlin in England, but he is also saving tears.

England and Germany are also contrasted in the second poem. Here, Auden describes the increasing awareness developed by the 'I' of the physical and mental inequality between him and his lover after his return to Britain. The lines '[m]an redet hier von Kunst am Wochenende | Bin jetzt [*sic*] zu Hause'¹⁵⁵ contrast with 'nicht mehr in Berlin [...] sieh immer besser aus'.¹⁵⁶ While for the 'I', 'home' stands for intellectual conversations about art at the weekend, in Berlin he would have been in the company of good-looking lovers and exposed to superficial delights. After his return home, his fascination fades and he concludes: 'Wir sehen uns nie wieder',¹⁵⁷ drawing a line under a period of juvenile pleasure and initiating a more adult phase, devoted without compromise to his art. This reflects Auden's state in 1930 when he had started to teach in Helensburgh.

It is crucial to point out that Auden was not only distancing himself from 'married life' and singing the praises of love that was bought cheaply by the time he had left Germany behind. Although sex remained a matter of business to Auden throughout his

¹⁵⁴ [6], p. 14. ['To save blubber and money'.]

¹⁵⁵ [2], p. 6. ['They talk here of art at the weekend | Am now at home'.]

¹⁵⁶ Ibid. ['no longer in Berlin [...] Look better and better'.]

¹⁵⁷ Ibid. ['We'll never see each other again'.]

life – when he returned to Berlin in 1964, he somewhat distastefully swapped English lessons for sexual favours¹⁵⁸ – the six poems are testimony to the fact that shortly after having returned to the UK, Auden was able to regard the Berlin business with ironic distance. There was a difference between Auden and Isherwood in this respect, and Isherwood's juxtaposition of the term 'Puppenjunge' with 'Freund' ('Du bist kein Puppenjunge. Du bist mein Freund') reflects this, demonstrating Isherwood's wish, like Graff's, to have a 'Verhältnis' rather than to spend occasional nights with a boy. In 1932, Isherwood met his first love Heinz Neddermeyer, with whom he lived in Germany until the Nazi seizure of power in 1933.

Auden was more pragmatic. He had understood and accepted the rules of the 'market' and strove to fulfill the boys' expectations of how he, as a 'rich' foreigner, was supposed to act. Poem three, for instance, reflects Auden's experience that the boys often insisted on being given gifts. Again, *Der Puppenjunge* confirms this as being authentic, showing that amongst the boys, gifts were prestige objects: the better the gift, the more respected the boy. In one scene, the narrator states that when talking amongst themselves, the boys had only one topic for their conversations, 'Herren und Geld'.¹⁵⁹ In another scene, they talk about how the bad times are and deplore the fact that 'die Fremden fehlten, die reichen Amerikaner und die Schweden, mit ihren Dollars und Kronen'.¹⁶⁰ In the journal, Auden even criticises an American who had boasted to him that he 'liked having boys when he didn't have to pay'. Auden on the other hand considered it 'a pleasure to feel one is really giving a person something they need'.

His awareness of the goings-on in the Berlin gay scene allowed Auden to recreate six different scenarios relating to the boys in poetic form, and these probably reflect his own experiences and feelings. In the third poem, the 'I' describes his feelings towards his

¹⁵⁸ Carpenter, *W.H. Auden*, 412.

¹⁵⁹ John Henry Mackay, *Der Puppenjunge: Die Geschichte einer namenlosen Liebe aus der Friedrichstrasse* (Berlin: Rosa Winkel, 1999), 104.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 113.

boy who goes from lover to lover without having a relationship. In a way the ‘I’ seems to pity him for his detachment and his obsession with material goods:

Der arme Junge, der kein Verhältnis hat
Und nur als Konpter [?] zwischen Menschen geht;

Der trägt Geschenke blos [*sic*]

but does not gain anything more profound.¹⁶¹ The word ‘Konpter’ used here, if the original transcription is correct, could be an obscure word Auden – and Isherwood, for whom the poems were, after all, written – learned from the boys and that is unknown to both David Constantine and myself. Alternatively, Auden invented it.

More interesting is the word ‘Verhältnis’ (‘relationship’) and the fact that Auden stressed it in this way in the poem. Mackay’s novel suggests that ‘Verhältnisse’ were important topics of conversation amongst the boys but not always well regarded. In the book, boys who saw a customer more than a few times were suspected of having a ‘Verhältnis’ and mocked for it by their fellows. Thus one of the first pieces of advice ‘Atze’ – Günther’s first acquaintance in Berlin who introduces him to the ways of the street – is that a proper rent boy never enters into ‘Verhältnisse’. This conditioning has the consequence that Günther disrespects Graff’s honest attempts to help him and to find him ‘eine Stellung’ (‘a job’). Seemingly, the ‘I’ in Auden’s poem feels, like Graff, that this lack of willingness to build up trust and a lasting relationship was deplorable. In the novel, Graff is proven both right and wrong: Günther finally recognizes that Graff’s love is unconditional and opens up to him, but as this happens, both are jailed. Auden’s own bias, too, seems to have been towards lasting relationships, so much so that he would later turn Chester Kallman into the object of a projected ‘marriage’. To pay for sex, on the other hand, Auden seems to have regarded as a practicality that was

¹⁶¹ [3], p. 8. [‘The poor boy who has no relationship
And only as a transaction goes between people;
He carries presents merely [...]’.]

detached from his feelings, helped to silence his appetites, and put him in a mindset where he could focus on his work.

Because of Auden's general tendency to dominate situations and relationships, poem four is perhaps the strangest of the lot. In it, the 'I' allows his feelings of utter happiness to play havoc with his sense of self. While previously work was the centre of his life, he now feels that he needs nothing but to have his lover gaze upon him to be content. In this poem, several words occur that can be found in *Der Puppenjunge*: for instance the aforementioned 'Stellung' ('Wenn du ein [*sic*] Stellung hast'¹⁶²) and the more surprising 'Geschäftliche Reise' (should be 'geschäftliche Reise': 'nach Dir | Mein [*sic*] einzige Geschäftliche Reise ist'.¹⁶³). A 'Geschäftsreise' is mentioned in Mackay's novel, which is the more idiomatic way of putting it.¹⁶⁴

Although Graff never considers giving up his work for Günther in the fictional account, his attitude towards his beloved is as devoted and servile as that of the 'I' in the third poem. The 'I' feels he is stupid like an animal since his meeting with the beloved one, with whom he seems to have a firm relationship. Suddenly, because of this, he no longer depends on his work to give him a sense of purpose but feels he would be content to do other people's laundry or clean for them. This culminates in the two fantastic, though rather 'Denglish', lines:

Weil, wenn Du kukst mir an, dann ist mir wie
Ich König wär ein grosses [*sic*] Industrie.¹⁶⁵

Poem three is the only one in the sequence that addresses a relationship, if at all: it consists chiefly of the 'I' projections and does not allow one to get a sense of the reality

¹⁶² [4], p. 10. ['If you have an employment'.]

¹⁶³ Ibid., ['My only business journey is'.]

¹⁶⁴ Mackay, *Der Puppenjunge*, 133.

¹⁶⁵ [4], p. 10. ['For when you look at me I feel as though I were the king of a great industry'.]

of it all. Special about it is Auden's poetic posing, his role-playing within the space of the poem's little room.

This is true about the other poems, too, although these – by contrast – make plain that the emotions felt and expressed by the 'I' are in reference to male prostitutes. All poems, one could say, tell stories of hopes, expectations, and fantasies that were projected on interchangeable subjects. As a result, all convey a sense of frustration felt by the 'I' that the encounters with the German boys were not what he would have liked them to be, and his various degrees of desperation because of this.

Auden's poetic analysis of his interactions with the Berlin boys corresponds with his more immediate analyses in the *Journal*, reflecting his personal experiences with Gerhart and other lovers. Despite his relative pragmatism, Auden was of course not unsusceptible to male charms. Gerhart understood particularly well how to profit most from his generosity: by never allowing him to feel too secure emotionally he made sure that his source of money and gifts would not run dry. Auden made this an easy task, and it says much about Auden's character that he never thought he was being mistreated when his Berlin lovers took liberties with him. While writing in his journal on April 16th: 'I feel that it is too easy to say "He's a bad egg. I made a mistake." If a person does one an injury one is always half to blame', Auden did not romanticise the 'Juvenile Delinquents' behaviour but was sorely aware of the bleak reality behind their apparent greed.

Auden was infatuated with Gerhart for a time and wrote about him: 'he has the most extraordinary power I have met in any one. He laid his hand on my knee and switched on the current, an amazing sensation'. (J29) In '1929' Auden turned this into the 'fresh hand with fresh power' on the arm of the 'I' (I. 7-8). Despite writing in reference to him: 'I am so jealous with him that I am frightened when he goes to the lavatory that [he] won't come back', Auden accepted that he played no major role in

Gerhart's life and had no emotional or intellectual impact on him. On April the 1st he recorded: 'I kissed him and we parted. "Viel Glück. Und gut verdienen"' ['Good luck. And much income'.] and on April 5th he even assessed: '[his] mixture of affection and selfishness seems just right'.

After a terrible trip to Hamburg with Gerhart, Auden was finally able to dispel his feelings for the ungrateful object of his desire. Feeling it had been partly his homosexual guilt ('Call yourself a man'. (J29)) that had made him so obsessed with Gerhart in the first place, Auden deduced:

It is not always realised by myself that the attraction of buggery is partly its difficulty and torments. Heterosexual love seems so tame and easy after it. I feel like this with Sheilah. There is something in reciprocity that is despair. (J29)

It is at this point in the journal that Auden called suffering a stimulant of his creativity ('How one likes to suffer'). Indeed, it seems that as a poet, Auden considered his amazement about the handsome 'other' to be just as valuable as the emotional and physical discomfort which the Berlin 'boys' seem to have induced in him: both could serve him as literary tools. In *Secondary Worlds*, Auden later wrote:

[...] if he did not experience such feelings of awe, wonder, enchantment, in the primary world, I very much doubt if the Poet would desire or believe it possible to create secondary worlds. Being a man, not God, a poet cannot create *ex nihilo*. If our desire to create secondary worlds arises at least in part from our dissatisfaction with the primary world, the latter must first be there before we can be dissatisfied with it. (SW, 51)

In Berlin, through his fantastic and mercenary but nonetheless very 'real' affairs with a number of boys, Auden learned to turn dissatisfaction into poetic substance. This is true despite the seeming contradiction that really, Auden did not write any Berlin poetry that was of public consequence: in contrast to Isherwood, no direct, tangible, literary product resulted from Auden's nine months in Berlin. Of course, '1929' can be interpreted as a

Berlin poem, and a poem that disclosed Auden's development at the time, but this requires the support of biographical material: Auden's contemporaries would not have 'understood' the references in this way, as personal references, unless they were close friends and knew the stories first or second hand.

As to the six German poems, these were not intended for publication and written for Isherwood, who would have understood all hidden references, to the Berlin boys they knew and to gay literature such as *Der Puppenjunge*. Yet while being private documents, the poems – accessible to us now – are a striking expression of Auden's 'life-wish', as defined by him in the *Journal*: through writing the poems in German, Auden set himself apart from his literary tradition; he also distanced himself from his family and upbringing by celebrating his 'sinful' disposition as a homosexual while invoking traditions of learning and religion, in 'Chorale' and 'Lacrimae Rerum', that officially had no place for homosexuality. This is true despite the fact that, as I have shown, Auden subverts his own irony in the poems. Auden's changeable attitudes are also put into perspective by the fact that only two years previously, he had still tried to be 'converted' from homosexuality through psychoanalysis, and that he was engaged throughout his Berlin year. When Auden finally ended his engagement with Sheilah Richardson, he wrote to Bill McElwee: 'Never, never again. This is a criticism of me, not of marriage'.¹⁶⁶ Davenport-Hines even calls Auden's choice 'a death of sorts'¹⁶⁷ – and this is not inaccurate. It was certainly a great caesura, an admission to himself that he did not want to be more than a product of his class. His symbolic dissolution of his engagement constituted a drastic step in his personal history.

It is striking though that even if Auden did not necessarily learn to acknowledge and embrace his 'gayness' as fully as Isherwood did – Isherwood did not become a gay icon without reason – and did not go about proclaiming 'I am gay' or 'Ich bin schwul'

¹⁶⁶ Davenport-Hines, *Auden*, 101.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

as Beachy claims, Auden did learn more about the person he wanted to be. This becomes obvious from his ‘posing’ in the Berlin Journal, in ‘1929’, in the six German poems, from his ability to say ‘I’ more pronouncedly than ever before in his poetry. While Spender calls his most early poetry ‘intellectually over- and emotionally underdeveloped’ in its obsession with mines and the landscapes of industrial areas, in Berlin more anthropocentric topics found their way into Auden’s writing.¹⁶⁸ In the Journal he summarizes:

Country on a fine day makes one feel why do I bother about people. They are insignificant. But country is not enough.

Maybe an explanation for Auden’s lack of direct poetic engagement with Berlin could be that he had a tendency not to turn the events that truly touched him into poetry. A more negative example of this – compared with his Berlin experiences that were unsettling in a positive way – is Auden’s silence in the face of the horrors he witnessed when visiting Germany with the US Army in 1945 (see Chapter 3.1-3.2). A letter to Naomi Mitchison, written from Birmingham on 5 August 1930, shows that Berlin had affected him greatly and that he missed his life there in the following year: ‘[...] I am much too miserable at having to leave Berlin to write a decent letter’.¹⁶⁹

A passage in Auden’s journal shows additionally that the poet-in-the-making was still struggling with his work-routine while in Berlin; feelings of inadequacy were still haunting him:

Damn this laziness. I envy the ease of so many writers. I sit down for an hour or so and think of about two lines. Is this genuine difficulty or just lack of concentration. My work is shabby. I want to do something on a larger scale. Or must I wait until I am forty [...] I know what I write is obscure. To others this is just being too lazy to think things out properly. When I have an idea I never

¹⁶⁸ Monroe K. Spears and Stephen Spender, eds., “W.H. Auden and His Poetry,” in *Auden: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1964), 30.

¹⁶⁹ W.H. Auden, Letter to Naomi Mitchison from 5 August 1930, Letters to Naomi Mitchison. Berg Collection, New York Public Library, W.H. Auden collection of papers.

know whether to finish it or to wait till I have some more.
Laziness – Impatience.

On the one hand, it would not be surprising if during his time in Berlin, Auden lacked that rigid work routine which he would later adhere to – given his lifestyle at the time. On the other hand, the passage could simply be indicative of the mind of the young writer who projects perfection on more established writers whose ‘ease’ is probably a projection by Auden rather than a reality.

1.7 THE 1930S: A LONG DECADE

Auden’s instinct to return to Britain and earn his living as a teacher, while using the somewhat monastic conditions at the public school to focus his attention on the production of poetry and verse plays, seems to have had a beneficial effect on his work. By the summer holidays of 1931, which he spent on Rügen Island with Isherwood and Spender, Auden had transcended his fascination with the German body cult. According to Carpenter, he stayed indoors working on *The Orators* while his friends and various German boys were nude sunbathing on the beach.¹⁷⁰ In *The Dance of Death*, published a year later, Auden even has a group of bathers proclaim proto-Fascist statements that were clearly modelled on the German free body culture movement – which indeed was associated with National Socialism. In the years after he left Berlin, Auden solidified the rigorous work routine to which he adhered throughout his life and which was the foundation of his prolificacy.

The 1930s were a long decade for Auden, in the same way that historians sometimes characterise a century as ‘long’. While the early 30s brought the sudden explosion of Auden’s fame as a writer and his sudden immersion in politics, in the late 30s Auden distanced himself from the British literary world, from political engagement, and from Britain geographically through his move to America. According to John

¹⁷⁰ Carpenter, *W.H. Auden*, 123.

Auden, his brother's 'reasons for going to America were not then so much disgust with Chamberlain as a dislike of the narrow intellectualism of the English establishment, and the desire not to become a "court" poet'.¹⁷¹ Somewhat ironically, the bitter critical reactions of the British public when Auden 'fled the burning ship' just before the outbreak of WWII proved him right in his conviction that British culture and society was too familiar and too narrow to inspire his growth as an artist. In addition to this, Auden developed his restless international life style during the 30s, travelling to Iceland, Spain, and China, among others.

The decade was, of course, a politically charged one, and Auden's engagement with politics is an interesting and difficult case. His 'change of heart' – a term he used in a 1939 letter to Annie Edwards Dodds written in reference to his 'new' apolitical stance¹⁷² – between the middle and the end of the 30s was not a linear process: during this period, Auden's behaviour and written statements concerning politics were therefore often inconsistent.

The extent of Auden's 'change of heart', and the way it was perceived by his British critics, can be shown exemplarily through his engagement with the work of two German-speaking poets from the opposite ends of the poetic and political spectrum: Bertolt Brecht and Rainer Maria Rilke. As my literature review has shown, there has been much critical interest in Auden's respective engagement with Brecht and Rilke, which suggests that in both cases, there are indeed important parallels to draw. That critics have compared Auden's political didactic plays, written in the early 30s, to those of Brecht, while detecting many similarities to Rilke in his poetry of the late 30s, is striking to anyone who recognises just how different in nature these two poets were.

¹⁷¹ John Auden, "A Brother's Viewpoint," in *W.H. Auden: A Tribute*, ed. Stephen Spender (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1975), 28.

¹⁷² Bell, "Auden to the Doddses," 95.

What this German comparative ‘lens’ indicates is that after his experimentation with personal relationships and a kind of self-reinvention in 1928/1929 Berlin, during the 30s Auden experimented with poetic relationships. Later, Auden reflected:

Between the ages of twenty and forty we are engaged in the process of discovering who we are, which involves learning the differences between accidental limitations which it is our duty to outgrow and the necessary limitations of our nature beyond which we cannot trespass with impunity.¹⁷³

As an artist, Auden had yet to decide what exactly the point of his work should be. Indicative of this is his persistent interest in the social role of the artist, one of the great continuities in Auden’s thinking during the 30s, although his views on the matter changed dramatically.

Auden left Berlin with the sense that Europe was in turmoil. During the next years, he moved beyond his Berlin thinking and writing, which had focussed on the individual and his or her state of mind, role, and development. Now, Auden began to be interested in society at large, slowly widening his simplistic, dualist picture – based largely on the German free-body movement – contrasting the weak, complex-ridden intellectually minded person with the strong and happy adventurer. After Auden’s acknowledgement of his own personal dissatisfaction in Berlin and the emergence of an ‘I’ in his poetry, he began to diagnose and address dissatisfaction on a wider scale.

G. Davey Smith makes a most insightful case in his commentary ‘W.H. Auden, G.A. Auden and psychosomatic aetiology’ (2002) about ‘Comrades, who when the sirens roar’. He quotes the two stanzas later deleted by Auden to demonstrate that in the early 30s, Auden’s interest in psychology was broadened from the level of the individual to that of society:

¹⁷³ Auden, *The Dyer’s Hand*, 5.

The worst employer's double-dealing
 Is better than their mental healing
 That would assist us.
 The world, they tell us, has no flaws
 There is no need to change the laws
 We're only not content because
 Jealous of sisters.

Once masters struck with whips; of recent
 Years by being jolly decent
 For these are cuter
 Fostering the heart's self-adulation
 Would dissipate all irritation
 Making a weakened generation
 Completely neuter.

These stanzas, according to Smith, emphasised the 'evident disapproval Auden felt towards the attribution of psychological and psychosomatic outcomes to failings of the individual, rather than to the broader social environment, from the family level up to that of the state'.¹⁷⁴

Throughout the early 30s, he would express this sense that something was going wrong in societies, in others just as well as in his own:

Sombre the sixteen skies of Europe
 And the Danube flood.

[...] Hitler and Mussolini in their wooing poses,
 Churchill acknowledging the voters' greeting,
 Roosevelt at the microphone, van der Lubbe laughing [...]
 ('A Bride in the 30s', CP, 129-130)

Auden wrote political plays and poetry and travelled to war-zones. Meanwhile though, his identity as the public voice of his generation of left-wing middle-class intellectuals was short-lived and comparatively inauthentic. He was never an ardent communist, certainly not by the time he went to Spain. Philip Toynbee, himself a left-wing writer and journalist, commented that 'the politics of middle-class intellectuals in those days

¹⁷⁴ Smith, "Commentary," 1138.

were really a kind of hobby – a passionate stimulant rather than a burdensome and cruel necessity'.¹⁷⁵

Quite possibly, Auden's 'political phase' can be located somewhere between poetic role-play and public projection. While he was taken for a communist by some, he wrote to Stephen Spender between June and July of 1933: 'I'm no more of a communist than you are but to achieve the kind of society I think we both wish for, it is fatal to ignore the national psychological factor'.¹⁷⁶ It was Auden's enduring interest in psychology, now with a theoretical interest in society, not the individual, that constituted the driving force behind Auden's interest in the political events of the 30s.

Most fascinatingly, Auden's thinking was not limited by borders. While later, especially abroad, scholars have tended to trace reasons for Germany's 'fall' to the Nazis in her intellectual history and a specific national mind-set, Auden was interested in psychological, universal insights, not in nationalist prejudices. Psychology itself to Auden was international; the 'trouble' was international. His application of the psychological thought system he had adopted from John Layard in Berlin, which worked on the level of the individual, to societies as a whole, is one of his most striking achievements in the early 30s. Auden analysed not only the disease elsewhere, but also that of his own home country, Great Britain: '[...] this country of ours where nobody is well'.¹⁷⁷

With this approach, international and psychological, Auden was very much ahead of his time. Auden had witnessed the beginnings of Germany's bleakest history in Berlin, and again when he travelled to Europe with two old boys of Downs School, Michael

¹⁷⁵ Quoted in: Buell, *W.H. Auden as a Social Poet*, 105.

¹⁷⁶ W.H. Auden, Letter to Stephen Spender from Downs School in Malvern, undated, between June and July 1933. Letters to Stephen Spender, Berg Collection, New York Public Library, W.H. Auden collection of papers.

¹⁷⁷ W.H. Auden, *The Orators: An English Study* (London: Faber & Faber, 1966), 14. Hannah Arendt used the dedicational poem to Stephen Spender at the beginning of *The Orators* in her 1975 Sonnings Prize acceptance speech.

Yates and Peter Roger, after the summer term of 1934. Having visited the German towns of Cologne, Eisenach, and Dresden, Auden wrote in the school magazine after his return that Germany, now run by the Nazi party, seemed like it was “‘being run by a mixture of gangsters and the sort of school prefect who is good at Corps’”. And at Eisenach: “Sat in a café in the market square listening to Hitler shouting from Hamburg. Sounded like a Latin lesson.”¹⁷⁸ It is striking that repeatedly Auden compared Fascism with elements of the British public school system. Maybe this ‘association of ideas’ is related to the fact that Auden felt the urge to detect and address problems in his society rather than alerting the public to the dangers of Naziism: this would have been truly political.

Instead, Auden felt it was his duty as an artist to confront a wider audience with a diagnosis of their society’s failures. He set *The Dog Beneath the Skin* (1930) in a stereotypical English village, for instance, in order to hold the mirror up to his own nation, playing ambiguously with the modish, nationalist term ‘enemy’.¹⁷⁹ In his diagnoses, Auden was more often than not to the point; and he delivered them beautifully in his work throughout the 1930s:

In the nightmare of the dark
 All the dogs of Europe bark,
 And the living nations wait,
 Each sequestered in its hate;

Intellectual disgrace
 Stares from every human face,
 And the seas of pity lie
 Locked and frozen in each eye.
 (‘In Memory of W.B. Yeats, CP, 249)

This, however, is in part what led to the perception of Auden as a political poet: the beauty and accurateness of his diagnoses. To diagnose a social problem correctly is, on

¹⁷⁸ Carpenter, *W.H. Auden*, 169.

¹⁷⁹ This is even more obvious in *The Orators*. For a rich discussion of this, see Fir. 41-42.

the whole, not a political act if one does not also offer possible ways of solving the problem. This was not Auden's strength and interest though.

Interesting, too, is the 'Germanisation' of Auden's language in the early 30s and through the plays, for instance in *The Dance of Death* (1933), as Firchow points out:

[...] the Manager shifts in and out of heavily accented English, saying things like 'Vy make so a trobble in my theatre' while noting that entire dialogues are direct English translations of idiomatic German phrases, such as in the case of 'Day my sir.', 'How goes it thee?', 'Thou hast thyself too well amused, not true?'. (Fir, 61)

A proper analysis of Auden's Germanic-sounding lines in the plays, as well as in his poetry, would be valuable, but is beyond the scope of what can be done here. It seems to me though that a function of these strangely disruptive phrases could be the breaking up of strict national affiliations.

How political Auden actually was during this period is impossible to say, not least because this would be dependent on a definition of what constituted political acts. Yet what is evident though is that Auden rarely offers suggestions for solutions to the problems he satirically addresses in the poems, and that, in the long run, he was not happy with his image as the British left-wing oracle. Fascinatingly, he wrote about Goethe's *Die Leiden des jungen Werther* in the following excerpt from his 'Writing' essay:

The work of a young writer – *Werther* is the classic example – is sometimes a therapeutic act. He finds himself obsessed by certain ways of feeling and thinking of which his instinct tells him he must be rid before he can discover his authentic interests and sympathies, and the only way by which he can be rid of them forever is by surrendering to them. Once he has done this, he has developed the necessary antibodies which will make him immune for the rest of his life. As a rule, the disease is some spiritual malaise of his generation. If so, he may, as Goethe did, find himself in an embarrassing situation. What he wrote in order to exorcise certain feelings is enthusiastically welcomed by his contemporaries because it expresses just what they feel but,

unlike him, they are perfectly happy to feel in this way; for the moment they regard him as their spokesman.¹⁸⁰

As is so often the case with Auden's reviews and essays, this seems to be just as revealing about Auden himself as it is about Goethe. Analogously, Auden's short-lived political phase during the early to mid-30s can be seen both as a 'therapeutic act' on the personal level, and as a reflection of the period itself.

His theoretical interest in society and community, on the other hand, suggests that Berlin had instilled in Auden an appreciation of company and community. Perhaps this was a consequence of his decision not to lead a married life. In 1939, when he met Chester Kallman, Auden tried to impose a marriage-like relationship on him. While they lived together, at least for certain times of the year, until the end of Auden's life, the relationship was not the middle-class marriage Auden, perhaps without meaning to, attempted to re-enact. Yet all the while, Auden had such a marriage anyway: in 1935, he married Erika Mann, the daughter of the German Nobel laureate, Thomas Mann.

¹⁸⁰ Auden, *The Dyer's Hand*, 18–19.

CHAPTER TWO

AUDEN'S 'WAHLVERWANDTSCHAFTEN'¹⁸¹

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Auden's most fascinating, long-lived, and serendipitous link with 'Germany' came into being in 1935 through his marriage into the family of the Nobel Prize winning German author Thomas Mann. This chapter of his life-story is a striking example of how a combination of coincidences and choices can shape a person in unexpected ways.

In the mid-30s, a gut-decision necessitated by the political circumstances of the times – Erika Mann's rescue from the Nazi regime's imminent threat through Auden's agreement to marry her – led to a life-long connection: not only between Auden and his 'wife' but also between Auden and Klaus Mann, Thomas Mann, Golo Mann, and more loosely the rest of the family. Each of these relationships is fascinating and would deserve a book of its own. Yet Auden's marriage to Erika Mann, with all its consequences, has not received proportionate recognition in the existing biographies of Auden and in the secondary literature to date.

One plausible explanation for this would be that this topic falls squarely between the areas of research for which German and English literature scholars, respectively, feel themselves responsible. In German accounts on the Manns, Auden tends to appear as a footnote, and the same is true for the Manns in publications about Auden. It seems to me that once a few scholars had underrated the scope of the connection, this was more or less taken to be the state of affairs by others. A few points have been perpetuated without proper referencing and appear as 'established facts', for instance that the Manns fell out with Auden in 1941, which is probably not true or at least an exaggeration of the truth (see 2.11).

¹⁸¹ This is a reference to Goethe's *Elective Affinities*, published as *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* in 1809.

This has made me acutely aware of the problems and choices faced by biographers, for this is probably the most biographical chapter of the three. As Hermione Lee has stated, ‘biography is a form of narrative, not just a presentation of facts’.¹⁸² What this means in detail and practice needs to be examined further though.

Lee writes:

Even in the most sober and factual of biographical narratives, ‘what actually happened’ can be ambiguous or obscure. [...] Biographers can spend a great deal of time sorting out the myths or false trails their subjects have created about their own lives. Witnesses, friends, and enemies have their own agendas, or misremember events, or embroider their anecdotes over the years. Biographers have to treat all testimony with scepticism and care. Untruths gather weight by being repeated and can congeal into the received version of a life, repeated in biography after biography until or unless unpicked.

Thus biographical writing always makes one feel sorely aware of one’s limitations as a researcher, faced with the daunting task of presenting the life of a stranger with the help of language, this limiting representative, relying on limited sources in the first place. After all, one can never know what percentage of the material which once existed one has got hold of, nor how much more material is still ‘out there’ somewhere, forgotten in attics or locked away in private collections.¹⁸³

Characteristically for the era during which Auden spent most time with the Manns, the relationship was dominated and defined by the experience of exile, by displacement, and these topics must therefore necessarily dominate my account: Auden would never have married Erika Mann if the times had been different. While he might still have met Klaus Mann through Christopher Isherwood, and possibly Erika too, he

¹⁸² Hermione Lee, *Biography: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press, 2009), 7.

¹⁸³ This ‘chronology’ about Auden and the Mann family is far from exhausting or conclusive. Still, the material presented here maps a network of complex dynamics amongst a group of rather extraordinary people, which formed during one of Europe’s most traumatic periods and stretched over two continents. Discussing alternatives to some of the established views on Auden’s interaction with the Manns, the chapter on hand shows that this family connection deserves more attention than it has been given previously.

never would have established such a constant and formalised connection with one of Germany's most important literary families.

The Manns always regarded Auden highly and were most grateful for what he had done for Erika. Despite it having been a marriage of convenience, Auden was referred to as Erika's husband by them and invited to many family events. Perhaps the Manns' sense of, and reverence for, the family, direct as well as extended, was particularly strong because they had been forced to give up their home in Munich and to live in exile in various places. Tilmann Lahme states in his biography of Golo Mann: 'Die Familie war durch den erzwungenen Aufenthalt in der Fremde näher zusammengerückt'.¹⁸⁴ Community and family increasingly acquired a particular significance for those anti-Fascist Europeans who were displaced during the 1930s, which explains why a sense of connectedness grew easily between them.

While the Manns were comparatively fortunate in comparison to many other exiles, they still suffered from the same political circumstances, especially because so many of them were writers. Exile of course mostly meant exile from the country where one's native language was spoken, which had existential consequences for all those whose income was dependent on the use of this language. Golo Mann, for instance, suffered from and reflected on being cut off from his native language, writing to a friend in January 1941 after having only just escaped from occupied France:

Wenn nur das verfluchte Mehrsprachige nicht wäre [...] Die Sprache ist ein Instrument, das wie die Geige täglich geübt werden muss; und jetzt muss und darf ich nichts als englisch lesen und schreiben, ausser, dass ich vielleicht mit meinem Vater ein paar trübe Worte auf deutsch wechsele.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸⁴ Tilmann Lahme, *Golo Mann: Biographie* (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer, 2009), 118–119. ['Because of the time non-voluntarily spent abroad, the family had moved more closely together'.]

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 161. ['If only I didn't have this damn problem with the different languages [...]. Language is an instrument, which has to be practised daily like the violin; and now I have to and am only allowed to read and write nothing but English, except for maybe exchanging a few dreary words with my father'.]

It is telling, for instance, that Golo Mann stopped keeping a diary on his arrival in America. The process of recording one's life becomes more complex when the language spoken in one's surroundings is not one's native language. The situation in which Golo Mann and his siblings found themselves had additional layers of trauma, in particular their being in safety while knowing many of their friends and acquaintances to be either dead, in camps, or on the run. This awareness had an impact on the relationship all refugees had with their new home country.

While Auden was similarly 'displaced' once he had moved to America, his was an 'exile' which he had chosen and created for himself – in reaction to certain circumstances in England which, he felt, were hindering his artistic growth, but not because of political persecution. Unlike the Manns, he was not disadvantaged professionally in America, through displacement from his native language. On the contrary, as he had already recognised in 1929, artistic originality and true creativity had to be essentially 'non-habitual' in his case, while being executed through working habits of monastic regularity: 'Habit – the inheritance of thoughts and emotions. Parental authority' (J29). Already in the late 20s in Berlin Auden had defined his 'real "life-wish"' as 'desire for separation, from family, from one's literary predecessors', which appears to foreshadow – at least with hindsight – his move to the United States in 1939. This was not fundamentally an attempt to escape from the war, which is supported by the fact that he had initially intended to move in 1938, but a personal choice which he happened to make during a time when the British public judged this kind of choice on very particular moral grounds.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁶ Thus I cannot agree with what Patrick Deer writes in 'Two Cities: Berlin and New York': 'Auden arrived as an émigré; the harsh attacks on him during the war were to transform him temporarily into an exile'. (Sharpe, *W.H. Auden in Context*, 29.) A.L. Rowse writes: 'I do not think myself an exile when in America [...]; neither did Wystan'. (Rowse, *The Poet Auden*, 63.) Of course it is always possible to pick out aspects of Auden's life which were 'exile-like', for instance that his English bank account was frozen during the war, but this does not make it appropriate to equate his conscious and voluntary choice of going to America with the situation true exiles had left behind.

Still, Auden's emigration could be thought of as the ultimate break with habit through the displacement of self to a foreign space with its corresponding different social and cultural environment. Auden was never an exile and never 'forced' to stay away from his home, yet his inherited thoughts and emotions still lost their original sounding board and context in the way he had hoped they would. In a way, he sought exile and the corresponding loneliness as prerequisites for creativity. An extreme example for the same phenomenon is Samuel Beckett, who was only able to produce a novel in English after writing and publishing it in French (*Molloy*, 1951) and then translating it into his native English (1955).

In 1935 though, when his connection with the Manns began, Auden was not displaced in this way, nor had he 'broken with habit' in the way he hoped, but rather had chosen one of the most habitual environments: the boarding school. He had not yet begun to insist on the separation of poetry and politics. In fact, he was revising some of his more 'political' poems for *Look, Stranger*, which he dedicated to Erika Mann in the year after their wedding. In Thomas Mann's library, which is partly kept in Zurich, there is a copy of the book which Auden signed for his father-in-law, with an odd 'light' quatrain in German:

An Thomas Mann
 Mit herzlichen Grüsse [*sic*]
 Von
 Wystan
 Oct 1936

Als klapperdürer Musikant
 Zieht er durch Deutschland und welsche Land
 Und wenn er geigt, tanzt alles geschwind
 Der Mann, das Weib, der Bursch, das Kind.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁷ From: Collection of Books from the library of Thomas Mann. ETH Zürich, Thomas Mann Archiv. A very direct translation of this strange little poem would be:

As a skinny musician
 He moves through Germany and the [Francophone part of Switzerland]
 And when he plays his fiddle, everything dances
 The man, the woman, the chap, the child.

Letters from Iceland (1937) reveals the story behind this dedication. In his second letter to Erika Mann – in the section, entitled ‘Tuesday’ – Auden states:

I found an excellent collection of German songs and spent the morning playing them. Really, they choose funny things to cheer themselves up with. How about this for a soldier’s song?

Die bange Nacht ist nun herum
Wir reiten still, wir reiten stumm
Wir reiten ins Verderben.

[...] I also found a magnificent Dance of Death, which I expect you know, but I had never seen before, and which seems very topical. I like the grammar lesson in the last line:

Der Tod reit’ oft als General
Beim Trommel und Kanonschall.
Er gibt Parol, du musst ihm nach
Ins Bivouac bis zum letzten Tag.

Als klapperdürerer Musikant
Zieht er durch Deutschland und welsche Land
Und wenn er geigt, tanzt alles geschwind,
Der Mann, das Weib, der Bursch, das Kind.¹⁸⁸

‘Das welsche Land’ refers to those ‘foreign’ Romance countries neighbouring the Germanic ones at the time of the folksong’s composition, primarily the French-speaking part of Switzerland. It is not surprising that Auden was intrigued when he came across this Dance of Death, given that his play of the same title had been published three years previously.

In Iceland, Auden not only found himself confronted with this old Germanic song but also with the Dance of Death inflicted on by contemporary Germany, as the book in which he had found the German folksongs belonged:

[...] to a German lady who married an Icelander, solely, as far as I can see, in order to have a child, as she left him immediately after, and now won’t go back to Germany. She had a magazine from the Race Bureau of the N.S.D.P. which was very funny.

¹⁸⁸ W.H. Auden and Louis MacNeice, *Letters from Iceland* (London: Faber & Faber, 1937), 143–144.

Boy-scout young Aryans striding along with arms swinging past
fairy- story negroes and Jews.¹⁸⁹

While this comment sounds Audenesquely detached, he was acutely aware of and fundamentally upset by the recent developments in a country whose past cultural achievements he so admired. A few pages later, Auden describes another Iceland experience:

A bell suddenly clanged and everyone stuck their spades in the
carcase and went off for lunch. The body remained alone in the
sun, the flesh still steaming a little. It gave one an extraordinary
vision of the cold controlled ferocity of the human species.¹⁹⁰

Reading this, one cannot help but feel that Auden was also thinking of the ‘cold controlled ferocity’ of the German National Socialist Party.

The collection *Look, Stranger!* contains some of those poems which have been considered to be Auden’s most political ones – easily identified because Auden later changed or disowned them: ‘O what is that sound which so thrills the ear’ or ‘Brothers who when the sirens roar’. The latter, for instance, lost several stanzas and was not addressed to ‘Comrades’ anymore but to ‘Brothers’: a less unambiguously socialist and more religious or humanitarian term. Clear evidence – whatever one’s views on this may be – of Auden’s profound ‘change of heart’ from the mid-30s onwards. And although there is probably no deeper meaning in this, Auden changed most radically during the peak time of his exchange with the Manns.

2.2 DESPERATE TIMES & DESPERATE MESASURES

On 28 June 1935, Auden had occasion to write to Stephen Spender with the most unusual news from Downs School, where he was teaching at the time: ‘On June 14th I married Erika Mann, Thomas Mann’s eldest daughter, to give her a new passport. I didn’t see her till the ceremony and perhaps I shall never see her again. But she is very

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 145.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., 149.

nice. (Be very discreet about this, if you hear about it anywhere. Officially it is perfectly genuine.)¹⁹¹ What Auden describes with understatement and nonchalance as if it were no more than a fleeting social encounter could be regarded as an act of lived grace and humanity. For his selflessness, ‘Miss God’ rewarded Auden with a network of interesting people who would shape his life profoundly over the next decade. Auden’s attachment to the Manns and to his wife is reflected in the fact that Auden and Erika Mann were never divorced. Indeed Auden wrote that ‘if it were genuine, socially and artistically, it would be an excellent match for me’, and he was quite right. (App. A2)

But even without it being a ‘genuine’ marriage, Auden did not only stay in regular contact with Erika until her death on 27 August 1969 but even became a minor member of the Mann clan: he was part of their shared family mythology. In 1949, Thomas Mann would comment with the pride of a true patriarch on an issue of the journal *Der Monat*, in which contributions from or about various members of his extended family were brought together: ‘Der “Monat” mit Klaus Pr.s [*Pringheims*] Aufsatz, Auszügen aus Faustus, Artikel “Dr. F. in Amerika”, Aufsatz von Golo über Toynbee und Avis am Schluß über die amazing family, einschl. Borgese’s, Auden’s, Moni’s und Vikko’s. Sehr komisch und phänomenal. Es sind 9 “schreibende” Personen. Wäre in England weniger erstaunlich’.¹⁹²

Auden fitted well into the ‘amazing family’ and was generally not dissimilar to the Manns in terms of cultivation and intellectual interests. Strikingly, too, both of his brothers-in-law, Golo and Klaus Mann, were homosexual; his wife was bisexual; and Thomas Mann had homosexual inclinations. Auden was already familiar with some of

¹⁹¹ The marriage certificate, kept in the Monacensia archive in Munich, proves that Auden and Erika Mann were in fact married on 15 June, not 14.

¹⁹² Thomas Mann, *Tagebücher, 1949-1950*, ed. Inge Jens (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer, 1991), 22. [‘The “Monat” with Klaus Pr.’s [*Pringheim*’s] essay, excerpts from Faustus, essay “Dr. F. in Amerika”, essay by Golo about Toynbee and Avis at the end about the amazing family, incl. Borgese’s, Auden’s, Moni’s and Vikko’s. Very curious and extraordinary. There are 9 people who are ‘writers’. Would be less special in England’.]

Thomas Mann's work (see p. 167), and the fact that Erika Mann was the famous writer's daughter must have been attractive to Auden: not in a calculating way, since this was not typical for Auden (compare Chapter One, p. 18), but because of a true interest and curiosity.

When recapitulating the story of Auden's interactions with each of the Manns, one ends up with a rather good sense of their respective characters: Thomas Mann recorded Auden's visits meticulously in his diaries but does not seem to have engaged much with the work of his son-in-law, not quite as famous as himself, never abandoning his somewhat distant tone; Klaus Mann's personal opinion about his brother-in-law varied greatly and this fluctuation appears to have been directly dependent on his mood and on how supportive Auden was of Klaus Mann's socio-political endeavours at any given time; Erika Mann was always charming and grateful to Auden and wrote jokingly about 'Wysti' – the Manns, especially Erika, liked nicknames – but she, too, wanted him to support campaigns in support of the anti-Fascist cause; and Golo Mann, who lived with Auden for a few months between 1940 and 1941, seems to have got on with Auden very well, which made his brother Klaus jealous.

While critics have often claimed that major political differences began to take their toll on the relationship between Auden and his in-laws after 1940, the material I have seen does not support this. It appears to me that the drastic decrease of their contact after 1942 was primarily due to the demands of the time and the fact that the Manns as well as Auden travelled more and had their individual problems to deal with. Thus while the Manns had a more active stance towards politics than Auden did – which was mainly due to their personal experiences of loss – nothing suggests to me that there was a major falling out over this or any other topic.

As a 'couple', Erika Mann and Auden were strikingly similar, considering how fortuitous their acquaintance had been: neither was heterosexual; both emigrated to

America; and both died early, in their mid-60s. Even the life paths of the coincidental couple were not too dissimilar. Erika had lived in Berlin after her 'Abitur' in 1924 and Auden 'followed' in 1928, at which point Erika had already left. Of course they didn't know each other personally at the time and Auden probably would not have heard about his future wife, since her acting career was still in its initial stages. Erika then moved to New York in 1936 and Auden settled there three years later. Both travelled to Spain during the Civil War; and both returned to Germany in 1945 with the U.S. Army.

Erika Mann was an extraordinary and extraordinarily headstrong woman. Well-travelled and eccentric, she had founded and ran a satirical ensemble called 'Pfeffermühle' ['Pepper Mill']. She was only two years older than Auden, born in 1905, but had already been married and divorced when Auden left Oxford¹⁹³; she had visited Russia, China, Korea, Japan and the United States, and travelled on the Trans-Siberian Railway.¹⁹⁴ She had become 'a symbol of the daring new woman of the Weimar Republic: the kind of woman who wore short hair, had affairs with men or women, and wrote witty, charming pieces in the popular press'.¹⁹⁵ Unlike Auden, and unlike her brother Klaus, who had written creatively from an early age and kept diaries, Erika Mann wrote chiefly because she had a reason for doing so, and a message to convey, not for writing's sake. She had dedicated her life to the fight against Fascism and did so, from the time the Nazis came into power onwards, with her pen.¹⁹⁶ As a result, the programme of the Pfeffermühle, which was primarily conceived and written by Erika, was determinedly socio-political and had a clear anti-Hitler stance.

¹⁹³ Erika Mann's previous marriage was to the actor Gustaf Gründgens, who at the same time had an affair with her brother Klaus; meanwhile, Klaus Mann was engaged to a woman with whom Erika Mann had a similarly close relationship.

¹⁹⁴ Klaus Mann, who was just as restless, called this their 'dress rehearsal of exile'. (Quoted in: Weiss, *The Erika and Klaus Mann Story*, 59.)

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 62.

¹⁹⁶ This choice was the polar opposite to the choice her husband came to make during the years after their wedding.

With his usual cynicism, Colm Tóibín writes about the Mann siblings' political engagement in *New Ways to Kill your Mother: Writers and Their Families* (2012): 'It was their silliness that made them serious. Once the right to go on being silly was threatened, they would respond with considerable urgency and earnestness'.¹⁹⁷ While this is a cynical view on the matter, it is not a wrong one. Even in exile, and despite devoting their energy largely to anti-Fascist projects, they did not altogether lose what Tóibín alludes to as silliness: a certain frivolous life-style and love for luxury that most certainly would have been considered by some to undermine the seriousness of the siblings' message.

In any case Erika, at the beginning of 1935, was searching for an eligible foreigner who could provide her with a new passport, knowing herself to be a likely target for the Nazis. Indeed, a hundred-page expatriation file allows us to reconstruct how fervently the regime's bureaucrats tracked Erika Mann and her ensemble on their tours across Europe. The main aim of their efforts was to collect enough material to justify Erika's expatriation from Germany, which they were able to effect in June 1935.¹⁹⁸ At this point though, she had just about escaped their immediate control by becoming a British citizen through her marriage with Auden and was able to continue performing outside Germany after 1935 – because she had a valid passport, thanks to Auden. Joseph Roth, the Austrian writer, wrote to Erika Mann early in 1935 after having seen her perform in Amsterdam: 'Ich habe die Empfindung, daß ich Ihnen sagen muß: Sie machen zehn Mal mehr gegen die Barbarei, als wir alle Schriftsteller zusammen. Ich bin ein wenig beschämt, aber dafür auch sehr stark ermuntert'.¹⁹⁹ During a time which required each citizen to make difficult moral choices, not only in theory but in practice, Erika Mann

¹⁹⁷ Colm Tóibín, *New Ways to Kill Your Mother: Writers and Their Families* (London: Viking, 2012), 192.

¹⁹⁸ The Nazi documents call her the 'geistige Urheberin der deutschfeindlichen Pfeffermühle' ['creator of the anti-German Pfeffermühle'] and justify her expatriation with 'in diesem Unternehmen gezeigten würdelosen Darbietungen, die auf eine Verunglimpfung Deutschlands abgestellt sind' ['undignified acts performed by this enterprise, which have the purpose of denigrating Germany']. (Irmela von der Lühe, *Erika Mann: Eine Biographie* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1996), 141.)

¹⁹⁹ Erika Mann, *Briefe und Antworten*, ed. Anna Zanco-Prestel, vol. 1 (München: Ellermann, 1984), 66. ['I have the feeling that I need to tell you this: you are doing ten times more against this barbarism than all of us writers together. I am a little ashamed of myself, but on the other side also strongly encouraged'.]

stood out as a woman of political action who did not stray from the path she had chosen – while always conscious of the fact that she would have lived another life had the circumstances been different.

It was through Christopher Isherwood and Klaus Mann that the connection between Auden and Erika Mann was initiated, early in 1935. Both Klaus Mann and his friend, the publisher Friedrich Landshoff, who lived in Amsterdam and published Klaus Mann's journal of exile, *Die Sammlung*, had been friends with Christopher Isherwood for several years. In May 1935, Isherwood and his German boyfriend Heinz Neddermeyer happened to be in Amsterdam when the *Pfeffermühle* was performing there. Klaus, too, was visiting. He took his friends to see one of his sister's shows, either on the 16th or on the 22nd of May.²⁰⁰ Over dinner, Erika casually asked Isherwood whether he would marry her in order to make her eligible for a British passport.²⁰¹ Isherwood declined reluctantly and was, as he wrote, 'honoured, excited, amused', and later explained that he hadn't wanted to offend his mother or bring Heinz into trouble by marrying into a family that was famously anti-Nazi – a concern that was perhaps not unjustified since Heinz was nevertheless arrested in 1937 when he was expelled from Luxembourg and imprisoned in Germany.²⁰² This demonstrates how serious Erika Mann's situation was at the time.

Isherwood did however write to Auden, inquiring whether he would marry Erika Mann, the daughter of the famous German novelist, and Auden agreed without hesitation. Austin Wright, a fellow member of staff at Downs School at the time, who shared a cottage with Auden, recorded:

Isherwood wrote saying that Erika Mann's life was constantly in danger. She was in political cabaret in Amsterdam. Shots fired in the theatre. She had to change her hotel every night. Would

²⁰⁰ One of these two performances must have been the one Joseph Roth attended.

²⁰¹ Lühe, *Erika Mann*, 143.

²⁰² Carpenter, *W.H. Auden*, 175.

Auden marry her and provide a British passport? This, Wystan said, was a question you decided at once. And he did. But in no time he was full of worries about what his mother would think – staunch Anglo-Catholics. And what about Geoffrey Hoyland? ‘We shall see the headmaster pacing the lawn.’²⁰³

Very soon afterwards, on 12 July 1935, Erika Mann travelled to England in order to meet her future husband for the first time and to marry him, there and then. After arriving in London, she took the train on to the Midlands. The wedding took place in Ledbury, five days before Mann lost her German citizenship. On Sunday, 16 June 1935, relieved Thomas Mann noted in his diary: ‘Radio-Telegramm von Erika aus London, daß ihre Trauung dort mit dem Schriftsteller Auden vollzogen. “All love from Mrs. Auden”’.²⁰⁴ Before Erika’s arrival in England, Auden had already made the necessary preparation at the registry office in Ledbury. Wright remembers:

We went over one afternoon to see the Registrar. A tiny square room of an office; huge musty ledgers piled and leaning against walls and cupboards, and a dear little old man behind glasses. Of course Wystan didn’t know any of the answers to the questions – her name? ‘Well, she has been married and divorced, I don’t know.’ ‘It doesn’t matter, tell me later. Her age? – Never mind.’ Wystan *was* able to provide some information about himself, and we emerged into the heavy sunshine. ‘He would have married me to the poker,’ Wystan said.²⁰⁵

This anecdote has been told and retold in British secondary literature in a way that makes the whole affair appear less serious than it actually was. Auden himself would of course have enjoyed a certain amount of mythmaking around his ‘marriage’. When it came to legal details though, he was never one to leave anything to chance. His unpublished letters to the lawyer James Yates, give us an idea of how meticulously he

²⁰³ Ibid., 176.

²⁰⁴ Thomas Mann, *Tagebücher, 1935-1936*, ed. Peter de Mendelssohn (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer, 1978), 120. [‘Radio telegram from Erika in London that her marriage to the writer Auden has taken place. “All love from Mrs. Auden”’.]

²⁰⁵ Carpenter, *W.H. Auden*, 177.

planned ahead.²⁰⁶ This was not a trivial matter at all and required thorough preparation because English officials had become suspicious of passport marriages. Auden anticipated: ‘If she can get permission to enter England, it will I suppose be only for a limited period, so what I want to know is how long she has to be resident before we can get married in a registry office, the state of law about acquiring a nationality etc, in fact all the details about marrying a foreigner. I should be most grateful if you could let me know all this as soon as possible, as time is short and I don’t want there to be any hitches’. (App. A1) In fact, quite possibly it was thanks to Auden’s preparations that his marriage to Erika Mann did not stir up the officials’ suspicion.

After having spent a day together in Great Malvern and visiting Cecil Day-Lewis and his wife in Cheltenham, Auden and Mann got married in Ledbury on 15 June. Auden’s colleague E. Maurice Feild, the art master at Downs School, and Auden’s lover, Peter R. Roger, served as witnesses. Auden and the only woman he would ever marry, Erika Auden-Mann, as she was now officially called, both signed a document drawn up by James Yates beforehand, which guaranteed that they would never make financial claims on each other.

Auden’s letters to Yates make several things clear: first of all, that in 1935 Auden was concerned about his public image, especially out of consideration for his parents whose opinion on topics such as divorce he knew well. One wonders how Auden would have communicated the news of his marriage to them in the first place. Surely, they must have known that it was not a ‘sincere’ marriage: one cannot imagine Auden being dishonest about this since it could not have escaped his family that he was not living with his wife. And yet Auden wrote to Yates about the possibility of a future divorce: ‘Personally, unless either of us wishes to re-marry, I shall try to avoid this, chiefly for my

²⁰⁶ The son of James Yates, Michael, had been one of Auden’s pupils at the Downs School and then became his close friend. The correspondence makes plain that Yates did not know that Auden was in fact gay – despite the fact that (or perhaps precisely because) Auden was spending much time with his son.

parents' sake. The proceedings are always sordid and expensive, and it is difficult to avoid publicity altogether'. (App. A2)

Why, however, would Auden's parents – if they had already accepted that their son would get married to a German woman in order to save her life – have taken offence at a divorce? Was it only the expense and the publicity Auden mentions? Or was the Anglo-Catholic faith of Auden's parents' – and especially his mother's – so 'High-Church' that they would have considered marriage to be a holy sacrament and divorce a sinful act, which needed to be avoided under all circumstances, even if the marriage itself had never been 'sincere'? This seems likely. Maybe one should consider this question in connection with the fact that Auden regarded homosexuality as a sin throughout his life despite embracing it openly. In both cases, there appears to be a strange gap between theory and practice. Auden could well have inherited this from home. At the same time, divorce was still less common in 1935, less easily achieved, and more sensitive a topic than it began to be after the Herbert Divorce Act of 1937.²⁰⁷

Auden's letters to Yates also give us an interesting insight into his views on marriage. He wrote in response to a comment Yates must have made in his letter: 'You mustn't think that my views about marriage are "advanced". When one marries by choice, I believe it is for better, for worse etc. This business on the other hand is, of course, the purest formality'. Auden added that there was 'not the least intention on either side of cohabitation'. (App. A2) It is interesting that Auden should contrast his decision to marry Erika with 'choice'. Clearly, he felt that his conscience left him no choice at all.

Secondly, it transpires from the correspondence just how traditional Auden's views on marriage were: a few years later, he would impose this vision of marriage on his relationship with Chester Kallman with whom Auden was in it 'for better and for

²⁰⁷ See: Lawrence Stone, *Road to Divorce: England, 1530-1987* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 398–401.

worse' until the end of his life.²⁰⁸ Not dissimilarly, he even took his marriage with Erika Mann so seriously that critics have treated the subject with a mixture of incredulity and mockery. Finally, the marriage lasted for thirty-five years and was never dissolved, which is more than can be said about many 'genuine' marriages.

Most interesting though, given the context of the time, is the following passage from Auden's pre-marital correspondence – where he further explains and contextualises his decision to save Erika Mann's life:

I know all this looks rather odd at first sight, and it is certainly a reflection on the present state of Europe that anything so ridiculous should be necessary. I don't think it particularly quixotic or 'tender-hearted' to be prepared to be put to some inconvenience to save somebody's life, and somebody whom I have every reason to believe is well worth saving. For that is quite literally what it amounts to if she doesn't get a new nationality before her passport expires, she will be sent back to Germany and that means for her, as she is well-known on the continent as an Anti-Nazi, death in a concentration camp. I, on the other hand, am neither immediately contemplating marriage with somebody else, nor have I complications of property to justify a refusal. (App. A2)

Because Auden is such a clever rhetorician, one has to remind oneself of what an unusual statement this really is generally but particularly in the context of the time. First of all, it proves that even outside Germany, the Nazi concentration camps were known. Most remarkable about Auden's account of his marriage to Mann in the letter is the tone of his writing: unemotional, matter-of-factly, and somewhat tongue-in-cheek while expressing something very profound. The notion of being 'inconvenienced' and his general tendency to understatement are so stereotypically English that Auden's way of weighing this against Erika Mann's certain fate of being tortured and killed if sent back to Germany seems almost comical. In the same mode, Auden's comment that Mann

²⁰⁸ The relationship was a strange balance of power between the heterosexual conventionality Auden tried to recreate in this homosexual partnership – similarly, he was quick to assume the paternal role in his Bohemian Brooklyn house share where he made sure that he created the living environment in which he could live his typically structured work and social life – and the unconventional element which Kallman in response introduced, through his 'unfaithfulness' and the ensuing openness of the 'marriage'.

was ‘somebody whom I have every reason to believe is well worth saving’ is rather striking and reads somewhat uncomfortably.

Contrasting inconvenience with certain death in this way, Auden’s seems to assume a strikingly anti-heroic and humanist position. And this was not just a pose: Auden did not feel he was faced with a choice at all. To him, it was a moral obligation to marry Erika Mann; and while one might feel that anyone in Auden’s situation should have acted in the same way, Isherwood’s uncomfortable refusal demonstrates that an acute awareness about the political situation in Germany did not necessarily precipitate a person’s socio-political engagement, even on the most personal level. Auden’s anti-heroic way of presenting himself – contrasted with the esteem in which heroism was generally held during the 20th century – is most fascinating given what his decision to marry Erika Mann amounted to.

While one is therefore tempted to call this a political act, perhaps even Auden’s most political one, the situation was more complex. True, it was the ‘present state of Europe’, which necessitated Auden’s act of charity in the first place. It is also unlikely that, in a hypothetical case, Auden would have married a woman who was trying to escape her country where she was prosecuted for having committed war crimes, even if she were the daughter of a famous writer. In this respect, then, there was of course a political element to Auden’s decision for the marriage. This political element, however, was in the conditions which necessitated Auden’s decision in the first place. Auden’s act was itself not political but moral. He believed that, under the circumstances, it was his moral duty to save this woman, though unknown to him, who was persecuted for a political act he supported (namely raising the public’s awareness of the dangers of Fascism through art). While his political beliefs thus aligned with Erika Mann’s own, and his decision to make it possible for her to continue her fight could be taken as an expression of a political intention, Auden had not set out to marry a persecuted German

in order to fight Fascism: this would have constituted a political act. Instead, when confronted with the situation, he acted on the basis of his moral judgement. In this, Auden was not alone, as he knew, writing in *The Age of Anxiety* (1947), that ‘in war-time [...] everybody is reduced to the anxious status of a shady character or a displaced person’ and ‘even the most prudent become worshippers of chance’ (CP, 447).

With divorce being such an omnipresent and socially accepted phenomenon today, one wonders if we can now truly appreciate quite how brave Auden’s step was at the time. A.L. Rowse remembered:

In the June of this year Wystan married Thomas Mann’s daughter, Erika. This gave me a slight shock. It was an act of generosity on his part, to give her the necessary status to take refuge in this country from the Nazis. But wasn’t it an act of bravado too? There was no question of making it a real marriage – wasn’t that rather flaunting in the face of opinion? I was astonished that anyone could be so certain what his tastes were that he could take such a decisive step, prejudging the future. He was lucky as usual; it did him no damage, and he entered, if on a friendly, non-committal basis, that distinguished, but rather ghastly, family.²⁰⁹

Despite Rowse’s general criticism of Auden’s interactions with Germany, this is very interesting and raises a few important points. The judgement ‘flaunting in the face of opinion’ implies that Rowse was more interested in public opinion than Auden was, yet this reminds one how shocking and brave Auden’s decision must indeed have seemed at the time – to those who knew the marriage was not ‘sincere’ – since it did indeed commit Auden, in his ‘sincere’ choices, to a life that was by no means commonly accepted. His marriage to Erika Mann was in a way a legal confirmation of Auden’s Berlin decision to renounce the prospect of ever leading a married life. Indeed, it was a ‘decisive step’ into the future showing how certain Auden had become of his tastes since

²⁰⁹ Rowse, *The Poet Auden*, 36.

it blocked any possibility of future marriage, given that he was hoping not to go through divorce procedures with Erika.

This raises another question, namely how sure Auden was of Erika Mann's tastes when he agreed to marry her. Did he know that she was interested in women and thus sure that she, too, was really only interested in a passport marriage? On the one hand, Auden did know that she had been married before. On the other hand though, one can assume that Christopher Isherwood would have been a reliable channel for gossip about his best friend's bride-to-be, and it seems plausible that Auden did not have fears in this respect. Possibly, Auden even projected his own pragmatic, clear-cut manner of thinking on Erika Mann, not doubting in the slightest that she was thinking about the marriage in exactly the same way as he did – and this was true.

Rowse continues his account of Auden's marriage by criticising Thomas Mann's 'Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen' (1918) in which Mann defends Germany's provocation of WWI, a position from which he later distanced himself, calling him 'an apologist for the German disease, the German mind'.²¹⁰ Auden seems not to have shared this critical attitude towards his future father-in-law. In fact, Auden himself favoured 'the German minds' amongst European thinkers and never tired of pointing out this bias. That Auden knew some of Mann's work must have made him more willing to agree to a marriage protecting the writer's daughter.

2.3 FORMALITIES: 'A NARROW STRICTNESS'

*The desires of the heart are as crooked as corkscrews,
Not to be born is the best for man;
The second-best is a formal order,
The dance's pattern; dance while you can.*
(‘Death’s Echo’, 1936, CP, 154)

Unlike Auden, who was protective of his public image for his parents' sake, Erika Mann was quick to draw her 'private' life into the public when she felt this might help her

²¹⁰ Ibid., 37.

cause. But although she was actively forging her public image as the wholehearted anti-Hitlerite, Erika Mann was an extremely secretive person when it came to what she considered to be truly private.²¹¹

Once she returned to Switzerland as a British citizen though, she made sure that her marriage to the British poet W.H. Auden became public knowledge. On 24 June 1935, she sent a letter to an acquaintance, the editor in chief at the literature department of the *Basler Nachrichten*:

Lieber Herr Doktor Knuchel, –
 ich möchte Ihnen erzählen, daß ich mich verheiratet habe. Mein Mann heißt Wystan Auden, ist ein junger englischer Schriftsteller und recht bekannt und geschätzt in seinem Land. Er schreibt Gedichte (hat zwei Bände herausgegeben), arbeitet nebenbei für Schulen, – hat mehrere Anthologien zusammengestellt, die dort in den Schulen Verwendung finden, und hat eben gerade (mit Christopher Isherwood zusammen) ein Stück beendet, das bereits best seller war, – ich bin ordentlich stolz, wie Sie sehen.
 Komisch ist, daß wir (seit geraumer Zeit ganz still verlobt) gerade in den Tagen heirateten, in denen meine Ausbürgerung von den Nazis beschlossen worden sein muß (wie können Deutsche eine Engländerin ausbürgern, das Kunststück bringt nur Hitler fertig!). Ich erfuhr von ihr erst nach meiner Rückkehr aus England, – wo ich nun artiges ‘subject’ bin.
 Schönste Grüße. Wann man sich einmal wieder sieht?
 Immer die Ihre: Erika Mann-Auden

P.S. Wenn Sie eine Notiz bringen wollen, – obenstehende Angaben sind zur Verfügung.²¹²

²¹¹ Irmela von der Lühe acknowledges the near-impossibility of appreciating what Mann’s self-image was. She points out that even in her letters to family and close friends, Mann kept a distanced and ironic tone and preferred telling amusing anecdotes to giving insight into her true feelings. She quotes a passage from Mann’s unfinished biography, *Ausgerechnet ich*: ‘Eigentlich habe ich eher wenig Interesse an mir. Selbstanalyse hat nie eine Rolle in meinen Schriften gespielt, in denen sogar das Wort “ich” selten vorkommt’. [‘Actually, I am not very interested in myself. Self-analysis has never played a role in my texts, in which even the word “I” does not occur very often.’] (Lühe, *Erika Mann*, 264.)

²¹² Erika Mann, *Briefe und Antworten*, 1984, 1:69–70. [‘Dear Dr. Knuchel, – I want to tell you that I have married. My husband’s name is Wystan Auden, he is a young English writer, and fairly well known and popular in his country. He writes poems (has published two volumes), works also for schools, – has edited several anthologies, which are being used in the schools, and just now he has finished a play (together with Christopher Isherwood) that is already a best-seller, – I am mightily proud of him, as you can see. It is strange that we (having been quietly engaged for quite some time now) should have got married exactly during the days when my expatriation must have been decided by the Nazis (how is it possible for Germans to expatriate an English woman, this is a miracle only Hitler is able to perform!) I only heard about it after my return from England, – where I am now a dutiful ‘subject’. Best wishes. When might we

This wonderful letter is a good example of how Erika Mann tried to antagonise and provoke her political opponents by instrumentalising her ‘private’ life for political ends. The line between friends and those whom she hoped or even expected to help her when she pursued a new cause, too, was barely discernible. The language of her letter is very obviously pointed and tongue-in-cheek: this would not have escaped Knuchel.

Meanwhile, her husband took his new ‘family duties’ very seriously from the beginning. Although Auden had described his marriage as a mere ‘formality’ beforehand, shortly after the wedding he showed his good breeding and paid his parents-in-law a formal visit. He had finished teaching at Downs School after the summer term of 1935, moved to London, and travelled to Switzerland to meet his parents-in-law, Katia and Thomas Mann, for the first time. On Thursday, 10 October 1935, Thomas Mann first referred to Auden in his diary – which he kept on a daily basis – calling him his son-in-law: ‘Der Schwiegersohn Wystan Auden meldet sich zum Wochenende an’.²¹³ And three days later: ‘Die Mahlzeiten mit Wystan Auden. Abends Verabschiedung von ihm, da er morgen früh per Flugzeug nach London zurückkehrt’.²¹⁴

The patriarch had welcomed Auden into the family and Auden, after having returned to England, sent his father-in-law a present to thank him for his hospitality. On 30 October, Thomas Mann noted about this: ‘Schöne Aphorismen bei W. Blake, dessen Werk W. Auden schickte: “Proverbs of Hell”’.²¹⁵ The foundation stone of a long-standing friendship between the most exemplary German family and their strange English son-in-law was laid by the means of an old-fashioned politeness, a ‘formality’,

see one another again? Always yours: Erika Mann-Auden. P.S. If you would like to publish this as a news item, – the information given above is at your disposal’.]

²¹³ Thomas Mann, *Tagebücher, 1935-1936*, 187. [‘The son-in-law Wystan Auden announces his visit this weekend’.]

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 188. [‘The meals with Wystan Auden. Saying good-bye to him in the evening since he is returning to London tomorrow morning by plane’.]

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 197. [‘Nice aphorisms by Blake, whose work W. Auden sent: “Proverbs of Hell”’.]

which defined the Auden-Mann interactions throughout the 35 years of their duration. The Manns were utterly traditional and distinguished in their lifestyle; things were done ‘properly’, just as one travelled with the appropriate amount of suitcases. They could relate in this respect to Auden’s ‘narrow strictness’ – as he put it in his dedication in 1936 of *Look, Stranger!* to Erika Mann. Convention was a language they all spoke and this was clearly a major factor leading to the ‘success’ of the ‘marriage’: they all embraced at least some aspects of the new roles resulting from the wedding, despite it being a passport marriage.

Auden’s apparent wish to start the relationship with his in-laws on the right foot, as well as his life-long loyalty to them, could be taken as a sign of how deeply the wish for a conventional life was engrained in him. But of course, he would have been very interested to meet the other members of the distinguished family he had married into. Thus, Auden also sent a letter to his new brother in law, Klaus Mann, while visiting his in-laws in Zurich. It was addressed to Klaus Mann’s Budapest flat and stamped on 14 October 1935 at ‘Zürich Hauptbahnhof’, the central station through which Auden would have passed on his way back to England. Auden’s German was very shaky:

Lieber Klaus Mann,
 Herzlichen Dank für den Tschaikowsky-Roman. Ich habe es [*sic*] noch nicht gelesen aber I ‘look forward very much to doing so.’ (Ich weiss nicht wieviel English sie können. Hoffentlich ist es ~~mehr~~ mehr als mein Deutsch).
 Es tut mir sehr leid, dass sie nicht jetzt hier sind, dass ich noch mit einen schweiger Bruder treffen könnte [*sic*].
 Finde Dein [*sic*] ganze Familie reizend.
 Wann kommen Sie nach England? Ich soll sollen sollt (mich?) mich wirklich freuen, wenn Sie mich besuchen wurden.
 With many thanks and best wishes,
 Wystan Auden (App. C1)

Curiously and involuntarily, Auden switches between the formal and the informal way of addressing Klaus Mann. He calls him his ‘schweiger Bruder’: a comical mistake since ‘Schweiger’ signifies a mute person and Auden clearly meant ‘Schwiegerbruder’, a

direct translation of the English ‘brother-in-law’ which does not work in German as the correct word is ‘Schwager’. Mann must have sent Auden his book on Tchaikovsky, *Symphonie Pathétique. Ein Tschaikowsky-Roman*, which was published earlier in 1935 – or possibly he had left it with his parents who might have given it to Auden during his visit. It is evident that both Klaus Mann and Auden were keen to make a good impression on one another.

Immediately after the unceremonious wedding, Erika Mann had returned to London in order to meet with Rudolf Kommer, a journalist, translator and impresario with close connections to America. She was keen to interest him in her plans of taking the Pfeffermühle on a tour to the United States. At the time, she was already anticipating that her ensemble, which had continued touring successfully outside of Germany, would not be able to do so for very much longer. And indeed, in 1936 they had to resign themselves to the fact that the situation in Europe had become too hostile: on 9 May, the Pfeffermühle gave its last European performance in Luxemburg.

Meanwhile, America had become an *idée fixe* for Erika and she tried everything to carry it out, too. Auden played a part in this by helping with a few translations and discussing her plans with her. On 30 May, Auden visited Erika Mann in Leiden and on the 12th, she travelled to London again, ‘von wo aus Kommerherz mir unaufgefordert [*sic*] und pedantisch telegraphierte dass es sechs Wochen lang im Ritz sitzen wolle... Die Giehse hat nichts (oder doch beinahe nichts, – es fängt an, eine sehr ernste Sorge zu werden, –. Vielleicht dass Wysti Rat weiss.)’. (App. E1) Therese Giehse – ‘Gissky’ – was the star of the Pfeffermühle and would become a very famous actress. She did not have very good English at all and was not exactly thrilled by the prospect of performing in America. Things did not look too promising for the venture overall. Kommer had invited Erika to London, but nevertheless she was beginning to treat him with irony in his letters.

Without hesitation, and despite discouraging comments even from members of the ensemble, Erika continued to pursue her idea single-handedly and returned to London to meet with Kommer again. Britain, ‘the mole between all Europe and the exile-crowded sea’ had become the reloading point for Erika Mann’s cabaret: language was the main issue. She was still convinced at the time that the ensemble would be able to perform translations of the German language sketches in America and that this would be suitable for the audiences there. Evidently, Auden tried to support his wife in every way he possibly could and was thus becoming a great source of both moral and practical support to her. Despite that fact, she complained about ‘Wysti’ in a letter to her mother Katia from London on 18 May:

Ich führe ein *elendes* Leben, – immer zwischen Birmingham und London, – auch zwischen Salisbury und London hin und herfahrend, das muß sein. Mein Mann ist ein Tyrann und da er nun unsere Gissky unter die Haube bringt, habe ich ihm völlig zu Willen zu sein, er bestellt mich bald hier, bald dorthin. Dabei bin ich doch bloß hier, um den Kommer zu treffen, wegen Amerika... Ich hoffe, letztlich wird es klappen mit drüben, obwohl im Augenblick alles noch ein wenig vage scheint, – aber das wird es bleiben, bis ich drüben bin, so ist das nun einmal.²¹⁶

The tone Erika Mann adopts in this letter is very typical for her, always a little ironic and playful – using the obviously exaggerated term ‘Tyrann’ – but often rather quick to complain, too. Of course, her claim that she had come to England ‘chiefly to meet with Kommer’ was not true: there was another ‘formality’ she had to attend to.

With the help of Louis MacNeice, Auden had found a fellow English homosexual (‘What are buggers for?’²¹⁷), for ‘Gissky’, who was by now in desperate need of a

²¹⁶ Erika Mann, *Briefe und Antworten*, 1984, 1:92–93. [‘I am leading a *wretched* life – always commuting between Birmingham and London, – also between Salisbury and London, it cannot be helped. My husband is a tyrant and since he is now marrying off our Gissky I have to be completely at his will, he summons me to various places. All this while I am here chiefly to meet with Kommer about America... I hope it will work out with over there in the end, though it all still seems very vague at the moment – but this will be the case until I am actually over there, that’s simply the way it is’.]

²¹⁷ Davenport-Hines, *Auden*, p. 136.

passport as well. She married John Simpson, on 20 May.²¹⁸ Since Erika had been the driving force behind this, she had travelled back and forth to meet Auden and organise details. Despite her mock complaints, Erika was very grateful to Auden for his kindness; and while her letter gives the sense that, compared with her keen pursuit of Kommer, the meetings with her ‘tyrant’ of a husband were not a priority, she did accommodate Auden in every possible way and even met his parents for the first time.

Eventually, Erika’s ambitious plan of performing in America – where, she thought, prevailed ‘ein Gefühl von Sinn, Verstand und 1000 Möglichkeiten’²¹⁹ – did become real, thanks to her networking skills and her stubbornness. Auden had already written a sketch in English for Therese Giehse – Carpenter calls it a ‘wedding present’.

Auden refers to this in *Letters from Iceland*:

The only other people staying here are a couple of Dutch schoolmarms, intelligent, well dressed, and attractive, a great contrast to the English variety. They have seen the Pfeffermühle, I’m glad to say, and were very impressed. By the way, I’ve finished that sketch with the goose for Thérèse. I haven’t got a copy as it’s appearing in the next volume of *New Writing*, but I’ll send you a proof copy as soon as it comes. I hope it will suit her.²²⁰

It is possible and likely that this particular sketch became the starting point of the Pfeffermühle’s English repertoire.²²¹

On 28 August 1936, Erika wrote to her family:

²¹⁸ In a letter to her father from Mallorca, written on 2 June 1936, Erika makes fun of her friend’s husband, writing: ‘Auf Wiedersehen und sei es ein sanftes Jahr, welches bevorsteht, eines, das den Joseph zu Ende bringt und zugleich den Anfang einer hübschen mühelosen zu schreibenden kleinen Novelle, – über Zwergerln, oder sonst ein erheiterndes Thema (wobei der Gatte der Giehse gut als Modell herhalten könnte!), – ich schwätze [...]’. [‘Good-bye and be it a gentle year, this one which we are facing, one that will see the end of Joseph and at the same time the beginning of a pretty little novella that will write itself effortlessly, – about dwarfs, or another such uplifting topic (for which the spouse of Giehse would serve as an excellent model!) – I am prating [...]’.] (Erika Mann, Letter to Thomas Mann from 2 June 1936. ETH Zürich, Thomas Mann Archiv.)

²¹⁹ Erika Mann, *Briefe und Antworten*, 1984, 1:99. [‘a feeling of sense, reason, and 1000 possibilities’.]

²²⁰ Auden and MacNeice, *Letters from Iceland*, 145.

²²¹ Auden expanded this sketch into a half-hour monologue, ‘Alfred’, broadcast in June 1940 by the Columbia Broadcasting System.

Liebe Buben [...] Miro reiste gestern abend, – ich gedenke es in etwa einer Woche zu tun. Und zwar zu euch. Im Grunde neige ich der Auffassung zu, dass ich, ehe denn ich segele, noch nach England muss, – falls Wystisysti nämlich dorten ist; Kommer hin und her, – Geld hat keins herausgeschaut aus seinen dämlichen Arrangements bisher, – sondern im Geigentiel [*intentional mix-up of the word Gegenteil*], – Kontrakt auch nicht, – also muss ich nunmehr meinem Köpfchen, dem ausgeruhten, folgen, und innerlich darauf gefasst sein, sehr vieles auf englisch darzubieten. Da heisst es Gattenlieder mitnehmen und eigene, zwecks Uebersetzung von Gattenhand, in Birmingham zurückzulassen. Wie das geschehn soll, liegt noch im Nebel (wann denn kommt er, der sexappeal, – er möchte in Rotterdam winkend stehn, – ich kenne ihn!) [...]
 Ich bin Eure Erimaus. (App. E2)

This wonderfully funny and lively letter demonstrates how fond Erika was of Auden, despite her ‘practical’ attitude. Although she did not particularly like to delegate work or rely on others, she sought his advice repeatedly while developing the English Pfeffermühle’s programme. It turned out to be a little collaboration of sorts, although it is not clear how much Auden ended up writing or translating, nor how much time the two were able to devote to this: on 19 September, Erika was already on her way to Southampton, where she was catching the ship to America.²²²

In any case though, Auden had provided his wife with ‘Gattenliedern’ [*literally* ‘*spouse songs*’], English sketches or poems he wrote specifically for the purpose, and also translated some of her own pieces, too, but I have not been able to find any traces of them. After having spent one last day with her husband, Erika Mann sent good-bye greetings to her mother from the train to Southampton:

Frau Süßi, Frau Süßi, –
 Dies sind Abschiedsgrüßi, – aus dem Zug nach Southampton,
 wo ich das Schiff, den K. und meine Koffer treffen soll. Wysti
 läßt schön grüßen – ich war nur einen Tag in seinen Armen, da
 er soeben erst aus Island heimgekehrt. An England kennt ich
 mich nicht gewöhnen, – hoffentlich an Amerika.

²²² If Auden really did wave good-bye to her in Rotterdam, then it represents a pleasingly circular sequence of events: three years later, Erika and Klaus Mann were waiting for Auden and Isherwood at the pier in New York.

Seid umarmt und zwar tüchtig von E.²²³

It is remarkable how quickly Erika got everything organised in the end. A show was put together in no time and a month after arriving in New York, she had found a local translator who rendered the rest of the German programme into English: ‘Ich habe einen sehr begabten Buben, welcher meine Liedchen übersetzt’.²²⁴ Well-connected and active, she had also managed to find prominent sponsors, among them Thomas Mann’s American publisher, Alfred A. Knopf, and the banker Maurice Wertheim. The latter had fallen in love with and proposed to Erika. Despite her eventual refusal, Wertheim paid for most of the expenses of the tour. Thus the other members of the ensemble were able to follow Erika to New York on 4 November 1936: about a month before the premier. Once again, Erika found ways – facilitated by others – to realise her plans, using her personal influence and charm.

On 24 October 1936, Erika wrote to her mother again from *The Bedford* in New York: ‘Wysti hat “Warum ist es so kalt?” auf Englisch geschickt, der Gute, und recht poetisch übertragen. Aber sonst ist nicht viel zu sehn vom Programm [...]’.²²⁵ Both the original and Auden’s translation of the text have survived:

[...] Wer faselt da von Ungerechtigkeiten?
 Von Mord und Marter, die zum Himmel schrein?
 Was kummert’s mich, wenn andre Leute streiten?
 Lasst mich in Ruh, – ich mische mich nicht ein!

[[...]] Coldly we stand and witness justice shot, –
 Our hearts are cold, – for whom shall hearts be hot, –

²²³ Erika Mann, *Briefe und Antworten*, 1984, 1:98. [‘Mrs Sweetie, Mrs Sweetie, – These are good-bye greetings, – from the train to Southampton where I am supposed to meet the ship, K., and my luggage. Wysti is sending his love – I could only spend one day in his arms since he just returned from Iceland. I cannot get used to England, – but hopefully to America. Feel yourselves embraced, and heartily, by E’.]

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, 1:104. [‘I have a very gifted boy who translates my little songs’.] In her edition of Erika Mann’s collected letters, A.Z. Prestel comments that Mann probably does not refer to Auden but to the young American poet John Latouche.

²²⁵ Helga Keiser-Hayne, *Beteiligt euch, es geht um eure Erde: Erika Mann und ihr politisches Kabarett die “Pfeffermühle” 1933-1937* (München: Spangenberg, 1990), 131. [‘Wysti sent “Warum ist es so kalt?” in English, the dear, and carried it over quite poetically. But otherwise, there is not much of a programme to speak of [...]’] Sadly, I could not locate the other texts performed in America, or Auden’s other translations.

For other's wrong we have no wish to burn, –
Let it alone, – it is not our concern.]

Warum sind wir so kalt?
Warum, – das tut doch weh!
Warum? Wir werden bald
Wie lauter Eis und Schnee!

[O why are we so cold, –
And this cold hurts us so?
Why, – for we shall soon
Be only ice and snow.]

Beteiligt Euch, – es geht um Eure Erde!
Und Ihr allein, Ihr habt die ganze Macht!
Seht zu, dass es ein wenig waermer werde,
In unserer schlimmen, kalten Winternacht!

[No, – it is your concern, your world, your hour, –
And yours alone, – you only have the power,
To make a little warmth, a little light
Shine in our cold and wicked winternight.]

Die ist erfuehlt von lauter kaltem Grauen, –
Solange wir ihm nicht zuleibe geht;
Wehrt Euch und kaempft, – und dann lasst uns doch schauen,
Ob die Gespenster diesen Kampf bestehen!

[With harms swarming and by nightmare shaken.
Only so long, as you refuse to waken,
Take part in it, – what ghost is there that can
Struggle at daybreak with the living man?]

Bestehen? Ich glaub' es nicht!
Die Sonne siegt zum Schluss!
Warum? Weil solches Licht
Am Ende siegen muss!

[Cold trembles in the dark,
But perishes in light, –
Why? Because the day
Always defeats the night!]²²⁶

Andrea Weiss calls Auden's translation an improvement of the original, without giving reasons for this judgement.

²²⁶ German: Weiss, *The Erika and Klaus Mann Story*, 135. English: Keiser-Hayne, *Beteiligt euch*, 78.

The main difference between the two versions lies in the narrative perspectives. Erika Mann changes perspective from stanza to stanza and unless the song were to be sung by varying constellations of actors – if I am not mistaken, the song was sung by Erika on her own – this inconsistency takes away from the strength of the message conveyed. While the first stanza is sung in the first person, defensively, in the second stanza a collective ‘we’ is worried by its own coldness. Auden seems to have disliked this too: he turned the defensive ‘I’ of the German version into a cold collective (‘we’, ‘us’) opposing others and choosing to ignore the ‘wrong’ done to them. Auden’s slightly altered alignment of these stanzas has the effect that when in the third stanza a moral voice appears that calls on everyone to help making life a little warmer, it is clearly distinct from those who are accused of their indifference and coldness – unlike in the German version.

Interestingly, Auden’s translation is often more black-and-white than the original, for instance in the last stanza, where he introduces the night as a clear contrast with the daylight. In the context of the *Pfeffermühle*, Erika Mann was always careful not to preach or to be too propagandistic. As she underlined about her German show later: ‘Kein Name – auch nicht der unseres verdorbenen Landes – ist je bei uns gefallen. Wir wirkten in der Parabel, im Gleichnis und Märchen, unmißverständlich, doch unschuldig [...]’²²⁷ This attitude exposed her not only to the obvious criticism from the right but also from those leftist intellectuals who thought that only more radical performances would make a change. An early reviewer commented after the very first show of the *Pfeffermühle* in 1933: ‘Vom Vater soll der Name stammen, der im Übrigen bissigere Speisen verspricht, als sie wirklich geboten werden [...]’.²²⁸

²²⁷ Keiser-Hayne, *Beteiligt euch*, 60. [‘No name – not even that of our degenerate country – was ever dropped here. We worked through the use of parables, allegories, and fairy tales, unambiguously yet innocently [...].’]

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, 32. [‘The father is supposed to have come up with the name which incidentally promises more biting dishes than are being delivered [...].’]

Auden, too, called himself a ‘parabolic writer’ in a letter to Stephen Spender from 1935.²²⁹ Written in 1935, *The Dog Beneath the Skin* had been first performed in 1936, confronting the audiences with a harsh commentary on contemporary British society. Edward Mendelson writes about the play:

The pattern introduced beneath the wanderings of the hero amounts to a parabolic lesson in history. This takes the form of a progress from innocence, in both the hero and his native village, to experience, of two opposed kinds: the revolutionary awakened in the hero and the reactionary hysteria that emerges in the village. (EA, 101)

It does not seem as if Erika Mann’s texts had an impact on Auden’s own writing. Around the same time though, his collection *Look, Stranger!* appeared, with a dedication to Erika Mann. In the collection, Auden also deliberated the situation of his home, Britain, in relation to a bigger geographical whole, calling the island

This fortress perched on the Atlantic scarp,
The mole between all Europe and the exile-crowded sea [...].²³⁰

Again, this shows that very early on, Auden was conscious of the realities faced by German refugees, the death camps and the need to flee if this was still possible, perhaps through his direct awareness of how their exile was affecting the Manns.

Having this awareness, Auden was keen to keep supporting his wife in whatever ways he could. This – to take a slightly cynical angle – is obvious from the fact that he did translate her cabaret songs that were not always of the highest literary standards and lived from being performed: a sign that he had developed a deep and protective affection for her. To Erika, he was of course invaluable during the time when she prepared the American Peppermill’s show: he knew German well enough, had an interest in translation, and was writing performance art with a social critical angle himself. This may be a good example of how ‘formalities’ – a ‘narrow strictness’, the

²²⁹ Jenkins, “Auden to Spender,” 64.

²³⁰ W.H. Auden, *Look, Stranger!: Poems* (London: Faber & Faber, 1936), 11.

observation of conventions – could indeed provide a shell in which something precious could develop.

As it turned out, the American Pfeffermühle was a great flop: despite ‘Wysti’s’ efforts and despite the fact that the premiere was attended by well-known New Yorkers and famous émigrés, such as Raimund von Hofmannsthal, Hugo von Hofmannsthal’s son. The reviews in the *New York Times* and the *New York Post* were devastating. After only a week of performances, the agency discontinued the project.

Erika made one last attempt at performing in America with her ‘European’ approach, following an invitation by the New School for Social Research in New York – but she ended up having to do so without most of her troupe who had decided to return to Europe. At the New School, the ‘University in Exile’ had recently been founded, a haven for German exiled intellectuals where Auden would later teach. Erika read a poem Auden had written specifically for the occasion, ‘The Dictator’s Song’:

Are you living in the city all your dreary little life?
 In a dreary little office with a dreary little wife?
 I will give you flags and banners,
 And processions and a band.
 You shall march in step together,
 You will feel just grand!

Refrain:

For I am the simple answer to the man’s and maiden’s prayer.
 I am the spring in the desert, I am the song in the air.
 The clue to history, I am the mystery, I am the miracle man.²³¹

At the New School, the Pfeffermühle – or what was left of it – received the most enthusiastic response during its time in the US. Finally though, Erika realised that it was impossible to serve American audiences the same food for thought which German-speaking audiences had enjoyed. She realised she had to rethink her strategy for

²³¹ Weiss, *The Erika and Klaus Mann Story*, 140–141.

informing the American public, which now became her chief goal. And thus, three years and 1034 performances later, the Pfeffermühle ceased to exist.²³²

Despite the fact, or maybe precisely because her first American project had failed, Erika Mann realised how much there was left to be done, how much awareness still needed to be raised: during Roosevelt's presidency between 1933 and 1945, America was becoming the main haven for refugees threatened by the expansion of Nazism throughout Europe, and yet the American public knew very little about the circumstances the refugees left behind. Instead of trying to reform through allegory and parable, as she had attempted with the ensemble, Erika Mann now realised that she had to cater for the American taste instead, using her charismatic presence and her story to help in both educational and practical ways: committees and aid funds had to be founded, protests and demonstrations organised; platforms created to promote German cultural life in exile and give exiled artists the chance to work.

From this point onwards, the Mann family, specifically Erika and Klaus Mann, became central to many of these efforts and the epicentre of the German diaspora in America. Thomas Mann became chairman of the 'American Guild of German Cultural Freedom'. Erika rarely stayed in one place for more than a few days, ceaselessly touring the United States and eventually becoming the 'meistbeschäftigter weiblicher "lecturer"', as she called herself, a political writer, and a journalist. She lectured on political topics with concrete, practical aims in mind, accepting any invitation to speak. Her first public appearance was in Madison Square Garden at the 'Peace and Democracy Rally' on 15 March 1937 in front of about 23,000 people, next to distinguished speakers such as the mayor of New York, Fiorello La Guardia.

Meanwhile, Auden was teaching in England and travelling to Iceland. His *Letters from Iceland* include a 'letter' (in Chapter XI) to Erika Mann, starting like a true husband

²³² Ibid., 140.

with complaints about his sore throat and a wink: ‘I suppose my Id is really repenting its sins, which it apparently has to do about every six months, but I wish it wouldn’t’.²³³ He also mentioned traveling on a bus to Myvatn,

[...] full of Nazis who talked incessantly about Die Schönheit des Islands, and the Aryan qualities of the stock ‘Die Kinder sind so reizend: schöne blonde Haare und blaue Augen. Ein echt Germanischer Typus’. I expect this isn’t grammatical, but that’s what it sounded like. I am glad to say that as they made this last remark we passed a pair of kids on the road who were as black as night.²³⁴

The appearance of this kind of observation in a public letter to his ‘wife’ Erika Mann exemplifies that Auden now had a more personal interest in the developments in Germany. Generally, the book is full of allusions to Germany and German culture.²³⁵

2.4 ‘WHAT DOES THE SONG HOPE FOR?’

While Auden thus remained keenly interested in current events, in what was happening in Europe, he was feeling increasingly ambivalent about trying to take political sides with his poetry. The question ‘What does the song hope for?’ (‘Orpheus’, CP, 158) was central to his thinking at the time.

Auden stayed in touch with those members of the Mann family who were still based in Europe at this point. It has not really been stressed enough just how important this network was becoming for Auden, especially once he was building up a new existence in America after having abandoned his inherited network in England: the marriage to Erika Mann, despite not being ‘consummated’, affected Auden’s life in very concrete ways.

Earlier in 1936 for instance, Auden had been asked to sign a festive letter on the occasion of Sigmund Freud’s 80th birthday.²³⁶ This must have happened through

²³³ Auden and MacNeice, *Letters from Iceland*, 134.

²³⁴ *Ibid.*

²³⁵ See: Waidson, “Auden and German Literature,” 350.

Thomas Mann's initiative, since he organised the surprise and personally delivered the letter to Freud. The text had been written by Stefan Zweig, slightly amended by Thomas Mann, and signed by artists such as Aldous Huxley, Heinrich Mann, René Schickele, Hermann Hesse, Emil Ludwig, Annette Kolb –, and Wystan Hugh Auden.²³⁷ These names give an idea of the immense network Auden was suddenly part of and privy to due to his connection to the Manns. His in-laws enjoyed myth making as much as Auden did and would have talked with pleasure to their illustrious friends about 'Eri's Wysti'. Carpenter also acknowledges that through the Manns, Auden 'began to get to know a number of refugees from Nazi Germany', naming only Wolfgang Köhler ('pioneer of Gestalt psychology, who was teaching in America').²³⁸ Gestalt theory also made it into Auden's *New Year Letter*:

Yet in intention all are one,
 Intending that their wills be done
 Within a peace where all desires
 Find each in each what each requires,
 A true Gestalt where indiscrete
 Perceptions and extension meet. (CP, 198-199)

Köhler, who had studied under Max Planck, was interested in painting a holistic picture of the world, which resulted in his Gestalt theory: '[...] to apply the gestalt category means to find out which parts of nature belong as parts to functional wholes, to discover their position in these wholes, their degree of relative independence, and the articulation of larger wholes into sub-wholes'.²³⁹ One can see immediately why Auden would have

²³⁶ Both Auden and Thomas Mann were interested in Freud. Just before Mann's birthday lecture for Freud, Auden wrote in 'Psychology and Art To-day': 'Certain writers, notably Thomas Mann and D.H. Lawrence, have actually written about Freud [...] but the importance of Freud to art is greater than his language, technique or the truth of theoretical details. He is the most typical but not the only representative of a certain attitude to life and living relationships, and to define that attitude and its importance to creative art must be the purpose of this essay'. (W.H. Auden, "Psychology and Art To-Day," ed. Geoffrey Griegson (London: John Lane, 1935), 337.) It would be an interesting project to compare the two writers' relative views on Freud, but this is beyond the scope of my thesis.

²³⁷ Thomas Mann, *Tagebücher, 1935-1936*, 590.

²³⁸ Carpenter, *W.H. Auden*, 245.

²³⁹ Kurt Koffka, *Principles Of Gestalt Psychology* (Routledge, 2013), 22.

been drawn to a man with such an approach to life, not to speak of his ‘obsession’ with psychologists. What is even more fascinating though is that Auden was aware of the Gestalt school of psychology as early as 1927, as an entry at the very beginning of his 1927-1929 notebook shows. The entry is a list of words starting with ‘Freud’ then, in descending order followed by ‘Group Psychology, Case Histories, Preface of Metapsychology [...] Sex and Repression, Sexual Life among Savages, Gestalt’.²⁴⁰ Here, Auden was trying to order the many elements of psychology. The ideas of Gestalt psychology had also shaped *The Orators*.

It is striking how amicably Auden’s relationship with his wife and her family began in 1935 and how constant and continuous the connection turned out to be, considering the strange and serendipitous circumstances under which it came about. Erika and Auden could relate to one another in many ways and always remained very fond of each other. There are few surviving documents telling us about the year-to-year reality of their relationship after 1936, partly because neither of them kept diaries and very few letters have survived – those which have often dealing with legal issues. But both seem to have paid each other visits whenever their busy life and their travels allowed for it.

Ever since their wedding, the political situation in Europe had been deteriorating significantly and one topic stirred the minds particularly. When on Monday 15 February 1937, Thomas Mann had Therese Giehse over for dinner in Zurich, their conversation centred around one topic: the Spanish Civil War.

Zum Abendessen die *Giehse*. Über den Drang junger Intellektueller an die spanische Front. Auch W. Auden ist dort. Hat nicht der Fascismus als geistige Mode schon abgewirtschaftet? War nicht all sein Prahlen mit Jugend und

²⁴⁰ W.H. Auden, *Poems 1927-1929: A Photographic and Typographic Facsimile of the Original Notebook in the Berg Collection of English and American Literature*, ed. Patrick T. Lawlor (New York: The New York Public Library, 1989), 2.

Zukunft so blöde, wie ich immer wußte, daß es sei? Alle bessere, wirkliche Jugend ist auf der anderen Seite.²⁴¹

Evidently, Thomas Mann's somewhat naive, hopeful appraisal that Fascism might already have run out of steam in 1937 was deluded.

Mann's statement has to be seen in the context of his own indecision about his role in the face of Fascism: not unlike Auden, he tended to put his own creative, timeless work first – to an extent that tainted his otherwise close relationship with Erika who in 1936 essentially had to force her father to make a public statement against the Nazi regime.²⁴² Thomas Mann was right in one respect though: the 'bessere, wirkliche Jugend' tended to support the Republican cause if they were not already in or on their way to Spain. And indeed, Auden had left for Spain not long before the conversation between Mann and Giehse over dinner.

While Thomas Mann was somewhat dismissive of the cult which had developed around the Spanish Civil War amongst young European intellectuals, his own children Erika and Klaus went to Spain, too. That all three would have visited Spain during the Civil War is not surprising since the mood of the time was such that those who did not go to Spain had to defend their position rather than vice versa. The pull and relevance of a trip to Spain, as well as the publicity gained through it by the young intellectual elite, was hard to ignore.

Auden left for Spain on 12 January 1937 – over a year before Erika and Klaus Mann travelled there, in June 1938, when the war had been raging for two years. Auden's and the Mann siblings' respective approaches to the Spanish question helps to distinguish their different political attitudes and views. This is important not only to

²⁴¹ Thomas Mann, *Briefe 1937-1947* (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer, 1963), 28. [*Giehse* over for dinner. About the urge of young intellectuals to the Spanish front. W. Auden is there, too. Isn't Fascism already ruined as an intellectual fashion? Was it not all its boasting of its youth and future as stupid as I always knew it was? All the better, the true youth is on the other side'.]

²⁴² Later, Thomas Mann produced anti-Nazi propaganda for the BBC: '[...] was soll man diesen unglückseligen, verdummten und verbiesterten Menschen sagen?' [...]' what should one tell these unfortunate, addled, and ruffian human beings?' (Thomas Mann and Caroline Newton, *The Letters of Thomas Mann to Caroline Newton*, ed. Caroline Newton (Princeton, 1971), 39.)

show the development of Auden's own attitude but also because in the end, from about 1939 onwards, politics started to become a topic of controversy especially between Klaus Mann and Auden.

With hindsight, the inconsistency of 'political Auden' is first detectable in the story of his visit to Spain during the Civil War: two letters he wrote to E.R. Dodds before and during Christmas of 1936 show this most acutely. In the first, from 8 December 1936, Auden only mentions Spain peripherally after having critiqued a lecture Dodds must have given on a topic paraphrased by Auden as 'development of scholarship as a technical mystery'. Continuing in the same tone, not exactly giving the impression of being very concerned about the Spanish problem itself, Auden announced his decision to go to Spain in the New Year. Of course this uninvolved, humorous attitude was possibly donned by Auden in order to hide underlying worries:

I'm decided to go out in the new year, as soon as the book is finished, to join the International Brigade in Spain. I so dislike everyday political activities that I wont [*sic*] do them, but here is something I can do as a citizen and not as a writer, and as I have no dependants, I feel I ought to go; but O I do hope there are not too many surrealists there. Please dont tell anyone about this. I shant [*sic*] break it to my parents till after Xmas.²⁴³

This is not exactly the letter of an ardent leftist, who presumably would have worried about things other than the presence of surrealists on the battlefield. Moreover, Auden presents his decision to 'do something' in Spain as a moral and social rather than political choice. His distinction between the duty of the citizen and that of the professional is reminiscent of Moses Mendelssohn's distinction in his essay 'Über die Frage: Was heißt Aufklären?' between the role and duty of the 'Mensch als Mensch' (human being as a human being) and that of the 'Mensch als Bürger' (human being as a

²⁴³ W.H. Auden, Letter to E.R. Dodds from 8 December 1936, Letters from Auden to Dodds, Bodl., MS. Eng. lett. c. 464, fols. 10-11. All future quotations from Auden's letters the Doddses that are not printed in 'A Change of Heart: Six Letters from Auden to the Doddses' (*The Map of All my Youth*, pp. 95-115) are taken from this collection in the Bodleian Library in Oxford.

citizen).²⁴⁴ Auden explicitly states that he is going to Spain as a citizen and not as a writer; hoping he might be useful as an ambulance driver and not by writing about the situation.

But Auden also wrote another letter, prompted by Dodds's reply, in which he took a literary turn after all:

Dear Dodds,

Many thanks for your letter. I think it is Owen [*Wilfred Owen*] who has seduced me rather than his lordship [*Lord Byron*].

I am not one of those who believe that poetry need or even should be directly political, but in a critical period such as ours, I do believe that the poet must have direct knowledge of the major political events. It is possible that in some periods, the poet can absorb and feel all in his ordinary everyday life, perhaps the supreme masters always can, but for the second order and particularly today, what the poet knows, what he can write about is what he experiences in his own person. Academic knowledge is not enough. I feel I can speak with authority about la Condition Humaine of only a small class of English intellectuals and professional people and the time has come to gamble on something bigger. I shall probably be a bloody bad soldier but how can I speak to/for them without becoming one? We shall be at Threlkeld directly after Christmas, so please do come over and have a walk, to help me to get into training.

Love to you and Mrs Dodds²⁴⁵

The contrast between Auden's statements in the two letters makes one wonder what Dodds had written in his reply. Suddenly, the trip to Spain – still as conspicuously absent from Auden's argument in the second letter – had changed from being the unattached citizen's duty to being a premise for a poet with the wish to lend his voice to 'the people' and to address their situation in his poems – since apparently this is what Auden meant by 'speak to/for them'. Of course, the letter is inconsistent in itself: Auden's hope to speak for 'them', understanding their situation and 'struggle', clashes with his statement that he did not feel that 'poetry need or even should be directly political'. But speaking for/to those who fought on 'his' side in Spain meant,

²⁴⁴ Moses Mendelssohn, 'Über die Frage: Was heißt aufklären?', in *Was ist Aufklärung? Thesen und Definitionen*, ed. E. Bahr (Stuttgart: Philipp Reclam jun., 1984), p. 4.

²⁴⁵ Auden, Letter to E.R. Dodds from December 1936. Fol. 12.

inescapably, a commitment to the leftist cause, which cannot be called an apolitical stance at all.

Two other points in the second letter are particularly interesting, alone as well as in combination: Auden's confession to have been 'seduced' by Owen rather than Lord Byron – thereby establishing a direct link between Spain and WWI, the war he had missed – and the painful awareness that his world-view at the time was still shaped primarily by his upbringing amongst 'a small class of English intellectuals and professional people'.

Ever since his visit to Berlin, where he first defined his 'life-wish' as 'desire for separation, from family, from one's literary predecessors', Auden was aware how limited his world was, and consequently the world he was addressing in his poetry.²⁴⁶ As early as the mid-30s, Auden began to yearn for a broader vision, and this stands in direct connection with his later alignment with Goethe, who coined the term 'world literature' for a reason. Towards the end of his life, Auden acknowledged the subjectivity of all perceptions in 'I Am Not a Camera':

To call our sight Vision
implies that, to us,
all objects are subjects.

What we have not named
or beheld as a symbol
escapes our notice. (CP, 841)

In the 30s, Auden's attempt to broaden his vision led to puzzling inconsistencies and contradictions: the occasion he had chosen for the extension of his sphere of competence and his breaking away from his middle class life happened to be of major public interest and thus helped to cement Auden's reputation as a political poet.

²⁴⁶ Maybe Auden's trope of the Truly Strong Man – characterised by happiness through absence of fear ('1929') and a sense of determination – had some influence on Auden's decision to go to Spain, too.

At the same time, Auden was not the first poet who needed a war to escape from an uninspiring existence (nor indeed the first child of the middle class who felt compelled to 'break away'). Edward Thomas in part joined up to fight in WWI to escape from family life. Auden's identification with Wilfred Owen, too – assuming this is in fact whom Auden meant – could similarly be counted amongst those 'literary predecessors' from whom Auden sought to distance himself by breaking away from the familiar. There is, however, also another possible way of looking at this: in his poetry, Owen too breaks with tradition through the distortion of all too familiar cultural images, in order to represent his experiences at the front through uncanny juxtapositions in the space of his poems – a 'Verfremdungseffekt' à la Brecht.

This is the case in 'Anthem for Doomed Youth', for example, where Owen breaks with the habitual and creates an uncanny feeling by blending the familiar elements of a Christian burial with war images. Hence the natural significance and depth of Owen's poem that describes a situation which is both out of the ordinary and yet so dependent on 'normal' life, its symbolism and vocabulary, for description by contrast. This is what might have appealed to Auden – Owen had obviously not stirred an enthusiasm for fighting or war in him. Probably, more generally, it was a feeling of previous limitation that compelled Auden to go to Spain. One feels tempted to add that Auden may be one of very few people who felt compelled to 'go to war' after having read Owen's poetry.

Once in Spain, visiting Barcelona and Valencia, Auden got to experience socialism 'in his own person', as he had hoped to, and found the situation to be wildly out of touch with what had been propagated. He had come to make himself useful, but instead of driving an ambulance, as he had intended, he only stayed for a few months,

working briefly as a broadcaster of propaganda for the Republican government and otherwise ‘waited around, could find nothing to do’.²⁴⁷

If it had really been Auden’s aim to write with authority about the ‘Condition Humaine’ of those participating in the Civil War, he – who was so attached to orderly life – seems to have given up this plan once he saw the practices of the International Brigades and their inefficiency. Horrified by all sides, he responded with relative silence to a situation, which, he felt, would force him to make ‘dishonest’ statements: while of course he was of the opinion that Franco should not be supported by any means, he did not have anything convincing to say about the Republicans. No institution was beyond politics, he realised, and being apolitical in time of war a logical impossibility. Again, this foreshadowed Auden’s silence in the face of WWII horrors in the destroyed Germany he visited in 1945.

Auden was nevertheless tempted to published ‘Spain 1937’, which he later repudiated, and to give a public speech at a charity dinner for Spain as late as 1939. It is important to remember in this context that Auden had been adopted as the British national poet and ‘hyped’ ever since the appearance of his first collection of poetry. While it seems likely that he enjoyed the attention at the time, it cannot have been an easy situation for a young poet. Already in 1938, Auden wrote in *The Prolific and the Devourer*: ‘The voice of the Tempter: “Unless you take part in the class struggle, you cannot become a major writer.”’ (Eng.A, 403). While he left it for the reader to decide who exactly the Tempter was, it might have been the prestige connected with a trip to Spain: not a small temptation for any young writer – despite Auden’s comparative immunity to the lures of publicity and fame. Still, the significance of the public machinery, which can work in a writer’s favour or against it, can by contrast be seen in the harsh reactions from critics when Auden ‘left the sinking ship’ in 1939.

²⁴⁷ Carpenter, *W.H. Auden*, 210.

All in all, one could say that after Berlin, Spain signified the next step in bringing Auden closer to the ‘separation’ from home he had desired and towards the international life he would come to lead. Auden’s final break with what was perceived to be engagé poetry in the late 30s only showed where his true interest lay: in the abstract, the universal, the ‘truth’. Although he was still engaging with the socio-political realm, his focus would be much broader than that of current affairs. Really, this had never been much different: even in Auden’s self-proclaimed ‘occasional’ poem-sequence ‘1929’, though, the ‘occasional’ is abstracted to the point of being unrecognisable to anyone without additional biographical information, and ‘Spain’, too, is only truly political if the reader projects his own convictions onto the poem.

Poetically, there is a direct connection between ‘1929’ and ‘Spain’, these two ‘occasional’ poems which so quickly transcend the ‘occasional’ settings they offered to the reader as a frame of reference through their respective titles. ‘Spain’ is as little ‘located’ in Spain as ‘1929’ is in Berlin. Most obviously, the line from ‘1929’ ‘So I remember all of those whose death | Is necessary condition of the season’s putting forth,’ (CP, 45) written seven years before Auden’s visit to Spain, stands in connection with the ‘necessary murder’ of ‘Spain’ – which again seems to refer back to the ‘necessary error’ of ‘1929’: choice. While Auden later revised the line and replaced the ‘necessary murder’ with ‘chances of death’ – a change softening somewhat the poet’s implied attitude towards war – life reveals itself to *be* Spain, ‘your choice’, everyone’s choice.

Spain, which is thus equated with life, accepts whatever proposals she is faced with: Spain/life is a surface onto which every individual’s attitude – irrespective of their alignment – can be projected:

‘What’s your proposal? To build the just city? I will.
I agree. Or is it the suicide pact, the romantic

Death? Very well, I accept, for
I am your choice, your decision. Yes, I am Spain'.²⁴⁸

Already in 'Spain', Auden showed that political visions were subjective, while continuing to agonise over the question of the artist's relationship with politics.

Auden's obsession with the possibility or rather necessity of choice in human lives connects '1929' and 'Spain'. As much as Auden might have experimented with politicised verse in the 30s, the consistencies between '1929' and 'Spain' support the argument that despite various 'tempters', Auden always did actually remain true to his own voice, on which he had settled around the time of his departure from Berlin. Thus the period bracketed by Auden's first experience of living abroad and his final departure from Britain could be regarded as one long phase of experimentation and of individualisation, between Berlin and New York.²⁴⁹

Unlike Auden, the Mann siblings travelled to Spain with a clearly defined aim: to witness the state of affairs at the Republican Ebro front and to report about the situation. They did not travel to Spain as artists but as reporters with a predictable bias, given their personal experience of Fascism. After having spent three weeks being escorted to various sights of war, they came to an unsurprising conclusion Auden would probably have classified as propaganda:

Dieser Krieg, in dem es um so viel mehr geht, als nur um
Schicksal und Unabhängigkeit eines Volkes, wird nicht verloren
werden. Von einem 'Sieg' der Faschisten wird man unter keinen
Umständen, was auch immer geschehe, mehr sprechen können:

²⁴⁸ W.H. Auden, *Spain* (London: Faber & Faber, 1937), 9.

²⁴⁹ In 'Two Cities: Berlin and New York' (*W.H. Auden in Context*, ed. Tony Sharpe, pp. 24–34), Patrick Deer explores the same period of Auden's life – 'bookended by his stay in Berlin in 1928–29 and by his controversial emigration to New York in January 1939 on the eve of World War II' – though with a focus on 'the fugitive traces left by these cities in his poetry' (both p. 24). He, too, is unconvinced of the 'legend', depicted in various critical accounts, that 'decadent Weimar Berlin freed Auden sexually and imaginatively, enabling the political impostures and commitments of his Thirties poetic; whereas New York ushered the poet into exile and "later" style as an increasingly private citizen in the alienating American "megalopolis"'. (24) He argues that instead, these two cities specifically, and his constant change of scenery more generally, can be regarded as an expression of Auden's insight, recorded in his Berlin Journal 'Creative pleasure is, like pain, an increase in tension'. He claims that, as a result, Auden's poetry equally 'refuses to be rooted in any metropolis' (24).

der Widerstand der Demokratie, der nun über zwei Jahre lang dauert, ist an sich nun einmal ganz abgesehen vom schliesslichen Ausgang ein Ereignis, das seine historischen Konsequenzen haben muss und dessen moralisch-politische Folgen heute noch niemand ermessen kann.²⁵⁰

While Auden might have agreed about the significance of the Spanish conflict in the context of the historical process, he was not personally affected by its outcome in the way the Manns were, who had dedicated their life to the fight against Fascism and whose home country faced the same fate. Because of his relative political neutrality and removal from actual Fascist threat, Auden's plans and expectations in Spain were vague. His actual experience of the conflict, too, is not known in details. It is clear, however, that Auden did not do humanitarian work as he had planned, but was made to broadcast propaganda: a rather useless task, since it was broadcast in English.

After two months in Spain, Auden returned to England. Before Klaus and Erika Mann set foot in Spain, he had already moved on to another war, this time in China, and moved on mentally, too. That he published 'Spain' at all – in pamphlet form, with 'all of the author's royalties from the sale of this poem go[ing] to *Medical Aid for Spain*' – while disowning the poem later; that despite blaming the voice of the 'tempter' in 1938 he still spoke at a Gala in order to raise money for refugees from Spain only to feel 'covered with dirt' afterwards: all this is consistent with how nebulous his reasons for going to Spain were in the first place. Equally inconsistent the fact that Auden's 'Spain' pamphlet contained the line 'To-day the expending of powers | On the flat ephemeral pamphlet and the boring meeting'. (Eng.A, 212)

Once published though, 'Spain' was a most effective poem taking a prominent place in Stephen Spender's *Poems for Spain*. As such, it developed a life of its own in a

²⁵⁰ Erika Mann and Klaus Mann, "Zurück von Spanien," *Die Nation*, no. 35 (n.d.): 6. ['This war, in which there is so much more at stake than just the destiny and independence of a people, will not be lost. Under no circumstances, whatever may happen, will one be able to talk of a Fascist victory: the resistance of democracy, which has been lasting for over two years, is simply an event which, regardless of the final outcome of the situation, will have its historical consequences and the moral-political consequences of which nobody can estimate today'.]

way. Even in exile circles, the poem was circulating, as a diary entry by Klaus Mann shows. On 10 August 1937, he noted at Sanary, France: ‘Früh am Strand. Gelesen: im Romantiker-Heft. (“Marx und die Romantiker” u.s.w.) – Das schöne Gedicht “Spain” von Auden. (Denke daran, es zu übersetzen.) – In einer Anthologie “New Writings.” [sic]’.²⁵¹ It is unclear which of the two 1937 issues of *New Writing*, edited by John Lehman, Mann had access to. While the volumes themselves have no publication date, the spring edition was stamped by the Bodleian Library on 2 June 1937, close to the date given in Mann’s diary entry, and includes Auden’s poem ‘Lay your sleeping head my love’. The autumn edition was stamped on 10 November and includes Auden’s ‘Miss Gee’, ‘Victor’, and ‘Under the fronds of life’.

Mann’s passage does not clarify whether he read ‘Spain’ in the anthology *New Writing*, or whether he read ‘Spain’ and also *New Writing*. But since the poem did not appear in *New Writing* the latter must be true. Mann could have come across ‘Spain’ in a pamphlet also including Raul Gonzalez Tunon’s poem ‘Madrid’. It is unclear whether this publication preceded the Faber pamphlet or not, but in any case, after having discovered the poem Mann wrote to Auden asking for a proper print copy.²⁵² On 30 August 1937, Auden replied to his brother-in-law from Dover that he had asked Faber to send a copy of *Spain* to France, alerting him to the ‘bad misprint’ of ‘birds’ where it should say ‘burrs’. Mann seems not to have mentioned his plan of translating the poem to Auden and to have abandoned that idea pretty quickly in any case. Auden closed his letter stating: ‘I’m not going to America this January after all as Christopher and I are

²⁵¹ Klaus Mann, *Tagebücher 1936 bis 1937*, ed. Joachim Heimannsberg, Peter Laemmle, and Wilfried F. Schoeller (München: Spangenberg, 1990), 150. [‘Early at the beach. Read: parts of the Romantics issue (“Marx and the Romantics” etc.) – The beautiful poem “Spain” by Auden. (Thinking about translating it.) – In an anthology “New Writings.” [sic].]

²⁵² Auden was kept busy with other ‘family business’, too. On 16 July 1937, Thomas Mann wrote disapprovingly in his diary: ‘Erika in Bedrängnis, weil gewisse für das amer. Consulat notwendige Papiere von ihrem Paß-Gatten Wystan nicht eintreffen. Ihre Gegenwart, die leider zu Ende geht, immer belebend und erheiternd’. [‘Erika in distress because certain papers required by the Amer. Consulat haven’t arrived from her passport-spouse Wystan. Her presence, which is sadly coming to an end, always stimulating and uplifting’.] (Mann, *Briefe 1937-1947*, 77.)

being sent to the East. Can you stop off a day or so in England this September. I would so like to meet you'. But Auden and Mann would not meet until a year and a half later.

2.5 THE EXPAT AND THE EXILES

When Auden and Christopher Isherwood arrived in New York City on board the *Champlain* on 26 January 1939, Klaus and Erika Mann were waiting for them at the pier.²⁵³ This was another formality on their part, but also maybe a gesture; for Auden, to be arriving on the *Champlain* was rather symbolic as the ship also carried many political refugees from Europe to their new home. From the beginning, Auden's America was the America of the displaced and a striking percentage of his close friends there had escaped from Nazi Europe. What was symbolic, too, was the fact that Auden was welcomed to his new 'home' by 'family'. Their reunion on another continent coupled with their common experience of life in a foreign country, and Auden's immediate immersion in the Manns' life in America, must have had an impact on their relationship. Maybe this gave them an additional sense of connectedness beyond the already existing sense of a 'family-connection', however tongue-in-cheek this might have been at first. In any case, between 1939 and 1940 the Manns saw quite a lot of Auden.

Klaus Mann recorded the arrival of his brother-in-law on 28 January: 'Viel Betrieb. Ankunft von *Wystan Auden* und *Christopher Isherwood*, auf der "Champlain". Mit E – ihnen, auf dem "Cutter", in die Quarantäne entgegengefahren. Sympatischer Eindruck von A. Funny enough, I didn't meet him, until now. – Abends, Ausgang: *Wystan*, Eugene MacCown, Tomski, Bonzo [...]'²⁵⁴ When they finally met in person,

²⁵³ Thomas Mann noted in his diary on Thursday, 26 January: 'Nach dem Frühstück Erika, die W. Auden, auch Riess von Schiff abgeholt hatte. Mit ihr über das spanische Elend, die im Gang befindliche Einnahme von Barcelona, die bevorstehenden Massacres, die englische Anleihe für Franco, mit der Italien u. Deutschland bezahlt werden sollen – und all dies Schändliche'. ['After breakfast Erika, who picked up W. Auden, and Riess too, at the ship. Talked about the suffering in Spain, the ongoing usurpation of Barcelona, the imminent massacres, the English loan given to Franco with which Italy and Germany are supposed to be paid – and all these shameful things'.] (Ibid., 352.)

²⁵⁴ Klaus Mann, *Tagebücher 1938 bis 1939*, ed. Joachim Heimannsberg, Peter Laemmle, and Wilfried F. Schoeller (München: Spangenberg, 1990), 84. ['Lots going on. Arrival of *Wystan Auden* and *Christopher*

Klaus Mann's first impression of 'Wystan' seems to have been sincerely positive. His records give an idea of how active Auden was during his first weeks in America: not only going out with Klaus and his friends on his first evening in New York, but also visiting his in-laws in Princeton four days after his arrival. Mann wrote about the trip a few days after his return:

Mehrere Tage in *Princeton*. Mit E, *Liesl Frank*, und *Auden* hinausgefahren. Am nächsten Tag: *Isherwood* dazu. Wystan und er, freundlich-gesellig. Literarisches, politisches, erotisches Gespräch. Musik. (Wystan singt 'Light Verses' am Klavier.) – Die Photographen von 'Life'. Gruppen-Aufnahme. [...] Abends: [...] Im 'George Washington,' bei *Christopher – Wystan*, mit Ch.'s American Boy, Ury, Tomski, Bonzo. Vielfache Spannungen. W.'s Interesse für U..... Zu viert noch in einer Kneipe (I, with my three boy friends: T., B., U.) – Bonzo erzwingt 'conversation à trois,' im Hotel, Sinnlos.²⁵⁵

Klaus had driven his sister, Auden, and Liesl Frank – the wife of Bruno Frank, a writer-friend of Thomas Mann – down to Princeton on Monday, 30 January. Apparently, he still got on very well with Auden at this point: they had much to talk about – literature, politics, sex – and Auden played the piano and sang. On the next day, Thomas Mann noted in his diary: 'Ankunft des Freundes des W. Audens. Lunch mit Erika und ihnen. Nachher Life-Photograph: Von ½ 3 bis gegen ½ 5 zahlreiche Aufnahmen in der Library u. im Salon, einzeln u. gruppenweise. [...] Nach dem Abendessen Musik für Auden: Tristan und Wolf.'²⁵⁶ Isherwood joined the party at Princeton just in time for a visit by a *Life* magazine photographer. Apparently, after the 'family picture' was taken,

Isherwood, on board of the "Champlain". With E – travelled out to them, who were in quarantine, onboard of the "Cutter". A makes an agreeable impression on me. Funny enough, I didn't meet him, until now. – In the evening, going out: Wystan, Eugene MacCown, Tomski, Bonzo [...].'

²⁵⁵ Ibid., 84–85. ['Several days in *Princeton*. Drove out with E, *Liesl Frank*, and *Auden*. The next day: *Isherwood* joins. Wystan and him, friendly, social. A literary, political, erotic conversation. Music. (Wystan sings "Light Verses" at the piano.) – The "*Life*" photographers. Group-picture [...]. In the evening: [...] At the "George Washington," with Christopher – Wystan, with Ch.'s American Boy, Ury, Tomski, Bonzo. Manifold tensions. W.'s interest in U..... The four of us in a bar later (I, with my three boy friends: T., B., U.) – Bonzo pressures us into a "conversation à trois," in the hotel, Pointless'.]

²⁵⁶ Thomas Mann, *Tagebücher, 1937-1939*, ed. Peter de Mendelssohn (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer, 1980), 355. ['Arrival of the friend of W. Auden. Lunch with Erika and the two. Later Life-photographer: Between ½ 3 until about ½ 5 numerous shots in the library a. in the salon, on our own and as a group. [...] After dinner music for Auden: Tristan and Wolf.']

the photographer asked Thomas Mann how Isherwood was actually related to the Mann family, and Mann said he was the ‘family pimp’.²⁵⁷

Thomas Mann remembered about the visit that Auden had brought one of his books as a present to his hosts: ‘Ankunft von Erika und Klaus mit W. Auden und Liesl Frank. [...] Buchgeschenk von Auden: “Leight verses” [*sic*] mit gescheiter Einleitung von ihm’.²⁵⁸ Evidently, in America the ‘family relations’ continued most smoothly. The fact that Auden travelled to Princeton less than a week after his arrival in New York shows how much he appreciated the affiliation with his in-laws at this point. Community was always valued highly by Auden. Having the Manns and their unique social network in America was more significant to Auden at the time than is generally acknowledged.

One example for this is Auden’s connection with the psychoanalyst Caroline Newton, whom he met through them early in 1940.²⁵⁹ Only Davenport-Hines points this out in his biography, but it is important to underline that the connection became a crucial one for Auden since Newton supported him financially during his early days in America – from 1940 to the end of 1944 when they fell out; and he lived in her Pennsylvanian home for a while prior to this. During this period, Auden was struggling to make ends meet because he could not access his English money during the war; another reason was Chester Kallman’s college fees, which Auden partly paid for when Kallman’s father refused to do so.

It is even possible that Thomas Mann himself suggested to his friend that she support his son-in-law in the first place: in 1942, he asked her if she could possibly support an Austrian-Jewish lung specialist, Robert Klopstock, comparing his ‘worthiness’ to that of Auden: ‘Wäre es wohl möglich, dass Sie die 35 oder 40 dollars

²⁵⁷ This anecdote is not described in *Christopher and his Kind*, the source Andrea Weiss gives.

²⁵⁸ Thomas Mann, *Tagebücher, 1937-1939*, 354. [‘Arrival Erika and Klaus with W. Auden and Liesl Frank. [...] Auden brought book gift: “Leight verses” [*sic*] with his clever introduction’.]

²⁵⁹ Interestingly, Thomas Mann himself had first made Newton’s acquaintance in Berlin in 1929 – just after Auden had left Berlin to return to England – through their mutual acquaintance Jakob Wassermann.

monatlich einige Zeit für den verdienten und bedrängten Mann erübrigen könnten? Ich glaube, es wäre eine gute Tat, denn nach Allem, was ich von ihm weiss, ist er gewiss auf seinem Gebiet ebenso bedeutend wie Auden auf dem seinen'.²⁶⁰ But then again it is also possible that Mann asked Caroline Newton because of her previous support of Auden. Klaus Mann later criticised his brother-in-law for taking money from the family acquaintance. On 18 April 1942, he wrote to his sister: '[...] Golo sollte sich um einen Guggenheim Fellowship bemühen: Alvin Johnson wird behilflich sein. Dass Wystan sich eine ergattert hat, ist, in Anbetracht von Carolines regelmässiger charity, schnöde bis zum Unanständigen'. (App. E4) While it is hard to assess Auden's financial situation at the time, it does indeed seem somewhat strange for anyone to accept a private 'stipend' – or charity, as Klaus Mann calls it – and to then pay for his lover's education with it. But at the same time, Klaus Mann, who was financially dependent on his parents for most of his life, might not be the most unbiased moral authority to judge these circumstances.

It seems that after his first curiosity about Auden and his eccentricities had been satisfied, Klaus Mann developed more negative feelings towards him. On 22 February 1939, he noted in his diary: 'Spät noch bei Christopher im "George Washington." His little American boyfriend. (Ganz zufrieden, dass Wystan in Yale...)'.²⁶¹ And one and a half months later, on 7 April, he even wrote: 'Christopher lässt mir durch seinen Harvey telefonieren. Ich ärgere mich über ihn und, mehr noch, über Wystan. Sie haben beide die britische Unverschämtheit, kombiniert mit "marxistischer" Arroganz. Beide sehr

²⁶⁰ Mann and Newton, *The Letters of Thomas Mann to Caroline Newton*, 30. ['Would it be possible for you to spare 35 or 40 dollars for the deserving and hard-pressed man on a monthly basis? I believe this would be a good deed, since according to everything I know about him, he surely is as distinguished in his field as Auden is in his'.]

²⁶¹ Klaus Mann, *Tagebücher 1938 bis 1939*, 87. ['Late with Christopher in the "George Washington". His little American boyfriend. (Quite content that Wystan's in Yale...).']

begabt. Aber ich will nichts mehr von ihnen wissen'.²⁶² Klaus Mann seems to have gone through a particularly bad phase at the time; his diary bears witness to drug abuse, worries about the political situation in Europe, and personal disappointments. Still, it is not apparent what exactly he took offense at. Strikingly though, according to both Osborne (p. 257) and Davenport-Hines (p. 187), the reading where Auden met Chester Kallman took place on 6 April. Depending on when exactly Kallman ended up calling at Auden's flat he might have dropped his previous engagement with Klaus Mann in order to spend time with Kallman. Did Mann begin to feel left out by his old friend and his brother-in-law? Mann's possibly ironic reference to Auden's "'Marxist' arrogance' may also indicate that he started to realise that politically Auden followed no coherent line.

Indeed, there was still little consistency between Auden's theories and his acts. In March, he had spoken at a function with the purpose of raising money for Spanish refugees, an occasion which is often listed as one of the symptoms of Auden's turn from politics. Usually, a quotation from that letter to A.E. Dodds is given in which Auden states that after giving the speech, he felt 'covered with dirt'— just as he did after having graduated from Oxford. Klaus Mann, too, mentions the Spain dinner in a letter to his sister from Princeton on 17 March 1939:

- Frau Gespinst,
ich lege bei:
- 1.) Klein-Scheck von 'Nation'. (Die hiermit von mir honierte Rezension war nett. Auch die 'Vogue'-Schmonzette so übel nicht – was Wysty immer Oxforderisch mummeln mag. Ich bin ohnedies FAST verfeindet mit ihm [...]. Er sprach gestern erstmalig auf grossem Spanien-Dinner – Wystan, meine ich. Soll es üsis [?] ernst genommen haben. – mit Christopher bin ich gut. (App. E3)²⁶³

²⁶² Ibid., 96–97. ['Christopher has his Harvey telephone me. I am very annoyed about him, and even more so about Wystan. They both have this British presumptuousness, combined with "Marxist" arrogance. Both very talented. But I don't want anything to do with them anymore'.]

²⁶³ The article referred to is 'In Spite of the Gestapo' (*The Nation*, March 25, 1939, pp. 343-345.). The *Vogue* feature Klaus Mann refers to, entitled 'Thomas Mann and his Family', had appeared in

Mann confirms his negative attitude towards Auden at the time, though in a humorous way, while again he does not mention reasons for his estrangement – except alluding carefully to a certain degree of Oxford snobbism perhaps. It sounds almost childish when he contrasts his supposed hostility with Auden to his liking for Christopher Isherwood.

While it would not have been unlikely for the Manns to have been involved in the Spain event as well, the letter suggests that this was not the case ('Is supposed to have taken it very seriously'). Based on Mann's comment, it seems that Auden must have taken his Spain talk very seriously.

In his correspondence with Mrs Dodds, Auden discussed the issue of his new attitude towards politics. His letter about the Spain event seems to be in response to one of her letters in which she asks if Kallman had anything to do with his new attitude. In his answer, sent from his Taos 'honeymoon' with Chester Kallman on 2 July, Auden writes:

[...] As a matter of fact, my change of heart antedates the love, and is much nearer your attitude about He who generalises is lost. Talking about China in the fall began it, but the real decision came after making a speech at a dinner in New York to get money for Spanish Refugees when I suddenly found I could really do it, that I could make a fighting demagogic speech and have the audience roaring. And, my dear, it [was] so exciting but

the magazine two days previously. Calling it a 'Schmonzette', a light somewhat over-the-top 'Romantic' account, Mann engages with his sister, who had written the article, in a humorous way. Auden, quite understandably, seems to not have liked the way in which Erika Mann wrote about her parents in the story: he respected the private realm in a way that Erika did not. This becomes clear half a year later, when Auden wrote to Thomas Mann with the following news:

The New Yorker wants to do a Profile of you, one of those 'bright' X little pieces of journalism which seem so popular nowadays. They asked me to do it, and I refused as I thought it in rather bad taste. On thinking it over though I thought that, if they are going to do one anyway, I should perhaps invent fewer lies than anyone else. I talked to Erika yesterday about this and she agreed, but of course I couldn't do anything without consulting you.

If a profile has to be done, would you rather I did it or someone else? If the latter, I'll tell the New Yorker that I'll do it, but i would rather the decision lay with you.

Greetings to Frau Mann and any of the family who may be at Princeton.

Yours ever

Wystan Auden (App. B1)

so absolutely degrading; I felt just covered with dirt afterwards. It's not that I think one should not do any 'social' work but one must do something that is in one's nature to do, and for me that means 'teaching'.²⁶⁴

While it remains unclear why Auden would not have considered an activity he found 'he could really do' to be 'in his nature', Auden's reference to 'He who generalises is lost' is important in this context. According to Mendelson, Auden's speech 'consisted of partisan platitudes' (PII, xiv) and he decided never openly to take sides in political matters again, having become too sceptical of the definite, limited and 'propagandistic' standpoint. Although their political ideas were of course not worlds apart, this would cause increasing tensions with Klaus Mann, whose life was so closely entangled with politics that he was unable to subscribe to such a distanced standpoint.

Very interestingly, a letter from Erika Mann to her mother from the same year, dated November 1939, proves that at times she actually felt not dissimilarly to her husband about her public role: 'Meine Ansprachen bleiben erfolgreich, – ekeln mich aber ein wenig. Und das 'Weiter-Weiter', – die Idee des 'Abhaspelns um jeden Preis' ängstet mir zuweilen das Herz'.²⁶⁵ This goes to show the difference between Auden's existence and that of his wife: it proves to what extent Erika Mann's identity was based on the fight against Nazism, unlike her husband's, which was that of a poet first and foremost. Thus while Erika would always resign herself to ignoring all personal feelings of disgust and to embrace Auden's motto 'today the struggle', Auden himself – who had kept each of the struggles witnessed by him at arm's length – was too far removed from the realities of it to sacrifice what he effectively considered to be his artistic integrity.

Already in May, Auden had written to Mrs Dodds from St Mark's School:

²⁶⁴ Auden, Letter to A.E. Dodds from 2 July 1939. Fol. 50.

²⁶⁵ Erika Mann, *Briefe und Antworten*, 1984, 1:143. ['My speeches remain successful, – but they disgust me a little. And the "onwards-onwards", – the idea of the "labouring at every cost" occasionally scares me to the core'.]

Very pleased to hear that your attitude is mine. I will have nothing to do with it till there is a war; then I shall join an American Red Cross unit, or if America comes in, a neutral one, and if possible look after wounded Germans. Meanwhile art and the personal life. Never, never again will I speak at a political meeting. Of all the ivory towers it is the most secluded.²⁶⁶

Auden's humanitarian attitude was not exactly of his own time, and even his in-laws probably would have protested vehemently that those Germans who were left in Germany deserved no pity whatsoever. In the end, Auden did try to become involved after all, but, rejected at the US Army draft, joined them for their Bombing Survey mission in Germany, undertaken in 1945. As a civilian member with a status corresponding to that of a Major, Auden was useful for this task because he spoke German and could conduct interviews with surviving Germans, attempting to find out how the war had affected their morale during WWII (see 3.2).

On 21 April, Klaus Mann followed Auden's and Isherwood's invitation to the George Washington Hotel where they threw a 'little party', as he put it in his diary – joining guests as illustrious as '[sic] Churchill's twenty-year-old nephew', Esmond Romilly, and his wife, Jessica Mitford, 'sister of Hitler's "playmate" Unity Mitford'.²⁶⁷ Mann was irritated by the limited perspective of the young British 'lefties' who, he thought, were too fixed in their anti-Imperial view on current affairs: 'Politische Diskussion. (Das Urteil dieser jungen englischen Links-Leute verwirrt durch ihren – berechtigten – Hass auf britischen Imperialismus, Chamberlain u.s.w. Sind *gegen* den Krieg, weil sie das "Empire nicht verteidigen wollen"... Als ob *das* die Problem-Stellung wäre. – Wichtiges Thema. Vielleicht darüber schreiben.)'²⁶⁸ Both Klaus and

²⁶⁶ Auden, Undated Letter to A.E. Dodds. Fol. 34.

²⁶⁷ Romilly had fought with the German *Thälmann Bataillon* in Spain and was one of its few survivors. Before he was killed in action in 1941, aged 23, he had moved from London to America, as Auden had. Romilly had got to know Auden and Isherwood in London and apparently, they had run into each other again in New York when trying to win the same rich old lady as a patron. (Davenport-Hines, *Auden*, 183.)

²⁶⁸ Klaus Mann, *Tagebücher 1938 bis 1939*, 101. ['Political discussion. (The opinion of these young English leftists is confused through their – justified – hate for British imperialism, Chamberlain etc. Are *against* the war because they don't want to 'defend the empire'... As if that was the true problem. – Important topic. Maybe write about it.)']

Erika had given up their own initial attitude of Pacifism years ago, when they had come to the conclusion that in the case of Hitler, negotiations would be futile. Auden, on the other hand, was steering into a short-lived Pacifist phase, though unlike Christopher Isherwood's it was not very serious.

Refugees were under a much greater pressure to engage with current events than voluntary emigrants. They were exposed to immeasurable pressure: especially when they were exiled from an environment where their native language was spoken. As a result, the suicide rate of displaced writers before, after, and during WWII was depressingly high. One particular suicide, which moved the German émigré community greatly and Auden to write a memorial poem, was Ernst Toller, who died in New York on 22 May 1939. His poem beautifully captures the sensitivity Auden had developed towards the psychological difficulties of exile through his interaction with the German refugees:

What was it, Ernst, that your shadow unwittingly said?
 Did the small child see something horrid in the woodshed
 Long ago? Or had the Europe which took refuge in your head

Already been too injured to get well?
 ('In Memory of Ernst Toller', CP, 247)

Auden recognised that especially to those who had lost their home and had to live with trauma on a daily basis, the 'big and friendly death outside' (CP, 247) could be a saviour from all sorts of pressures: the pressure of reacting to political events, and the pressure to write. The constant confrontation with refugees from Europe was leaving its mark on Auden's poetry:

We are lived by powers we pretend to understand:
 They arrange our loves, it is they who direct at the end
 The enemy bullet, the sickness, or even our hand.

It is their to-morrow hangs over the earth of the living
 And all that we wish for our friends: but existence is believing

We know for whom we mourn and who is grieving.
(CP, 248)

Auden's insight into the world of European refugees made it possible for him to write these beautiful, clear lines.

Auden knew Toller from New York and contributed the verse translations to Edward Crankshaw's translation of Toller's *No More Peace* (1937). As Waidson points out:

The play is not without some parallels in themes and style to *On the Frontier* [1938]; there is the action alternating between two series of settings and characters [...], and there are figures such as the business man, the dictator, and the sincere young couple.²⁶⁹

Auden makes a brief appearance in Anna Funder's novel *All That I Am* (2011), in which she recreates the relationship between the two men, writing from Toller's perspective:

In my years in England I watched Wystan's star rise as a poet – he's the best this century, they are saying – at the same time as he worked with me. He translated my plays and wrote some glorious, original lyrics for them. We would sit in my garden in Hampstead batting words and sense around (his German is good) [*true!*] to see how much equivalent beauty we could wring from each tongue. It is an intimate relationship, when someone is inside your work. They see you better than you can.²⁷⁰

Funder mentions Erika Mann, too, creating a sense of the interconnectedness between the German refugees. She portrays the relationship between Auden and Toller as a close and amicable one and builds up the tension in her story towards the point of Toller's suicide:

Wystan is the only one, apart from Dora [*Fabian*], I told of my thrice-weekly visits to the psychiatrist in London. Partly because we had to work around them, and partly because he is a firm believer in neurosis (up to a point) as a stimulus for art. I can see from how he looks at me, and then around the room, that he is

²⁶⁹ Waidson, "Auden and German Literature," 353.

²⁷⁰ Anna Funder, *All That I Am* (London: Viking, 2011), 93.

gauging whether mine is working for me now or eating me
alive.²⁷¹

Like Auden, the Manns were deeply grieved by Toller's suicide – especially Erika. Toller's marriage to Christiane Grautoff had broken apart in the previous year because Grautoff had fallen madly in love with Martin Gumpert, who in turn was in love and living with Erika (the relationship lasted for a few years). From St. Mark's School, where he taught for a month in May, Auden wrote an undated letter to Erika Mann, probably shortly after Toller's suicide:

Dear Erika,
Terribly sorry to miss you the other week end. I had no idea you were in town. Any chance of seeing you next week-end. When do you leave for Europe. I hear you've had an awful time over Toller. I was horrified to hear about it. I've written a poem in his memory which I hope the New Yorker will print. I feel we have seen much too little of each other in these last three months, but, believe me, my dear, I cannot say how much I like and admire you, and you know, I hope that whenever and if ever I can help you in any way, you must ask me.

Don't do too much and don't – here uncle is speaking or the cheeky young brother. Don't hate too much.

Much love
Wystan (App. D1)

This letter proves how special the relationship between Auden and Erika Mann was: while it would be wrong to exaggerate their closeness, it is remarkable how much affection did develop between the two over the years.

2.6 'HIS GREATER SYMPATHY FOR GOLO': AUDEN THROUGH THE EYES OF KLAUS MANN

Things were less harmonious between Auden and his brother-in-law Klaus. While they first seem to have liked each other well enough, Mann's diaries soon give away that he had his problems with the slightly younger, more famous man who was suddenly the talk of the family. Mann already had a difficult standing as the oldest son of an

²⁷¹ Ibid.

‘Übervater’ and the brother of a sister whom he could only follow but not compete with. Colm Tóibín again summarises this succinctly: ‘[Erika’s] bossiness and her ability to organize things meant that she thrived in exile. Klaus, on the other hand, drifted’.²⁷²

In June of 1939, Auden spent another weekend at Princeton. This time, he did not come alone but brought along Chester Kallman. While Thomas Mann does not mention this event in his diary, Klaus commented on 17 June:

[...] Abends nach Princeton. Hier: Golo; *Auden* – mit kaltem Gustaf-Charme –; his boy-friend, eines jener gar-zu-stillen Wässerchen, die man trüben muss, um sie trinken zu können [...]. Lektüre. In ‘New Writing.’ (Gedichte von Auden, die mir nicht sehr viel sagen: ausser vielleicht eines über Rimbaud.)²⁷³

The issue of *New Writing* to which Mann refers (New Series II, Spring 1939) featured eight poems by Auden: among these was indeed ‘Rimbaud’, also ‘The Capital’, ‘Brussels in Winter’, ‘Gare du Midi’, ‘Palais des Beaux Arts’ – later ‘Musée des Beaux Arts’ – ‘A.E. Housman’, ‘The Novelist’, and ‘The Composer’. It is unclear why Mann might have preferred ‘Rimbaud’ to the other poems, but then again he does not express a strong dislike of them, only states that he cannot relate to them.

More interesting and, indeed, surprising though is Mann’s assessment of Chester Kallman, given that most accounts portray Kallman as lively and exuberant in social settings. Klaus Geitel, the music critic, told me in an interview that Chester would always try to be in the focus of attention, interpreting this as behaviour of one who could never hope to get out of the shadow of his paramount partner (for more on Auden and Geitel, see 4.3). These, however, were the very early days of his relationship with Auden, of course, and the presence of the assorted Manns – even Golo was in Princeton at the time of their visit – probably would have been somewhat intimidating to the

²⁷² Tóibín, *New Ways to Kill Your Mother*, 193–194.

²⁷³ Klaus Mann, *Tagebücher 1938 bis 1939*, 114. [‘In the evening off to Princeton. Here: Golo; *Auden* – with a cold Gustaf kind of charme –; his boy-friend, one of those waters which are just a little too calm, and that one must disturb before one can drink them [...]. Reading. In ‘New Writing.’ (Poems by Auden that don’t really speak to me: except one about Rimbaud perhaps.)’]

young American despite his general self-confidence and wit. That Mann calls him ‘ein gar-zu-stilles Wässerchen’ shows that instinctively, he sensed that there was much more to Kallman than was visible at first sight. This is especially noteworthy because much later, in 1947, when Mann and Auden seem not to have been in touch much, Mann mentions Kallman with suspicious frequency in his journal. It seems that at first sight, Mann was fascinated by Kallman and quite possibly even somewhat attracted, given the ambiguity and possible innuendo of his comment.

Mann’s comment on Auden is interesting as well: not only could he not relate to Auden’s poetry at that time, he also first records his perception of Auden as ‘cold’; and worse: ‘Gustaf-Charme’ is a particularly harsh criticism. The analogy refers to Gustaf Gründgens, Erika Mann’s ex-husband, who at this point had become a follower of the Nazi party. Klaus Mann used Gründgens’ life-story for his novel *Mephisto*, disguised as that of the main character Hendrik Höfgen – which later led to one of the most famous libel cases in the history of German literature. For Mann, Gründgens symbolised calculated charm and self-interest.

After the visitors had left Princeton, Klaus Mann wrote on 19 June, apparently relieved:

Das Haus war voller Leute; jetzt aber wieder still. *Wystan Auden* und sein Knabe *Chester*. (Die eingebildete “grand amour.” Dabei wäre dieser Ch. nicht schwer zu haben. Immer wieder: das Don Quixote-hafte Element solcher Beziehungen...) – Zwischen W.A. und mir will ein rechter Kontakt nicht mehr aufkommen. Er interessiert mich; aber ich *misstrau*e seiner dilettantischen Animiertheit, spüre auch immer eine eisig *glitzernde* Kälte – sehr unmenschlich, wenngleich ums Menschliche bemüht –, und übrigens eine seltsame feindliche Einstellung mir gegenüber. (Nie offen ausgedrückt. – Seine stärkeren Sympathien für Golo. Sonderbar: dass so häufig Sympathien für G. sich mit Antipathie gegen mich verbindet...).²⁷⁴

²⁷⁴ Ibid., 114–115. [“The house was full of people, it’s now quiet again though. *Wystan Auden* and his boy *Chester*. (The imaginary “grand amour.” Yet this Ch. would not be a difficult pick up. Again and again: the Quixotic nature of those kinds of relationships...) – No real connection anymore between W.A. and myself. He interests me; but I *mistrust* his dilettante activism, always feel an icy *glistening* cold – very

Again, Mann's perspective on Auden's relationship with Kallman is very interesting, this passage being a diary entry and not a conscious, public attempt to define the relationship. Mann's assessment again is harsh on the surface, calling Kallman essentially a flirt and easy pick up. Mann's instincts were not too bad in this respect. He even saw the one-sidedness of the relationship at this early stage, or, to be more fair to Kallman, on the different expectations each necessarily had, calling it an 'imaginary grand amour'! One wishes for more detailed descriptions of how Mann perceived Auden's behaviour throughout his visit at Princeton. Klaus Mann's depreciative comments leave one with the feeling that he was in fact primarily fascinated by Kallman himself while feeling uneasy about Auden.

One also wonders whether Mann's impression that Auden disliked him – having again described him as cold and as inhumane – was correct. The problems arising between the two brothers-in-law at this point, after a rather positive beginning of their relationship, were probably partly due to Klaus Mann's own unhappy disposition and drug addiction, which made him extremely sensitive and finally led him to commit suicide in 1949. While Mann's letters and diary entries map his changing attitudes towards Auden, I have only found one letter by Auden referring to Mann. Two years before his death, on 7 June 1971, Auden replied to a letter by the Klaus Mann scholar Klaus Täubert – who seems to have asked Mann's acquaintances for personal information – with his usual succinctness and bluntness:

Dear M Täubert

Thank you for your letter. I saw quite a lot of Klaus Mann during the war-years.

Between ourselves, I think his parents are partly to blame for what happened, because they did not insist in seeing that he got a good education. He could only enter the literary world where

unhuman, although trying to be human –, and by the way a strangely hostile attitude towards me. (Never expressed openly. – His greater sympathy for Golo. Peculiar: that so often sympathy for Golo is connected with an antipathy towards me...).']

he could not hope to compete with Papa. In contrast, his brother, Golo, was well educated and could find his own line as a historian.

Yours sincerely,
Wystan Auden (App. J1)

Based on the evidence of this letter, reading the simplistic assessment of his complex brother-in-law, one is tempted to believe Mann's impression of Auden's coldness. Auden the psychologist-preacher was still proclaiming his diagnoses as if preaching from an invisible pulpit at the end of his life – as he had done ever since his school years. It does seem as if Auden did indeed get on better with Golo Mann, whose understanding and appreciation of Auden are obvious from his obituary (see p. 209-212). Yet this does not mean that Auden necessarily disliked Klaus Mann: even close friends were sometimes puzzled by Auden's strange donnishness and his insistence on principles on the one hand, and his incredible generosity and humility on the other.

Additionally, Thomas Mann had a difficult relationship with his oldest son. It is likely that Mann reacted with particular sensitivity to the addition of another dominant male writer to his family. Klaus Mann had an inferiority complex, similar to what Auden described in his Berlin journal, and having chosen the same profession as his famous father did not help ameliorate this. Possibly, his dislike for Auden flared up whenever he had to witness how well his brother-in-law got along with his father: Klaus felt ignored and disliked by his father throughout his life, and it is possible that Auden did not hold back with hurtful comments such as the following, remembered by Golo Mann, in front of Klaus:

W.H. Auden, unseren Schwager, hörte ich einmal weise genug bemerken: für einen Romancier seien Söhne immer eine Peinlichkeit, nämlich etwas wie fleischgewordene Figuren aus seinen Romanen. Natürlich ahnte Klaus dergleichen. Daß der ringende junge Schriftsteller an dem ruhmgekrönten, mit

stärkerer Schöpferkraft gesegneten litt, ist bekannt und ist ein Fall von klassischer, fast banaler Unvermeidlichkeit.²⁷⁵

Whether or not Auden was in part responsible for Klaus Mann's feelings or not, it is possible that his brother-in-law was not thrilled to share his father's attention with another writer who was more famous than himself. And perhaps his sense of rejection was not entirely without foundation. It is peculiar, for instance, that Thomas Mann's diary entry in which he records Auden's first visit at Princeton, speaks of the 'Ankunft des Freundes des W. Audens', given that Isherwood was also a close friend of his son's. All this would explain why writing about Auden, Klaus Mann sounds jealous, like a sibling rivalling for attention.

This might even have been the simple cause of the 'political differences' one is inclined to deduce from further comments by Klaus Mann on Auden. In his entry of 19 June 1939, a puzzled Mann also wrote about a conversation with Auden: 'Merkwürdige, ziemlich paradoxe Unterhaltung mit Auden über den *Schriftsteller* und das *Politische*. Er vertritt lebhaft den anti-politischen Standpunkt. "Dichter verstehen nichts von Politik. Sollen sich nur ums Nächste, Wirkliche kümmern..." Dilettantisch. Wird nicht unsere "nächste Wirklichkeit" vom Politischen her bestimmt?'"²⁷⁶ Auden's decision to live 'without roots' had gone hand in hand with a personal disassociation – at least to a degree – from any form of national identification; the state Auden had chosen to defend ardently was the English language itself; and in this logic, political involvement, the subscription to firm sides, was impossible. It explains why Auden still supported humanitarian causes practically while at the same time being sensitive about

²⁷⁵ Klaus Mann, *Briefe und Antworten* (München: Edition Spangenberg im Ellermann-Verlag, 1975), 322. ['I once heard W.H. Auden, our brother-in-law, say wisely enough: for a novelist, sons are always an embarrassment, something like versions of the characters from his novels made flesh. Of course, Klaus sensed something like this. That the struggling young writer suffered from the laureate who was blessed with more creativity is well known and a case of typical, almost banal inevitability'.]

²⁷⁶ Klaus Mann, *Tagebücher 1938 bis 1939*, 114–115. ['A strange, rather paradoxical conversation with Auden about the *writer* and *politics*. He defends the anti-political stance passionately. "Poets don't understand anything about politics. Should only be concerned with the immediate, the real..." Dilettantish. Isn't our "immediate reality" being determined by politics??...?']

perceptions of his writing as political. And while one can sympathise with Auden's attitude, he did have a tendency to turn personal preferences into dogmata. This might explain the 'rather paradoxical conversation' recalled by Mann.

In the end, their differences really boiled down to the different degrees to which they were personally affected by the rise of Fascism in Europe. In terms of his beliefs, Auden was just as ardent an anti-Fascist as Mann was and their political 'differences' were minimal, but as History has shown again and again – in the context of the Spanish Civil War, for instance – it is exactly over such minimal distinctions that the most bitter conflicts arise. Clearly, the position Auden defended so uncompromisingly offended Klaus Mann somewhat. Unlike Auden, the Manns were convinced that everything possible had to be done to spread the truth about Fascism and the developments in Germany, by everyone. Erika and Klaus Mann's careers as writers were closely entangled with the political reality in their home country from the beginning, and thus they did not shy from manipulating the information they used in order to communicate their message effectively. This is exemplified by two passages – which involve Auden – from their book *Escape to Life* (1939), excessively subtitled a 'story of a migration unparalleled in history' of the 'artists and intellectuals for whom existence under the swastika became intolerable and who sought in exile that freedom of thought and action denied them in their native land', as the front flap has it.

The book is an admirable effort at documenting the rise of Nazism, through sharing the siblings' personal perspective on events and the individual destinies of people known to them. In the context of a passage on the Spanish Civil War, the siblings quote a letter Auden supposedly sent to them before going to Spain:

Wystan Auden is now Erika Mann's husband. When he wrote to us one day: 'I am going to Spain. It isn't enough for us to stand

up for our Spanish comrades with words. I want to be with them,' we were at first startled, but we were glad too.²⁷⁷

As Carpenter points out, this does not quite sound like something Auden would have written – which of course does not mean that he never wrote a letter. While it is likely that he would have informed the Manns of his plans at the time, the siblings seem to have printed a somewhat amplified version of a letter that probably did exist: and thus their paraphrase, written a few years later than the hypothetical original, distorts Auden's position of moderate interest in doing one's part. While, as we have seen, it is not clear what exactly Auden expected from his Spain visit, he certainly never expressed a desire that he wanted to 'stand up for our Spanish comrades with words', nor 'be with them'. These sound much more like examples of the Manns' own tone when writing about the Civil War:

In the summer, 1938, we decided to accept the invitation of a number of European newspapers and Spanish friends to spend some time in the districts defended by the Spanish Republicans. We knew that the weeks or months in front of us would not be easy or happy.

In our ears and hearts were beating the rhythms of a poem *Spain* which W.H. Auden had written under the impression of his visit to Spain [...] it had won him an official British prize for the best poem of the year: 'But today the struggle.'²⁷⁸

The second scene, at the beginning of the book, is even more misrepresentative than the first. Here, Erika and Klaus Mann are being interviewed by a fictitious ideal interviewer. Erika asks:

Erika:	Do you know my husband?
The Interviewer:	Wystan Auden? I was with him in Spain. I went to China with him, too. I couldn't come to your wedding. That was two years ago, if I'm not mistaken.
Erika:	Yes, at a little place in England. He was a master at a school in the country. He taught the boys 'How to write and speak English'.

²⁷⁷ Erika Mann and Klaus Mann, *Escape to Life* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1939), 163.

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 163–164.

- The Interviewer: He knows how to write English, anyhow. Some of his poems are superb, and his plays. They are simpler in style, but there is in them the same blend of pure poetry with deep concern for the state of the world. He is a lyricist with a social conscience.
- Erika: You know him well. I hope he will be coming to America soon. We want to work together, to give lectures and to travel.²⁷⁹

This remarkable passage, which was published in 1939 but must have been written in 1938, makes it plain how the Mann siblings wanted to perceive or at least to present ‘Wysti’. Joint plans for working, traveling, and lecturing together with Auden were probably wishful thinking on Erika’s part or something that sounded good in the context of the book.

While the siblings of course were right about Auden’s ‘deep concern for the state of the world’ and his ‘social conscience’, they realised soon that his interests were philosophical and historical rather than political, especially after his ‘change of heart’. This change in Auden’s attitude did not go unnoticed by his brother-in-law and by his friends. Klaus Mann noted in his diary on 7 August 1939: ‘Am Strand mit *Berthold Viertel* und *Isherwood*. Grosse Conversation: über das richtige Verhalten während des Krieges; den intransigenten Pazifismus radikaler junger Engländer; Auden’s neue “anti-politische” Attitüde u.s.w.’.²⁸⁰ On 14 August, Klaus Mann wrote: ‘Logierbesuch von *Wystan Auden* (und seinem Chester). Komme besser mit ihm aus als das vorige Mal’.²⁸¹ Auden and Kallman stayed in Princeton until 22 August. Politics was never far from the conversations and a few days later, the Nazi-Soviet Pact was signed. Auden referred to

²⁷⁹ Ibid., 9. Auden, too, celebrated his relationship with Erika Mann in his work. This is most evident in *Letters from Iceland*, where (apart from the two letters to ‘E.M.A.’) Auden expresses his ‘hope that Erika, my wife, may have her wish | To see the just end of Hitler and his unjust rule.’ (Auden and MacNeice, *Letters from Iceland*, 249.)

²⁸⁰ Klaus Mann, *Tagebücher 1938 bis 1939*, 124. [‘At the beach with *Berthold Viertel* and *Isherwood*. Big conversation: about the right behaviour during the war; the intransigent Pacifism of radical young Englishmen; Auden’s new “anti-political” attitude etc.’.]

²⁸¹ Ibid., 125. [‘*Wystan Auden* (and his Chester) visit over night. Getting along with him better than last time’.]

this as one of the great political disappointments of his life in the 1965 Deutschlandfunk interview.²⁸²

The relationship between Klaus Mann and Auden remained changeable, at least from Mann's perspective. A letter sent by him to his brother Golo on 10 November implies that by this point, he was truly appalled by his brother-in-law's impartiality:

Ich bleibe hartnäckig optimistisch [...]. The Führer is doomed – which means quite a lot, anyway. Stalin didn't win the war, as the Allies did not lose it as yet, es lebe Lord Halifax, der Auden will es nicht einsehen. – Was Du über diesen zu bemerken hast, ist mir sehr aus der Seele geschrieben. Seine dünnkelhafte Unparteiischkeit; seine akademisch starre Liebe für alles, was lebt – 'Everything that lives is Holy', zum Beispiel Heinrich Himmler –: tout ça m'agace [...] Überigens stehe ich persönlich etwas netter mit ihm.²⁸³

'Dünnkelhafte Unparteiischkeit' and half-hearted Pacifism were attitudes Mann could not comprehend, although he also writes that personally, he liked Auden better this time. Fascinating is his formulation 'seine akademisch starre Liebe', which is reminiscent of Auden's own 'narrow strictness'.

The passage Mann refers to is in fact a William Blake quotation. With it, Auden began his contribution to the book *I Believe: The Personal Philosophies of Certain Eminent Men and Women of Our Time* (1939): 'Everything that lives is Holy. – Blake'. Still, looking at Auden's essay, one can appreciate Klaus Mann's point:

For me, the least unsatisfactory description is to say that any thing or creature is good which is discharging its proper function, using its powers to the fullest extent permitted by its environment and its own nature – though we must remember that 'nature' and 'environment' are intellectual abstractions from a single, constantly changing reality. Thus, people are happy and good

²⁸² App. G, p. 286. '[...] es war eine Ding von denen wir alle schockiert, das war der Nazi-Soviet Pakt, natürlich'. ['[...] what shocked us all was the Nazi-Soviet pact, of course'. (Ibid., 297.)]

²⁸³ Klaus Mann, *Briefe und Antworten*, 1975, 89–90. ['I remain stubbornly optimistic [...]. The Führer is doomed – which means quite a lot, anyway. Stalin didn't win the war, as the Allies did not lose it as yet, long live Lord Halifax, Auden refuses to accept this. – Your remarks about him correspond exactly with how I feel. His arrogant impartiality; his academically rigid love for everything that lives – "Everything that lives is Holy", Heinrich Himmler for example –: tout ça m'agace [...] Personally though, I like him a little better by the way'.]

who have found their vocation: what vocations there are will depend upon the society within which they are practised. (EA, 372)

Without having space here to disentangle the rest of Auden's essay, which for the most is more substantial, complex, and differentiated than this initial passage, the passage makes it possible to see why Klaus Mann was upset about Auden's way of arguing at the time: it seems as if according to Auden's definition one would indeed have to call Himmler 'happy and good'.

But of course Auden would never have called Himmler 'good'. What this goes to show is the clash between Auden's generalising theoretical statements on the one hand, and his particular reactions to specific situations on the other. Around the same time, in November 1939, Auden had experienced how in a German-language cinema in Yorkville people shouted 'Kill the Jews' during the Nazi propaganda film 'Feldzug in Polen' about the invasion of Poland.²⁸⁴ This shook him up profoundly and made him realise that every individual was affected by what was happening in Germany, because of what it showed human nature to be capable of. During his commencement address at Smith College a few months later, Auden went as far as to say: 'Jung hardly went far enough when he said, "Hitler is the unconscious of every German"; he comes uncomfortably near being the unconscious of most of us'.²⁸⁵

Instead of condemning the German people – those who had remained in Germany – collectively, as the Mann siblings did, Auden adapted his views about humanity as a whole. Poetically, he summarised his views in 'The Cave of Making', many years later:

[...] More than ever
life-out-there is goodly, miraculous, lovable,
but we shan't, not since Stalin and Hitler,
trust ourselves ever again: we know that, subjectively,

²⁸⁴ Davenport-Hines, *Auden*, 200. Misquoted in Carpenter (p. 282) as 'Sieg im Poland'.

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 200–201.

all is possible. (CP, 691)

At this time, Auden briefly identified himself as a pacifist and even briefly attempted to integrate the practice of ‘Raj Yoga’ into his life – although he never got very far beyond the preparatory exercises ‘with a German girl’. To him, this seemed the necessary practical consequence of a pacifist position. Prescriptive as ever, Auden wrote to his brother John in September 1939:

Last year in Brussels, I was quite hoping there would be a war. This year I sat over the radio crying. I know now that my reaction last September was inspired by a death wish; death would solve my problem. Now all I think about it how to stay here with Chester at all costs. This may be cowardly but it is genuine. [...] Apart from all this, the war is not our war, (even if I hadn’t become a pacifist before now. I hope to send you some stuff about that soon).²⁸⁶

As his diary entries from August and November show, Klaus Mann was critical of Auden’s new ‘half-hearted’ pacifism. Later that November, Auden exposed his in-laws to another display of his views.

2.7 ‘EPITHALAMION’ – A POLITICAL WEDDING GIFT

On 23 November 1939, Thomas Mann’s youngest daughter Elisabeth married the Italian literary scholar Giuseppe Antonio Borgese, who was 36 years her senior. Two days after the ceremony, Klaus Mann wrote in his diary:

Vorgestern, in *Princeton*: die Hochzeit, recht üsis und hübsch verlaufen. Medi scheint ziemlich glücklich –: der überreife Bräutigam ist es jedenfalls, trotz aller stolzen Empfindlichkeit [...]. Vormittags: der kurze, schlichte Akt in der Kirche, mit Roger *Sessions* und Hermann *Broch* als Trauzeugen.... Abends, Party: *Auden* (der sein Hochzeits-Carmen mitbringt; noch

²⁸⁶ Auden, Letter to John Auden of September 1939. Letters to John Auden. Berg Collection. (Auden finished the letter stating: ‘May I recommend Raj Yoga to you. I have just started with a swami here. If one does take of a pacifist position, it is obvious that one’s private life must be genuinely non-violent, and that requires a technique, which I believe the Indians have if one regards it as a technique and discards the theoretical mumbo jumbo’.)

während des Dinners aufbrechen muss, um nach Canada zwecks Einwanderung abzureisen).²⁸⁷

Auden neither attended the wedding ceremony nor the lunch at the house of the Sessions, as Thomas Mann's diary entries show; he arrived in the afternoon, in time for the formal dinner at the Manns' house at 65 Stockton Street. Thomas Mann gave a speech and Roger Sessions provided musical entertainment.²⁸⁸

Much to everyone's surprise, Auden brought along a complex 'Epithalamion' of eight stanzas for the occasion, had it printed beautifully as a gift for every guest, and read it out at the dinner. Golo Mann commented in his obituary for Auden: 'He simply seized the opportunity, like eighteenth-century poets who derived a part of their meagre incomes from such occasional pieces, or like clergymen from their ceremonial duties'.²⁸⁹ In the following year, the poem appeared in the collection *Another Time*.²⁹⁰

Interestingly, Thomas Mann does not mention his son-in-law's gesture in his diary entries from the wedding-weekend. These are surprisingly confused and short, giving the impression that Mann was suffering from a bout of depression around the time. On the day itself, he sighed: 'Tage von großer Bedrücktheit, Schwermut, Gefühlsleiden. Widerstehen der Arbeit. Heute Medi's Hochzeit. Mittags mit K., Broch und Seshons [*sic*] in der Kirche. Kurze Ceremonie. Weinte vor Nervenschwäche. Nachher Lunch bei Seshons [*sic*] in kleinem Kreis. Sehr leidend und abgeneigt. Nachmittags Ankunft Audens'.²⁹¹ And on 24 November: 'Gestern Abend Hochzeits-Dinner mit Sessions,

²⁸⁷ Klaus Mann, *Tagebücher 1938 bis 1939*, 144. ['Before yesterday, in *Princeton*: the wedding proceeded quite [?] and nicely. Medi seems pretty happy –: at least the overly mature bridegroom is, despite of all his proud touchiness [...]. In the morning: the brief, simple ceremony in the church, with Roger *Sessions* and Hermann *Broch* as witnesses.... In the evening, party: *Auden* (who brings along his wedding carmen; already has to leave during the dinner, to leave for Canada for the purpose of immigration)'.]

²⁸⁸ Roger Sessions was a composer whom Borgese had met during his time at Smith College and for whom he wrote the libretto for the opera *Montezuma*.

²⁸⁹ Golo Mann, "A Memoir," 99.

²⁹⁰ W.H. Auden, *Another Time* (New York: Random House, 1940), 121–125.

²⁹¹ Mann, *Briefe 1937-1947*, 503. ['Days of great depression, melancholia, glumness. Resistance of the work. Today Medi's wedding. Mid-day in church with K., Broch, and Seshons [*sic*] My nerves were so weak that I cried. Later lunch at the Seshons's [*sic*] in small circle. Suffering much and disinclined. In the afternoon Auden's arrival'.]

Shenstones, Frau v. Kahler, Gumpert und Auden, der sehr früh abfuhr. Medi in Weiß sehr rührend. Worte an Borgese. Sesshion [*sic*] spielte. Zog mich ½ 11 zurück'.²⁹² The fact that Mann misspelt Sessions' name – and not even consistently, at that – might be one expression of his 'Gefühlsleiden', and this could explain why he did not mention Auden's poem. Since he does mention Auden's arrival though, it is also possible that Mann did not grasp very much of the complex poem – and that he did not bother to engage with it afterwards.²⁹³

What Auden's *grand geste* goes to show is both how seriously he took his new family affiliation and how deeply engrained an Anglo-Catholic love for ceremonial and ritual was in him. He believed in order and formality – where he considered them appropriate – and could be very generous: that he travelled to Princeton just to attend the wedding-dinner for a few hours before rushing to Canada – having not even attended the ceremony, if we can rely on Thomas Mann's diary entry – was a considerable effort to go through for a sister-in-law whom Auden had presumably only met a few times.²⁹⁴ Thus Golo Mann is most certainly right in suggesting that Auden was very aware of his gesture's grandeur: writing a poem for and reading it at such an exclusive literary occasion was an artistic challenge.

²⁹² Ibid., 504. ['Yesterday night wedding dinner with the Sessions, Shenstones, Frau v. Kahler, Gumpert and Auden, who left very early. Medi in white very moving. Words to Borgese. Sesshion [*sic*] spielte. Retired ½ 11'.]

²⁹³ Klaus Mann had once written about his father: 'His universal lack of interest in people is here [when his son was concerned] especially intensified'. (Quoted in: Weiss, *The Erika and Klaus Mann Story*, 143–144.)

²⁹⁴ Auden's trip to Canada was a legal requirement for him because he had violated the US immigration laws by working at St Mark's School before he was allowed to do so. While he was able to resolve the situation without grave consequences, he had to travel out of the country in order to re-enter it very soon after. In a letter to Mrs Dodds of 26 November 1939, three days after the wedding, Auden wrote amusingly about his experiences at immigration: 'Just got back from Canada where I had to go in order to start becoming American. American Burocrats are the nicest of their kind in the world – so polite and helpful – an example to our insolent busybodies at Harwich and Elsewhere. In the course of my medical examination I had to take down my trousers to show that I hadnt any sociable disease: the doctor was surprised because I dont wear underclothing and the following dialogue took place:

Doc. What's your job?

Me. I'm an author.

Doc. O I see: nudist, eh?

Montreal is rather frightful; compared with it, Birmingham is an Athens. There were a few of the expected horrors about, like a children's game called Hit Hitler, and a magazine with a roaring lion on the front called Offence, but it was encouraging to find that they were displayed rather furtively in second-class stationers as if they were pornography'. (Bell, "Auden to the Doddses," 106–107.)

Interestingly, Auden had written ‘Epithalamion’ as early as September 1939 and the poem could be regarded as another example of Auden’s not very occasional ‘occasional’ poetry: parts of it could have worked easily in the context of a completely different poem and seem to have nothing to do with the wedding as such. Still, it is crucial that Auden’s poem, first delivered in the context of Elizabeth Mann’s wedding, should be considered in exactly this original context. While Mendelson claims that ‘The conventional-sounding praise for marriage in this poem and its improbable tone of hearty affirmation lightly disguise the claims Auden made more explicitly in *The Prolific and the Devourer* for the shaping progressive powers of art and attention’,²⁹⁵ this seems somewhat beside the point: the poem, which reflects Auden’s shortlived pacifist leaning during the months of the poem’s composition, could not ‘disguise’ sentiments expressed by Auden in a different text, unpublished when he read the poem at the wedding. The poem stood on its own, as did Auden, in front of the Mann-Borgese wedding party.

Reading ‘Epithalamion’ at this grand occasion has mostly been viewed as a very kind gesture, which it was, of course. Lucy MacDiarmid calls ‘Epithalamion’ a ‘period piece’ because of its ‘unsubtle enthusiasm and simple dichotomies’²⁹⁶ and states that ‘Auden seized the occasion to write “Epithalamion” because it provided an opportunity to talk about saving civilization’ and ‘offered hope in the midst of ruins’.²⁹⁷ She points out that ‘[t]he ritual act of joining in community occurs [...] against an international background’.²⁹⁸

While all this is true, and telling about Auden, it is quite a different matter how the reading of the poem – ‘[j]oyful, exuberant, and imprecise’, avoiding ‘resolution in an

²⁹⁵ Edward Mendelson, *Later Auden* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1999), 70–71.

²⁹⁶ Lucy MacDiarmid, *Saving Civilization: Yeats, Eliot, and Auden Between the Wars* (CUP Archive, 1984), 16.

²⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 14.

²⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 16.

exalted blend of theatrics and ritual²⁹⁹ – would have come across to Auden’s audience of exiles at the time. The lines

While explosives blow to dust
 Friends and hopes, we cannot pray,
 Absolute conviction must
 Seem the whole of life to youth,
 Battle’s stupid gross event
 Keep all learning occupied (Eng.A, 453)

is not exactly a call to arms but an optimistic lamentation of the current state of affairs in the Western world, generally avoiding references to suffering and expressing faith in the final victory of love and culture over temporary periods of unrest. In this respect, the poem resembles ‘Spain, 1937’, which with equally vague optimism announced: ‘Tomorrow the rediscovery of romantic love’; set its hope in ‘Time the refreshing river’ and in history, the ‘Organiser’; and vaguely concluded: ‘To-morrow, perhaps, the future’. (Eng.A, 213).

With his poem and its performance, Auden decided deliberately to put Elizabeth Mann’s marriage with the Italian writer and scholar into a historical context. In the poem, Auden achieves this by suggesting that in the future, this particular marriage might be thought of as an act of ‘modern policy’. He directly juxtaposes this vision with the dark snap-shot of war’s effect on people’s lives quoted above. The message: war cannot be overcome by love; but individual acts of love, ‘normal’ and unspectacular in the context of war as they may seem, have the potential of changing history.³⁰⁰ Looking at things on a greater time-scale, Auden implies that ‘involved humanity’ (‘Aubade’, CP,

²⁹⁹ Ibid., 15.

³⁰⁰ This way of presenting greater contexts in his poetry was by no means a new invention by Auden at this stage. Already in 1932, Auden had written about the birth of John Warner, the son of his friends Rex and Francis Warner in *The Orators*:

A birthday, a birth
 On English earth
 Restores, restore will, has restored
 To England’s story
 The directed calm, the actual glory. (Auden, *The Orators: An English Study*, 93.)

884) cannot really achieve anything except by doing what all peoples have done for centuries, with or without war: to live and love and procreate:

Though the kingdoms are at war,
All the people see the sun,
All the dwellings stand in light,
All the unconquered worlds revolve,
Life must live. (Eng.A, 455)

Thus he wished: ‘May this bed of marriage be | Symbol now of the rebirth | asked of old humanity’ (Eng.A, 454). The hope is for a revival of old values through individual effort, and thus Auden also calls on ‘every girl and boy’ to ‘redeem the State’ and thereby to lead humanity to a brighter future: not through war, but by lifting ‘their prayers and praises’ to the memory of the ‘Great’, the cultural pillars of Central Europe:

Goethe ignorant of sin
Placing every human wrong,
Blake the industrious visionary,
Tolstoi the great animal,
Hellas-loving Hölderlin,
Wagner who obeyed his gift. (EA, 455)

German thinkers tend to dominate Auden’s lists of intellectual praise. In the ‘Epilogue’ of *Look, Stranger!*, for example, Schweitzer, Freud, Groddeck, and Kafka are singled out.³⁰¹ The ‘list’ in ‘Epithalamion’ also shows a clear bias towards the Germanic ‘Great’, though in this case the occasion might partly be responsible. ‘Goethe ignorant of sin’ is the altered line of the original ‘Goethe innocent of sin’, and Auden even replaced ‘ignorant’ with ‘innocent’ in 1940.

The alteration goes to show that within only one year’s time, Auden had ‘changed his heart’ further – to the extent that he felt somewhat uncomfortable about ‘Epithalamion’ anyway. The little change he made seems to be rather unnecessary, even counterproductive. Since the poem first appeared in *The English Auden* in 1977, the

³⁰¹ Auden, *Look, Stranger!*, 67.

change was made by Auden in person, in friends' copies: through this, he exposed himself unnecessarily – since the message of the poem remains virtually unchanged – but maybe this was the point. It is probably fair to assume that the one word Auden altered was not the only thing he disliked about the poem by this time.

It is unclear how the wedding guests would have thought about the sentiments expressed at the time: in November 1939, the Second World War was a reality in Europe, although the United States had still to enter it. Klaus and Erika Mann at least had welcomed the war and might have thought it downright cynical that Auden ended his 'carmen' with a bow to those 'Great', 'Looking down upon us, | Wish us joy'. (Eng.A, 456). It is not even clear how much the assorted Manns and friends, most of them non-native speakers of English, would have understood of Auden's complicated 'carmen' – although they all had received a printed copy of it and thus did not have to rely for their comprehension solely on Auden's performance.

Klaus Mann, while not commenting on the poem in his diary, wrote the following passage about the wedding in his book *Der Wendepunkt* (1942):

Wystan Auden, Erikas Gatte, überrascht die Gesellschaft mit einem zu diesem Anlaß verfaßten 'Epithalamion', einem anmutig-anspielungsreichen Gelegenheitsgedicht, in dem die Genien abendländischer Kultur als Schutzheilige des italienisch-deutsch-amerikanischen Paares beschworen werden. Fast alle kommen vor, von Dante, dem Exilierten – 'a total failure in an inferior city' – über Mozart und Goethe ('ignorant of sin, placing every human wrong') bis zu 'Hellas-loving Hölderlin' und jenem späten, schon recht fragwürdigen Heiligen, Richard Wagner, 'who... organised his wish for death into a tremendous cry'. Nun mischt seine verdächtige Stimme sich in den Hochzeitschor: 'All wish us joy!'³⁰²

³⁰² Klaus Mann, *Der Wendepunkt: Ein Lebensbericht* (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer, 1952), 416. ['Wystan Auden, Erika's spouse, surprises the party with an 'Epithalamion', specifically written for this occasion, an occasional poem full of charm and allusions in which the geniuses produced by occidental culture are summoned as patron saints of the Italian-German-American couple. Almost all of them appear, from Dante, the exile – 'a total failure in an inferior city' – to Mozart and Goethe ('ignorant of sin, placing every human wrong') to 'Hellas-loving Hölderlin' and that later, already rather questionable Saint, Richard Wagner, 'who... organised his wish for death into a tremendous cry'. Now his suspicious voice joins the wedding choir: 'All wish us joy!']

A few things are very interesting and surprising: that to Mann, ‘Epithalamion’ was a ‘Gelegenheitsgedicht’, an occasional poem; that he was not aware of or did not consider Auden’s word-change; that he expressed slight weariness at the mentioning of Wagner but was not offended by the poem’s message in general. He also mentions an ‘Allgemeine Ergriffenheit’ of the audience, which means that they were in fact touched by the poem rather than troubled by its implied message. Mann says that the audience was touched ‘teils wegen des sinnig-klugen englischen Kunstgedichts; teils, weil unsere Medi sich nun vermählt und gebunden hat, obwohl sie doch gestern noch das ‘Kindchen’ war, dem in deutschen Hexametern gehuldigt wurde’.³⁰³ Clearly, Mann had understood the poem very well indeed, noticing even that Auden had gone as far as making sure his poem’s metre – German hexameters – was appropriate for the occasion.³⁰⁴ But of course Mann’s comments were written specifically for publication, and whatever the reaction at the wedding was – and however touching the gesture – the poem is really another example of Auden’s ‘everything that lives is holy’ approach and his ‘dünnelhaftel Unparteilichkeit’. Despite Klaus Mann’s positive description, the Mann siblings probably would not have agreed with the poem’s implications if they hadn’t at the same time been so moved by Auden’s gesture.

This is exemplified by passages from their own writing. Around the time of the wedding, Erika Mann was working on an essay called ‘Don’t make the Same Mistakes’ in which she imagines a conversation during a train journey between a young American and the first person narrator. While the young man is convinced that the circumstances in America would prevent Fascism from spreading over from Europe, that Europe was

³⁰³ Ibid. [‘partly because of the coherent-clever artful poem in English; partly because our Medi had got married and attached herself, although yesterday she was still the ‘little child’, to whom homage has now been paid in German hexameters’.]

³⁰⁴ The German hexameter was established in the German poetic tradition by Klopstock, although the form had been used before. Goethe, Hölderlin, and von Platen carried it on, and Thomas Mann himself had used it in *Gesang vom Kindchen*. (See: Otto Paul, *Deutsche Metrik*, 4. völlig umgearb. Aufl. (München: Hueber, 1961), 160–161.)

remote enough for America's isolationism to be justified, Mann tries to convince him of the opposite – that he must try to learn from the mistakes made by the European democracies and look for parallel symptoms:

‘Excuse me,’ the young man retorted, and his bright eyes took on a grey-black color. ‘We have not failed yet. And may I say, there is no indication that we will fail in the near future.’ I was remorseful, but I continued steadfastly. ‘No,’ I said, ‘you have not failed yet. But will you not fail eventually? The similarity between your situation today and the German situation at the beginning of the thirties is striking, and terribly disturbing.’³⁰⁵

Asked various difficult questions by the young man, the ‘I’ decides to answer these in writing; thus an essay-within-the-essay is devoted to an analysis of the situation in Europe before the war and during the Nazi seizure of power: she wants to convince the young man to give up his rather Audenesque attitude: ‘After all, these things work themselves out and history goes on’.³⁰⁶ Revisiting her origins as a young apolitical actress in Berlin, Erika Mann acknowledges that she, too, was once a ‘pacifist’, and describes how she came to disrespect ‘empty’ phrases, however ‘true’, and to embrace and preach the active, political stance. It was her wholehearted belief – so much is beyond doubt – that there was no other way to fight for democracy and culture than by active means.

A passage from Klaus Mann's diary shows that he did not understand how Auden could be of his point of view: on 8 July 1940, he argued with Isherwood about Auden's ‘silence’: ‘Gestern, *Christopher Isherwood* hier zum lunch. Nett. Mit ihm geschwommen. Viel geredet. (Zum Problem des integralen Pazifismus à la Aldous Huxley. – Auden's unklare Stellung. Christophers eigene Unklarheiten und mannigfache Bedenken. Mir alles nicht ganz verständlich. Trotzdem Sympathie für seine Integrität und

³⁰⁵ Erika Mann, “Don't Make the Same Mistakes,” in *Zero Hour: A Summons To The Free* (Farrar & Rinehart, Inc., 1940), 18.

³⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 20.

Bemühtheit.)³⁰⁷ Although he thought Auden to be less upright in his attitude and behaviour than Isherwood, Mann seems to have buried his dislike of his brother-in-law and not to have held a grudge against him.

Quite clearly, the connection with the Manns and the exposure to the reality of the European exiles was influencing Auden. A month before the wedding, on 27 October, Auden had written in a typewritten letter to Mrs Dodds:

I am trying to organise the German Exiles and others here to produce some material which we might distribute, but it is a difficult job. The efforts I have seen so far are either so statistical that no one would read them, or so bitter that they would only have the opposite effect from what they intend. Duff-Cooper has been here prophesying a revolution in Germany from the Right with a possible restoration of the Monarchy.³⁰⁸

Although Auden does not mention his wife in this context, there must have been a connection between what Auden mentions in his letter and Erika Mann. His – was it really his own initiative? – attempt to ‘organise the German Exiles’ at this point is very likely to have been related to the Manns. Auden’s reference to Duff Cooper makes this even more likely. Before his appointment as Minister of Information to Winston Churchill, Duff Cooper travelled the United States from autumn 1939 until early 1940 on a lecture tour and visited Chicago several times, where Erika Mann reportedly first met him then.³⁰⁹ She would use this contact in order to obtain a chance to visit England from August 1940, in order to broadcast anti-Nazi propaganda for the BBC.

Other Mann projects were in the making in December 1939 in which Auden was meant to be involved. Klaus Mann mentions his latest idea for a book in a letter to his

³⁰⁷ Klaus Mann, *Tagebücher 1940 bis 1943*, ed. Joachim Heimannsberg, Peter Laemmle, and Wilfried F. Schoeller (München: Spangenberg, 1991), 47. [‘Yesterday, Christopher Isherwood here for lunch. Pleasant. Went swimming with him. Talked much. (About the problem posed by the position of integral pacifism à la Aldous Huxley. – Auden’s vague attitude. Christopher’s own lack of clarity and manifold concerns. All this quite incomprehensible to me. Nevertheless sympathy for his integrity and his efforts.)’]

³⁰⁸ Bell, “Auden to the Doddses,” 105.

³⁰⁹ J.F. Slattery, “Erika Mann und die BBC,” in *Thomas Mann Jahrbuch 12.*, ed. Eckart Heftrich and Thomas Sprecher (Vittorio Klostermann, 1999), 311.

brother Golo. It was supposed to be about European celebrities who visited America in the nineteenth century, Tchaikovsky, Mahler, Wilde and others. Mann added:

Auden möchte vielleicht zweiter editor sein – wenn ich zahlen kann. An die Geldgeber bin ich noch gar nicht herangetreten, alles ist noch in einem nebelhaft-frühen Stadium, vielleicht gebe ichs wieder auf, und hätte es wohl gar nicht erst erwähnen sollen.³¹⁰

It seems as if Mann could not pay in the end and abandoned the project. The contact between Auden and the Manns remained intact though: On 4 February 1940, Auden sent a post card to his brother-in-law, possibly confirming the date for a meeting, which simply read: Klauschen [*sic*], O.K. Thursday the 9th Dein Wystan. And on 11 February 1940, Klaus Mann mentions having been invited to dinner by Caroline Newton, together with Auden: ‘Vorgestern, Freitag: Dinner bei *Caroline Newton*, mit *Auden*. Viel Gespräch über englische, amerikanische Literatur. Ich sitze etwas dabei, wengleich interessiert’.³¹¹

Although or because Mann felt he could not contribute much to the dinner conversation about English and American literature, he read Auden’s new collection of poems, *Another Time*, a week later.³¹² In his diary, Mann muses about feeling ‘like Pygmalion’, quoting: “‘Every eye must weep alone.’ – Schöne Zeile in Auden’s neuem Band: aus dem Widmungs-Gedicht an den kleinen Chester’.³¹³ Writing about his financial and creative worries, Mann then further identifies with Auden’s poem:

³¹⁰ Klaus Mann, *Briefe und Antworten*, 1975, 100. [‘Auden maybe wants to be the second editor – if I am able to pay. I haven’t even approached the investors yet, everything is still at a nebulous early stage, maybe I will give it up again and probably should not even have mentioned it’.]

³¹¹ Klaus Mann, *Tagebücher 1940 bis 1943*, 18. [‘Before yesterday, Friday: dinner at *Caroline Newton*’s, with *Auden*. Much talk about English, American literature. I’m a bit left out, although interested’.]

³¹² Meanwhile, Auden had also started to teach at the New School for Social Research in New York, a progressive institution where since 1919, mature students could obtain a university degree. In 1933, a graduate division called University in Exile had been founded whose faculty included a great number of distinguished European refugees. Hannah Arendt, Auden’s great friend, who arrived in New York in 1941, would teach here from 1967 until her death in 1975. Auden said about the New School that it was ‘quite a good place but O so German of 1935 – and they seem to have learned nothing since’. (Quoted in: Carpenter, *W.H. Auden*, 295.)

³¹³ Klaus Mann, *Tagebücher 1940 bis 1943*, 22. [“‘Every eye must weep alone.’ – Beautiful line in Auden’s new volume: from the poem dedicated to little Chester’.]

‘Grotesk, dieses Fixiert-sein auf die eigenen kleinen Sachen – während.....ja die Finnen gehen zurück; die Türken machen sich bereit; die Nazis drohen mit uneingeschränktem U-Boot Krieg.... Aber inmitten der Kollektiv-Katastrophen trägt jeder sein eigenes Kreuz, and “every eye must weep alone.”’³¹⁴

It is obvious that Mann went through a particularly bad period of depression at the time. On 26 December 1939, after complaining about his various boyfriends and their lack of empathy, he wrote: ‘Wenn man eine Frau hätte... (Oder einen anderen “Typ”? Wystan und Chester....) Jetzt ist es jedenfalls so, dass zu der nationalen und politischen Isoliertheit eine fast komplette persönliche Einsamkeit kommt. Die Tatsache, daß ich englisch schreiben muss – fremde Sprache –, steigert noch dies unsägliche Gefühl...’³¹⁵ There it was creeping up again, that utterly traumatic feeling of personal isolation in a host country which had provided shelter from a worse reality but which would never become home. Mann’s comment underlies that for writers, language more than anything else was home. Interestingly, too, is Mann’s comment about Auden and Kallman here. It suggests Mann may have been envious of their seemingly marriage-like relationship, not knowing that below the surface of mutuality upheld by Auden, things were already starting to be much the way Mann had originally anticipated.

2.8 AUDEN AND THOMAS MANN

There is no indication that Erika Mann or her father ever shared any of Klaus Mann’s negative feelings towards Auden or reflected about him as much. Thomas Mann recorded in his diary that he and Erika had lunch with Auden in Princeton on 27 April

³¹⁴ Ibid. [‘Grotesque, this fixation on one’s own things – while.....yes, the Finns are retreating; the Turks are preparing themselves; the Nazis threaten unrestricted submarine warfare.... But amidst all the collective catastrophies, everyone bears his own cross, and “every eye must weep alone.”’]

³¹⁵ Klaus Mann, *Tagebücher 1938 bis 1939*, 149. [‘If one had a wife... (or a different ‘type’? Wystan and Chester....) Now, in any case, it is such that in addition to the national and political isolation there is an almost complete personal loneliness. The fact that I have to write in English – foreign language –, increases this unspeakable feeling even more...’.]

1939. Erika was contemplating at the time whether she should give up her plans of going back to Europe for a trip given that war seemed more and more probable. On 2 May, the three met again: this time in New York, where Thomas Mann had come to discuss his help for humanitarian causes with his daughter. Ever since their first meeting in Zurich, Thomas Mann seems to have talked to Auden about his various projects and to have involved him in them occasionally.

It has to be kept in mind that Thomas Mann only aligned himself officially with the German exiles on 3 February 1936, in a public letter that appeared in the *Neue Züricher Zeitung*. Up to this point, Mann's position had been a rather vague one – much to the dismay of Erika who had come close to falling out with her father over this matter – because he did not want to compromise his German publishing house.

After 1936, Mann became more actively involved in exile initiatives, though it often took the impetus of others to start these and then get him on board. In early 1937, just before his departure for Spain, Auden had allowed his name to appear below a petition appealing for the financial support of a Thomas-Mann-Fonds, which appeared in the Prague weekly newspaper *Die neue Weltbühne* on 11 February, along amongst others with Lion Feuchtwanger, Sigmund Freud, André Gide, Aldous Huxley, Oskar Kokoschka, Jules Romains, Ignazio Silone, Upton Sinclair, H.G. Wells, Fr. Werfel, and Stefan Zweig (for the full appeal, see: PI, 728-729). Thomas Mann had lent his name to a previously existing 'Notgemeinschaft deutscher emigrierter Schriftsteller', founded by the émigré writer Friedrich Burschell and chaired by his brother Heinrich Mann. It was first called Thomas-Mann-Fonds but renamed Thomas Mann Society in due course. The Thomas Mann Society endowment fund turned out to be one of the most successful attempts at uniting and supporting European intellectuals in their fight

against Fascism. The Society was forced to move to London in 1938 and helped to save many lives.³¹⁶

The most interesting example of Auden's active engagement for political victims – despite his new theories – involved Kafka's friend Max Brod.³¹⁷ On 17 March 1939, Auden wrote to E.R. Dodds with a plea:

Dear Dodds,

Do you think anything could be done in Oxford or at any other University for Dr Max Brod, the Czech novelist who was Kafka's greatest friend. He has a little money (\$ 3000), and (unless it has now gone) a small state pension. There is nothing against him politically except his Jewish Race, and I gather they are quite willing to let him go. His qualifications are.

- 1) He is an authority on the Philosophy of Religion.
- 2) He was the best music critic in Czechoslovakia.
- 3) He has a mass of unpublished Kafka Material.
- 4) He is said to talk English fairly well.

If you can do anything, I know you will. His adress [*sic*]

Dr MAX BROD

PRAG II

BISKUPSKY DVUR 8.

He is fifty years old.

God, it must be awful in England just now, and America seems only a shade better. [...] ³¹⁸

Brod, of course, never came to Oxford, and Auden's attempt to help him led to nothing. The missing link between them is the German Nobel laureate, Thomas Mann.

On 27 February 1939, Thomas Mann had written to the director of the New York Public Library (NYPL), H.M. Lydenberg, calling to his attention the unique opportunity both to 'secure' the bulk of Kafka manuscripts for the library and to potentially save Max Brod's life by inviting him to deposit and curate the collection in New York. Mann's attempt to help was instigated by a letter he had received from Brod himself, in which Brod states that he had been 'encouraged' to ask Mann for help by

³¹⁶ Ian Wallace, *German-Speaking Exiles in Great Britain* (Rodopi, 1999), 60.

³¹⁷ The information contained in the following passage on Auden, Brod, and Thomas Mann has been published as a Commentary: Hannah Arnold, "Brod's Case," *Times Literary Supplement* 5820 (October 17, 2014): 15. Auden's letter to Dodds was previously unpublished.

³¹⁸ *Ibid.*

Klaus Mann, whom he knew from Prague, and by Dr. Robert Klopstock, Kafka's deathbed physician. On 1 March, Mann received a first answer from Lydenberg:

At this moment I can do no more than acknowledge receipt of your letter, express our regret at the fact that we are faced with curtailment of staff rather than extension of it, and add that I hope in a few days to be in touch with a man whom I should like to talk to about the situation.³¹⁹

It is unclear who the man Lydenberg wished to talk to was, and what he hoped would be the outcome of the conversation: an invitation to another American institution, perhaps? Soon after hearing the apologetic response from the New York Public Library, Mann must have mentioned Brod's case to Auden. It seems likely that this happened during one of Auden's visits to Princeton in the first half of March – before 17 March, in any case, when he wrote his letter to Dodds: Auden must have seen Brod's letter. In it, Brod lists all those details about his circumstances which Auden, too, mentions: his financial position; possible ways in which he could make himself useful; and also his trump card – the Kafka papers to be exchanged in return for a way out of Europe.

While this side of the story is straightforward enough, other sources give rise to various problems. First, subsequent years have shown just how contentious the question of Kafka's literary estate is. Whether or not it was even appropriate for Brod to offer the manuscripts to institutions is a tricky question to begin with, given that he had ignored Kafka's last wish to burn the lot after his death and they were no longer meant to exist. So who owned these documents, which their author had asked to be destroyed but been unable to destroy himself? Considering that the manuscript of *The Trial* alone was auctioned for one million pounds by Sotheby's in 1988, this is not a minor issue. At the time of Brod's attempts to leave Prague, Kafka's sisters – his next of kin – were alive and would have had good claims to the manuscripts. All three died in concentration camps

³¹⁹ Peter F. Neumeyer, "Thomas Mann, Max Brod, and the New York Public Library," *MLN* 90, no. 3 (April 1, 1975): 422.

in the early 40s. On the other hand, Kafka's work would probably have been forgotten without Brod's efforts to promote his friend's oeuvre, in which case the manuscripts would not be worth very much at all. Brod was the executor of Kafka's estate and getting the papers out of occupied Prague was clearly not a bad idea.

Another question that arises is why Brod, an 'ardent Zionist', did not leave Prague at a time when it was still relatively easy to settle in Palestine. He was very lucky even to make it there in 1939, by which time Palestine's entry regulations had become much more restrictive. And what about America? Did Brod leave it this late with his move because he was waiting for a positive response from Mann? Interestingly, Brod later misrepresented the situation in his autobiography *Streitbares Leben* (1960), stating: 'Als später die Gefahr des Hitlerismus anstieg und ein Verbleiben in Prag Qualen und den Tod bedeutete, hat sich Thomas Mann meiner angenommen, ohne daß ich ihn darum hätte ersuchen müssen'.³²⁰ Brod's letter to Mann proves, however, that this is untrue.

Brod also states in his memoir that Mann had been able to secure him the offer of a professorship at 'an American college', and concludes grandiosely that, despite this, he decided to move to Palestine, against all better advice: 'Ich zog es vor, dem Genius meines Lebens zu folgen und nach Palästina zu gehen'.³²¹

In fact, though, nothing had come of Thomas Mann's efforts at that point, nor of Auden's. While the limited time frame of the 'operation' alone would account for this, there is also the question of how famous Kafka actually was in the English-speaking world in 1939. It seems that he was already relatively well-known in intellectual circles: the first English translations of his work, by Willa and Edwin Muir, had been published in the 1930s; and early in 1941, Auden would begin a review of three new Kafka publications with the words: 'A reviewer remarked recently that Kafka was in danger of

³²⁰ Max Brod, *Streitbares Leben: Autobiographie 1884-1968* (Frankfurt am Main: Insel Verlag, 1979), 255. ['When, later on, the threat of Hitlerism increased, and to remain in Prague would have meant torture and death, Thomas Mann looked out for me without my having to ask him to do so'.]

³²¹ Ibid. ['I preferred following my life's genius and moving to Palestine'.]

becoming the idol of a clique'.³²² One of the translations Auden reviewed was *The Castle*, with an introduction by Thomas Mann.

Judging by Lydenberg's reply, which reflects a sense of urgency and care, he certainly was interested in the matter. On 27 March, he even wrote a second letter to Mann, with a newspaper clipping attached that announced Dr. Brod's arrival in Tel Aviv from Czechoslovakia. Mann replied on 17 April, thanking Lydenberg and informing him that the Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati was now trying to invite Brod to teach at their institution. But Brod had settled in Palestine, and he remained in Palestine/Israel for the rest of his life.

The Kafka manuscripts, too, made their way to the Holy Land – by chance. Later, some of them were returned to Kafka's nieces who, fortuitously, deposited them in Oxford's Bodleian Library. The manuscripts left in Brod's care passed into the keeping of his secretary when he died in 1968, a situation that was only resolved in 2012, when her daughters lost a lawsuit in Tel Aviv and were prevented from selling the papers to the Marbach Archive in Germany. Instead, since they were deemed the cultural property of the Israeli people, the manuscripts will be deposited in Israel's National Library in Jerusalem – if there is no revision of the case and the court's decision is put into action.

The fascinating story of Kafka's estate is an example of how entangled moral and financial questions can become when it comes to determining the ownership of literary documents which have been 'displaced' in one way or other: a 'sense' of ownership, or the physical fact of possession, by no means goes hand in hand with legal ownership. The more complex the situation, the more life stories and emotions are woven into the invisible fabric of a manuscript.

What Auden's letter in the Bodleian Library reveals about Auden – who just like

³²² W.H. Auden, "The Wandering Jew," *New Republic*, February 10, 1941, 185.

Kafka asked for all his surviving letters to be destroyed after his death, with just as little success – is his eagerness to help those who were victims of the political circumstances he had decided no longer to address in his work at the end of the 1930s. While he had come to believe his ‘engagé’ poems to be untruthful, he always cared deeply about the misfortune of individuals. Early in 1939, the combined effort of Auden and his famous father-in-law might have come to nothing. Still though, it is important to know that the two discussed Brod’s case, and tried to help.

This episode makes it possible to imagine better how Auden and his father-in-law might have interacted; at least it goes to show what kind of topics must have dominated the conversations between Auden and the Manns at the time. Auden and Thomas Mann seem to have got on genuinely well, although Auden supposedly once joked: ‘Who’s the most boring German writer? My father-in-law!’³²³

Actually, there are striking correspondences between Auden’s and Mann’s interests and views in many respects and it is evident that Auden sincerely respected the older writer. Already in 1938, Auden had called Mann’s speech *The Coming Victory of Democracy* ‘the best brief statement of what democracy means which I have read’ in his review ‘Men of Thought and Action’, published in the *Birmingham Town Crier* on 14 October 1938. (PI, 459) In some ways, the two writers were not unlike one another, with their similarly pedantic ways and strict adherence to schedules. It is unlikely, for example, that either of them ever would have upset the other by being late for lunch or dinner. In his book *Auden: An American Friendship* (1983), Miller – who lodged with Auden at Ann Arbor – remember him to have quoted ‘his father-in-law, Thomas Mann’: ‘Sit down to your writing every morning from nine to twelve for thirty years and you’re bound to accomplish something’.³²⁴

³²³ Weiss, *The Erika and Klaus Mann Story*, 116.

³²⁴ Miller, *An American Friendship*, 22.

Another similarity – revealed through a comment by Caroline Newton in her introduction to the edition of Thomas Mann’s letters to her – is that both Mann and Auden knew entire poems by heart.³²⁵ Auden even made this a feature of the English classes he taught at various institutions. One wonders what the dynamics and conversations between Auden and his father-in-law were like: they would have had much to talk about, but one wonders to what degree Mann opened up to Auden.

It is an interesting question whether Mann and Auden ever talked about August von Platen, Mann’s favourite poet – who was outed as a homosexual by Heinrich Heine a century before Auden’s first visit to Berlin – and whether Auden was even familiar with Platen. Most certainly though, he would have been interested in the poet’s life and work. While the dispute between Platen and Heine, later termed the Platen Affair, was initially about literary values, it quickly became more personal, with Platen making anti-Semitic comments and Heine finally exposing Platen’s sexual preferences. If the quotation from Platen, which Heine uses at the beginning of ‘Die Bäder von Lucca’ (1930) – ‘Ich bin wie Weib dem Manne’³²⁶ – left any doubt about the text’s angle and intentions, the text itself did not: ‘Das ist eben das Schöne an diesem Dichter, daß er nur für Männer glüht, in warmer Freundschaft; er gibt uns den Vorzug vor dem weiblichen Geschlechte, und schon für diese Ehre sollten wir ihm dankbar sein’.³²⁷ Platen, who was in Italy when *Die Bäder von Lucca* was published, never returned to Germany again.

While there is no evidence as to whether Auden and Thomas Mann ever discussed homosexuality or the work of homosexual poets, it is striking that both had independently developed rather similar ideas about the artistic potential of

³²⁵ Golo Mann stated later: ‘From Auden I derive my own definition of poetry: something which creates order and can be learned by heart. (I would not say that Auden was always faithful to the second condition. No one could possibly recite “A letter to Elizabeth Mayer” by heart.)’ (Golo Mann, “A Memoir,” 100.)

³²⁶ Heinrich Heine, “Die Bäder von Lucca,” in *Heinrich Heine: Werke*, ed. Stuart Atkins, vol. 1 (München: Beck, 1973), 523.

³²⁷ *Ibid.*, 574. [“This is precisely what is beautiful about this poet, that he burns only for men in warm friendship; he gives us preference over the female sex, and for this honour alone we should be thankful to him’.]

homosexuality. As mentioned before, in the late 20s, Auden felt that ‘the attraction of buggery is partly its difficulty and torments. Heterosexual love seems so tame and easy after it’ (J29). Ten years previously, Thomas Mann had addressed the same topic in a letter to Carl Maria Weber, calling homosexuality ‘eine Gefühlsart, die ich ehre, weil sie fast notwendig – mit viel mehr Notwendigkeit jedenfalls, als die ‘normale’ – *Geist* hat [...]’, carefully avoiding the ‘difficult’ word itself.³²⁸ Mann continued by explaining that personally, he had managed to separate his love as a citizen – for his wife and children – from those sensual and erotic thoughts of a different kind, which he calls ‘geistig-sinnliche Abenteuer’.³²⁹

It was exactly this path that Auden had decided not to follow during his year in Berlin, a choice both symbolised by and practically executed through his dissolution of his engagement with Sheilah Richardson. One would like to know Mann’s arguments supporting his statement: exactly why did he think homosexuality had more ‘Geist’ than heterosexuality? And did he count himself amongst those whose homosexual inclinations had given a deeper insight into matter and art? As we have seen, Auden expressed this more clearly in his Berlin Journal: ‘There is something in reciprocity that is despair. How one likes to suffer. Anyway writers do, it is their income’. Yet both Mann and Auden seem to have compromised when it came to executing their theories: while Mann had chosen the path of public respectability through married life, Auden had committed himself to a homosexual relationship which he desperately wanted to be reciprocal and marriage-like – if his partner could only have played the part.

³²⁸ Thomas Mann, *Briefe II: 1914-1923* (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer, 2004), 348. [‘[...] a way of feeling which I honour because almost necessarily – at least with more necessity than the “normal” one – it has *esprit* [...]’.] Still, Thomas Mann wrote to Agnes Meyer on 26 May 1942: ‘Künstlerisch ist nur eine groteske Behandlung dieser Sphäre [*i.e. the homoerotic sphere*] möglich, wie bei Proust.’ (Thomas Mann and Agnes E. Meyer, *Briefwechsel 1937-1955*, ed. Rudolf Vaget (Frankfurt am Main, 1992), p. 402.)

[‘Artistically, only a grotesque treatment of this sphere is possible, like in Proust.’]

³²⁹ *Ibid.*, 351.

Fascinatingly, all these deliberations stand in connection with one particular text. In his letter of 1920, Weber – who was gay as well – had written a supporting letter to Thomas Mann about his novella *Der Tod in Venedig* (1912). Mann does not make it clear what Weber had defended his work against, he only alludes to ‘Einwände und Vorwürfe, die Ihnen selbst nur zu geläufig sein mögen’³³⁰, and tries to emphasize that he never wanted to give the impression of denying or disclaiming the homosexual ‘Gefühlsart’, both in his work and in life. He then follows:

Den *artistischen* Grund, warum es diesen Anschein gewinnen konnte, haben Sie klug und klar erkannt. Er liegt in dem Unterschied zwischen dem dyonysischen Geist unverantwortlich-individualistisch sich ausströmender Lyrik und dem apolinischen objektiv gebundener, sittlich-gesellschaftlich verantwortlicher Epik. Ein Gleichgewicht von Sinnlichkeit und Sittlichkeit wurde angestrebt.³³¹

What Mann describes is what he calls ‘schmerzhafter Prozess der Objektivierung, der sich aus den Notwendigkeiten meiner Natur zu vollziehen hatte’, which required him – unlike Aschenbach – to maintain a balance between the ‘bourgeois’ and what Mann calls ‘unverantwortlich-individualistisch’.³³² Unlike Aschenbach, Mann did not let his inclinations ‘get the better’ of his life – though maybe the fact that he did allow for his character to succumb to them may have been a matter of proving to himself where such behaviour could lead. Mann himself always remained a writer whose working method was, self-admittedly, ‘ein versachlichend Mühen’, ‘ein kältend Bemeistern’ rather than ‘Gesang’.³³³ Klaus Mann characterised his father in a similar way, calling him a

³³⁰ Ibid., 347. [‘objections and accusations which may be only too familiar to yourself’.]

³³¹ Ibid., 348. [‘Wisely and clearly you have recognised the *artistic* reason why it could have seemed this way. It lies in the difference between the Dionysian spirit of poetry which pours out irresponsibly-individually, and that of Apollonian objectively bound, morally-socially responsible narrative literature. An equilibrium of sensuality and morality was the aim’.]

³³² Ibid.

³³³ Ibid. [‘a struggle with the end of objectification’, ‘a chilling mastery’ rather than ‘song’.]

‘disziplinierten Träumer’ in his book *Der Wendepunkt*.³³⁴ Even in their great discipline as writers, Auden and Mann were very much alike.

Twenty years later, on 31 January 1941, Auden used the same opposition of forces in a now famous letter to Benjamin Britten, lecturing Britten about the balance between bourgeois order and Bohemian chaos in a way that is highly reminiscent of Mann’s framework in *Der Tod in Venedig*:

Dearest Ben, [...]

I think I know something about the dangers that beset you as a man and as an artist because they are my own.

Goodness and Beauty are the results of a perfect balance between Order and Chaos, Bohemianism and Bourgeois Convention. Bohemian chaos alone ends in a mad jumble of beautiful scraps; Bourgeois convention alone ends in large unfeeling corpses.

Every artist except the supreme masters has a bias one way or the other. The best pair of opposites I can think of in music are Wagner and Strauss. (Technical skill always comes from the bourgeois side of one’s nature)

For middle-class Englishmen like you and me, the danger is of course the second. Your attraction to this thin-as-a-board-juveniles, ie to the sexless and innocent, is a symptom of this. And I am certain too that it is your denial and evasion of the demands of disorder that is responsible for your attacks of ill-health, ie sickness is your substitute for the Bohemian.³³⁵

With its lecturing tone and untoward message, the letter had done further damage to the already strained friendship between Auden and Britten. Still, it is not unlikely that the content of Auden’s letter moved and occupied Britten thoroughly and permanently, and so it seems to be more than a coincidence that in 1970, another thirty years later, Benjamin Britten began what would be his last Opera: *Death in Venice*.³³⁶

³³⁴ Mann, *Der Wendepunkt*, 184.

³³⁵ W.H. Auden, Letter to Benjamin Britten from 31.01.1941. Letters to Benjamin Britten. Berg Collection of the New York Public Library. W.H. Auden collection of papers.

³³⁶ Not long before this, in July 1964, Erika Mann had been involved with a movie adaptation of her father’s novella. She wrote the following to Auden from Oxford: ‘I am still rather ill with a horrid plastercast all round me and no idea of what the operation will eventually turn out to have achieved. Despite my plight, though I did quite some work at Oxford, collaborating with Harry Craig on a ‘Death in Venice’ film which José Ferrer will start producing next march. You never can tell but there is a chance of something quite fine being in the offing’ (App. D6).

Paul Muldoon obviously also recognised the importance of *Death in Venice* for Auden, writing from Auden's perspective in '7 Middagh Street':

I have leapt [...]
 into this great void
 where Chester and I exchanged love-pledges
 and vowed
 our marriage-vows. As he lay asleep
 last night the bronze of his exposed left leg
 made me want nothing so much as to weep.
 I thought of the terrier, of plague,
 of Aschenbach at the Lido.³³⁷

A note scribbled in his Holograph Notebook 1927-1929 proves that Auden was aware of *Der Tod in Venedig* as early as 1927: on the page next to the second half of the 1927 poem 'The crowing of the cock', written during a visit to Carr Bridge in September, Auden had noted: "Der liebende psychogogue". Thomas Mann. Tod und Venedig [*sic*].³³⁸

Despite the fact that Auden misquoted the German title of *Der Tod in Venedig*, this could indicate that Auden was at least interested in German literature before he spent nine months in Weimar Berlin and that he had a basic understanding of German. It remains unclear if he did read the novella at the time or only came across it, in a review or through a friend. That he wrote the note in 1927 could be indicative that Auden actually read the first translation of the novella into English by Kenneth Burke, which had only just been published in 1925. It had previously appeared in the American literary magazine *The Dial* in 1924 and later, Auden simply said about it: 'this is it' – the definitive translation.³³⁹ It is equally possible, however, that Auden did read the original, and after all, he did quote the line in German. If this was the case, one wonders how

³³⁷ Paul Muldoon, *Poems, 1968-1998* (London: Faber and Faber, 2001), 179–180.

³³⁸ Auden, *Poems 1927-1929: A Photographic and Typographic Facsimile of the Original Notebook in the Berg Collection of English and American Literature*, 42.

³³⁹ Herbert W. Simons and Trevor Melia, *The Legacy of Kenneth Burke* (Univ of Wisconsin Press, 1989), 3.

much he would have understood of Mann's dense prose at the time. Of course, Auden might even have read both original and translation side by side.

Additionally, Thomas Mann's *Mario und der Zauberer* was published in 1930. Since Auden returned to Germany in the years after having left Berlin, it is perfectly plausible that he came across the novella, especially since Mann was awarded the Nobel Prize in December 1929 and Mann's work would still have been enjoying considerable prominence resulting from the award by the summer of 1930 when Auden next visited Germany.

In any case, Auden's reference to *Der Tod in Venedig* is taken from the novella's final death-scene on the last page of the book. At this point, the famous but rather controlled German writer Gustav von Aschenbach has decided not to leave his voluntary exile in Venice despite a cholera epidemic. The cause for this uncharacteristically irrational behaviour is his obsession with a young Polish aristocrat, Tadzio, who holidays at the same resort with his family. The scenario of an exile-like situation caused by homosexual feelings is reminiscent of Platen's situation, and Mann even refers to him explicitly at the point when Aschenbach first beholds Venice from a gondola and thinks of poems by Platen:

[...] er gedachte des schwermütig-enthusiastischen Dichters, dem vormals die Kuppeln und Glockentürme seines Traumes aus diesen Fluten gestiegen waren, er wiederholte im stillen einiges von dem, was damals an Ehrfurcht, Glück und Trauer zu maßvollem Gesange geworden [...].³⁴⁰

Although as a writer Aschenbach seems to have been quite unlike Platen in style and mindset before his spontaneous journey to Italy – 'unfeeling corpse' is not a bad way of

³⁴⁰ Thomas Mann, *Der Tod in Venedig* (Oxford University Press: London, 1971), 82. ['He recalled that poet of plangent inspiration who long ago had seen the cupolas and bell-towers of his dream rise before him out of these same waters; inwardly he recited a few lines of the measured music that had been made from that reverence and joy and sadness, [...] a passion already shaped into language [...]'. Since none of the Oxford libraries has a copy of the Burke translation praised by Auden, I used the translation by Auden's friend David Luke that Auden praised in a letter to Katia Mann (see p. 208). (Thomas Mann, *Death in Venice and Other Stories*, trans. David Luke (London: Vintage, 2003), 212.)]

putting it – his newly-discovered passion changes the writer so profoundly that his thinking becomes somewhat ‘schwermütig-enthusiastisch’, veering towards the other extreme and essentially giving up his life simply to be close to Tadzio a few more times. In this process, his thinking indeed becomes ‘a mad jumble of beautiful scraps’, as Auden put it. As he stops to control life and thinking, there is no further reference to his writing at all.

This development comes to an appropriately enthusiastic and morbid end in the final scene where the dying Aschenbach watches Tadzio for the last time, imagining the boy to be waving at him like a lovely psychagogue: ‘Ihm war aber, als ob der bleiche und liebliche Psychagog dort draußen ihm lächle, ihm winke; als ob er, die Hand aus der Hüfte lösend, hinausdeutete, voranschwebte ins Verheißungsvoll-Ungeheure. Und, wie so oft, machte er sich auf, ihm zu folgen’.³⁴¹ As Jim Reed points out in his commentary to *Der Tod in Venedig*, the role of a psychagogue is to conduct the souls of the deceased to the Underworld.³⁴²

Asking oneself why Auden would have taken a note of this particular line, one wonders if this was partly due to his fascination with rare words. Even in a review of the book, either of the original or of the translation, he could have come across a quotation of the line, which is one of the most famous ones in the entire novella. One can only imagine what the work meant to Auden at the time, but he integrated the ‘psychagogue’ in the poem juxtaposed to the quotation in the notebook: ‘The Crowing of the Cock’.

In the notebook, many of the earlier poems are faced by quotations in this way. Being given an entire page next to the poems, they look like they must have been written down at the same time as the poems and are probably emblems of Auden’s

³⁴¹ Mann, *Der Tod in Venedig*, 157. [‘to him, it was as if the pale and lovely soul-summoner out there were smiling to him, beckoning to him; as if he loosed his hand from his hip and pointed outwards, hovering ahead and onwards, into an immensity rich with unutterable expectation. And as so often, he set out to follow him’. (Mann, *Death in Venice and Other Stories*, 267.)]

³⁴² Mann, *Der Tod in Venedig*, 179.

inspiration for writing the poem. Just as he would in his Berlin journal, Auden reserved the right side of his notebook for the text proper – in this case poem and in the case of the journal diary entries – while noting ‘related thoughts’ on the left. ‘Daffodil bulbs instead of eyes’ from Eliot stand opposite the poem beginning ‘No trenchant parting this’; and the first four lines of ‘Hymnus Matutinus’, the second poem from Prudentius’ *Liber Cathemerinon*, face the first part of ‘The Crowing of the Cock’. The title of the poem, too, is inspired by Prudentius: the title of the very first poem in the collection is ‘Hymnus ad Galli Cantum’. While the Latin verses were composed by an old poet (‘Per quinquennia iam decem, | ni fallor, fuimus; septimus insuper | annum cardo rotat, dum ruimur sole volubili’.³⁴³), repenting for a life wasted in the pursuit of fame and power, and turning towards the Catholic faith, Auden’s ‘The Crowing of the Cock’ is reminiscent of a nursery rhyme while being full of juvenile morbidity and melancholia.

It is in this spirit that the psychagogue appears in the forth stanza of the poem:

[...] eyes
 Look in the glass, confess
 The tightening of the mouth,
 Know the receding face
 A blemished psychagogue:
 But symmetry will please.³⁴⁴

The ‘blemished psychagogue’ is an interesting detail here, because in the novella, Tazio is of course described as spotlessly beautiful. Auden’s psychagogue in the mirror on the other hand is more humane than Aschenbach’s projection and reflects the duality of death and life in the world, as does the ‘pointed crocus top’ which is coming to life at the cock’s crowing yet ‘[b]reathes of the underworld’³⁴⁵: ‘[...] symmetry will please’.³⁴⁶

³⁴³ Prudentius, *Prudentius I*, trans. H. J. Thomson, vol. 1 (London: William Heinemann, 1949), 2. [‘Full fifty years, if I err not, have I lived, and beyond that it is the seventh time that the heaven is wheeling the year and I have the benefit of the circling sun’. (Ibid.)]

³⁴⁴ Auden, *Poems 1927-1929: A Photographic and Typographic Facsimile of the Original Notebook in the Berg Collection of English and American Literature*, 43.

³⁴⁵ Ibid., 41.

³⁴⁶ Ibid., 43.

John Fuller detects another likely reference to *Der Tod in Venedig* in *The Orators*, stating: ““The bugger magician with his Polish lad” probably refers to two stories of pederastic significance by Thomas Mann, “Mario and the Magician” and “Death in Venice””.³⁴⁷ In all printed versions of the text prior to *The English Auden*, the bugger magician was censored by publishers though and became ““nigger” (how sad to think that racism was thought a more palatable alternative to homosexuality), “bigger”, or asterisks, in printed texts’.³⁴⁸ Edward Mendelson then restored the passage to its manuscript form:

Dear me! Where is that darling dreamer,
That piss-proud prophet, that pooty redeemer
The bugger magician with his Polish lad,
The aesthetic, the ascetic, the malicious and the mad?
(Eng.A, 106)

The reference itself seems to engage more closely with *Der Tod in Venedig* than with *Mario und der Zauberer* (1930), in which the homoerotic elements are subtler anyway.

The novella is set in an Italian seaside resort where, one evening, a traveling magician comes to give a performance. The protagonist’s children urge him to attend the show with them. Already at the beginning of the evening, it becomes clear that there is something rather uncanny and creepy about the magician, who turns out to be a hypnotist with sadistic tendencies. After having humiliated various townspeople, he asks Mario onstage – the beloved waiter of the protagonist’s children at their favourite café. This time, the magician exposes his victim’s love for a girl in front of the entire audience and then makes Mario take him for his beloved. The situation escalates when, having been woken up from his trance, Mario realises that the man, described as physically repulsive, has both exposed his innermost feelings and swindled a kiss from him:

³⁴⁷ Fuller, *W.H. Auden*, 118.

³⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

‘Küsse mich!’ sagte der Bucklige. ‘Glaube, daß du es darfst! Ich liebe dich. Küsse mich hierher’, und er wies mit der Spitze des Zeigefingers, Hand, Arm und kleinen Finger wegspreizend, an seine Wange, nahe dem Mund. Und Mario neigte sich und küßte ihn.³⁴⁹

This moment of utter embarrassment in front of an audience of familiar faces prompts Mario to pull a pistol and shoot the magician. His embarrassment stems both from the violation of his own deep feelings for the girl and of his male dignity through being made to kiss a man.

A further problem for the contextualisation of Auden’s Mann-reference in the ode is that it seems both inconsistent in itself and to make very little sense in the context of the poem. The passage from the ode quoted above seems to suggest that ‘mad’, eccentric people like the ‘bugger magician’ or Aschenbach with his morbid crush are indeed wanted to make England a better place – yet Mann’s novellas both give very little reason for the adoration of their protagonists. The call for more human variety in society does not seem to fit the end of his poem – which on the other hand is reminiscent of Auden’s theory of the Truly Strong Man, developed in Berlin in 1929 (see Chapter One, p. 42) – which proclaims that:

A birthday, a birth
On English earth
Restores, restore will, has restored
To England’s story
The directed calm, the actual glory.³⁵⁰

While I cannot contribute anything that would shed light on this seeming incoherence, it is evident that Auden knew Mann’s work quite well and that especially *Der Tod in Venedig* had a special significance for Auden.

³⁴⁹ Thomas Mann, *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 8 (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer, 1960), 710. [“‘Kiss me!’ the hunchback said. “Be convinced that you are allowed to do so! I love you. Kiss me here”, and he directed him with the tip of his forefinger towards his cheek close to the mouth, spreading away hand, arm, and pinkie. And Mario bent down and kissed him’.]

³⁵⁰ Auden, *The Orators: An English Study*, 93.

One reason why the novella must have resonated with Auden was its central question: how an artist should balance his human inclinations and the rigid discipline supposedly necessary for the creation of great works of art. It would be interesting to know what Auden's thoughts were on Mann's portrayal of homosexual love as a reason for the collapse of Aschenbach's discipline and for his downfall in *Der Tod in Venedig* because in a way, this corresponded with the choice he made in 1929 Berlin: for 'buggery' and against the calm haven provided by a conventional marriage – as Stephen Spender had chosen, for example, and Thomas Mann, too. Despite their different choices in this respect, both Auden and Mann always maintained their very rigid writing disciplines and within the frame of his choice.

Unlike Auden, Thomas Mann was hyper-conscious about the impression he himself gave as a writer, particularly while writing *Der Tod in Venedig*. Mann was keen to get away from his reputation as an analyst, a 'Schriftsteller' as opposed to the more 'lofty' but higher ranking 'Dichter'. His obsession with this issue becomes evident in the context of Mann's 1948 edition of Goethe in the Dial Press's series 'The Permanent Library', which appeared in time for Goethe's 1949 bicentenary. In *The Permanent Goethe: Edited, Selected and with an Introduction by Thomas Mann* (1948), which consisted of translated texts only,

Mann deliberately spoke of Goethe the 'Schriftsteller' (not 'Dichter'). In doing so he rejected the popular simplification of the inspirational theory and stressed the element of deliberate articulation and intellectual analysis in Goethe's writings. Mann took sides in an old conflict between opposing camps. He knew that the view he rejected was the one favoured by the National Socialists. It was also the one traditionally favoured, although in a less crude form, by the majority of the educated middle class in Germany.³⁵¹

³⁵¹ Hinrich Siefken, "Thomas Mann Edits Goethe: 'The Permanent Goethe,'" *The Modern Language Review* 77, no. 4 (October 1, 1982): 876.

Auden was considered as a potential translator for some of the texts, though he never ended up contributing. On 25 September 1947, Thomas Mann had mentioned in a letter to his son Klaus that he would ask Auden, Spender, or Prokosch to make a few new translations for the text once he knew what the publisher was willing to pay for these. Klaus Mann, who corresponded with his father about the project two years before his death, wrote in his diary on 26 July 1947: ‘Neue Übersetzungen wird der Verlag sicher kaum leisten wollen – außer vielleicht einige Gedichte, die wir von W.H. Auden oder Stephen Spender neu adaptieren lassen wolen [...]’.³⁵² It is unclear whether Thomas Mann ultimately did not ask him or whether Auden declined. Instead, ‘Mann acknowledges his indebtedness to “Mr Stephen Spender for his new renderings of some of the poems [...]’.³⁵³

While I can only begin to point out similarities between Auden and Mann, it would be a most fruitful task to compare their extensive works more fully. Not only was their personal relationship strange and fascinating, but so are the correspondences between their intellectual interests and characters. That Thomas Mann’s work and thinking influenced Auden profoundly is evident at various points throughout his work, for instance in the footnote to line 1581 in *New Year Letter*, ‘a quotation from “The Hungry” (“Die Hungernden”), indicating men’s position as “creatures of the restless suffering will” in need of “another love”;³⁵⁴ and in his claim in ‘September 1, 1939’ that:

Accurate scholarship can
Unearth the whole offence
From Luther until now
That has driven a culture mad [...].
(Eng.A, 246)

³⁵² Klaus Mann, *Briefe und Antworten*, 1975, 259. [‘It is unlikely that the publishing house will want to pay for new translations – except maybe a few poems, of which we would like W.H. Auden or Stephen Spender to produce new adaptations [...]’.]

³⁵³ Siefken, “Thomas Mann Edits Goethe,” 877.

³⁵⁴ Waidson, “Auden and German Literature,” 355.

A similar contextualisation can be found in Mann's famous speech 'Deutschland und die Deutschen' from 1945, as Waidson points out (p. 353). In it, Mann mentions Luther as an exemplary German who was a great thinker but lacked political sense. He brings the example of Luther's behaviour during the Peasants' War: '[...] das spezifisch und monumental Deutsche [...] stellt Luther dar [...]. Er brachte es im Politischen nicht weiter, als daß er beiden Parteien, den Fürsten und den Bauern, unrecht gab'.³⁵⁵ Mann also tries to show that the mentality of Luther was still reflected in the atmosphere in his own childhood town Lübeck: 'Aber wie Luther, der Reformator, nach Denkungsweise und Seelenform zum guten Teil ein mittelalterlicher Mensch war und sich zeit seines Lebens mit dem Teufel herumschlug, so wandelte man auch in dem protestantischen Lübeck [...] tief im gotischen Mittelalter [...]'.³⁵⁶ Goethe, the 'greatest' German, however, Mann excludes from this generalisation and claims that 'Goethe ist über diesen Gegensatz heraus und versöhnt ihn' – being a true artist and Weltbürger.³⁵⁷ One wonders where Auden would have ranked on Mann's scale of what he thought of being monumentally German; after all, Auden increasingly abandoned politics for 'Innerlichkeit' ('inwardness') – a Rilkean term. Like Mann, Auden agreed that Goethe's *Faust* was one of the central texts in the history of German literature.

2.9 EMIGRÉ CENTRAL: THE BOHEMIAN MIDDAGH STREET

During the summer of 1940, Auden spent some days with the Manns who had by now moved to California. Thomas Mann mentions having breakfast with Auden at Brentwood, Pacific Palisades, on Saturday 3 August and then lunch with both Auden

³⁵⁵ Thomas Mann, *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 11 (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer, 1960), 1135. ['[...] Luther represents what is specific and monumental German [...]. His politics did not extend beyond his considering both parties, the princes and the peasants, to be wrong'.]

³⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 11:1130. ['But just as Luther, the reformer, was, judging by his way of thinking and the state of his soul, in large part a Medieval human being and struggled with the devil throughout his life, people in protestant Lübeck lived [...] deeply in the Gothic Middle Ages [...]'.]

³⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 11:1133.

and Isherwood.³⁵⁸ The next morning, Mann had breakfast with Erika and Auden and gave the English version of his book *Lotte in Weimar* (1939) to his son-in-law ('Frühstück mit Erika und Auden, dem ich die englische Lotte zu lesen gab'). Afterwards, Auden went to explore the area and only returned after dinner.³⁵⁹ On Sunday, Mann got the news that his son Golo had been interned in Nîmes. He records having spent some time with Auden and being increasingly pessimistic for the future.³⁶⁰ Were they close enough at this point for him to have shared his thoughts with Auden? On the next day, the entire family had breakfast together, and then Auden left.³⁶¹ Beforehand, Auden wrote a letter to Mina Curtiss: 'Am staying with the wife and in-laws [...]. Nice house but O God I hate California. To tell the honest truth, I don't like desert to live in. I prefer Wordsworth and New England'.³⁶²

Back in Wordsworthian New England, Auden changed his living circumstances radically: in early October 1940, he moved from his Brooklyn Heights apartment at 1 Montague Terrace to a house-share set up by the editor George Davies and the novelist Carson McCullers. Both Davies and McCullers felt the need to refocus their lives and yearned to be surrounded by a stimulating creative community; and Auden was high up on their list of potential cohabitants. Not far from where Auden had been living before, Davies found a house with which he fell in love. With money borrowed from Lincoln Kirstein – a rich supporter of various artists who was especially fond of Auden and with whom Auden had lived in the past – 7 Middagh Street was duly rented. Neither Kirstein nor Davies and McCullers could anticipate at the time that the Brooklyn

³⁵⁸ Thomas Mann, *Tagebücher, 1940-1943*, ed. Peter de Mendelssohn (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer, 1982), 125.

³⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 126.

³⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

³⁶¹ Auden – 'Wiston Auden' – visited Thomas Mann again in Princeton on 7 November 1940 and stayed for the night. (*Ibid.*, 176.) Three days later, Klaus Mann saw him for an American election party 'im exklusiven, strikt republikanischen Cosmopolitan Club mit Caroline, Wystan, Golo, Gumpert. Die immer-länger-werdenden Gesichter der republikanischen Herrschaften'. (Mann, *Tagebücher 1940 bis 1943*, 72.) ['[...] at the exclusive, strictly Republican, Cosmopolitan Club with Caroline, Wystan, Golo, Gumpert. The faces of the Republican Ladies and Gentlemen getting longer and longer']

³⁶² Carpenter, *W.H. Auden*, 295–296.

Heights house for which they had just signed a lease would become one of the most famous centres for artists in New York: especially for those European exile artists who had managed to escape from Europe.

Auden had first met Davies in London, together with Christopher Isherwood, just before their departure for China in 1937. In his role as editor of *Harper's Bazaar* Davies had travelled to the UK, on a mission to convince British writers to publish in the magazine. Charming and competent, Davies not only signed up Virginia and Leonard Woolf and Edith and Osbert Sitwell, but also Isherwood, Spender, and Auden – it probably helped that *Bazaar* paid generously. In fact, Davies had been the first to publish Isherwood's short story 'Sally Bowles'. Isherwood's fictionalisation of his time in the German capital would become famous in novel form as *Goodbye to Berlin*. It was Davies, too, who had convinced Auden and Isherwood to visit New York on their way back from China. When they did, their falling in love with the city largely seems to have been due to Davies' tremendous efforts at entertaining his guests. After Auden moved to New York in 1939 he saw him regularly.

Thus when Davies shared his idea with Auden of founding a kind of artists' community and invited him to move in with him and Carson McCullers, Auden was glad to agree: not only did this decrease his expenses significantly – he had been struggling to make ends meet despite Caroline Newton's support – but just as important a factor was that, despite his many idiosyncrasies, Auden had always been acutely aware of the importance of 'community' for himself and others, conceptually as well as practically. In a letter to E.R. Dodds from 16 January 1940, Auden had expressed his opinion that '[t]he Machine has destroyed Community. ie the association of people to place', not only those of the artist but of all people: 'The ice-cream-soda jerker is every bit as isolated as the highbrow artist. [...] People darent [*sic*] face the truth that tradition, community, roots and what have you have gone for ever, and in their terror

are trying to make it artificially'.³⁶³ In his 'trying to organise the German Exiles' letter, Auden had also described a fantasy which somewhat foreshadowed his new living circumstances of autumn 1940:

Glad to hear that Bill [*William Coldstream*] and Louis [*MacNeice*] are both safe pro tem: what is Stephen [*Spender*] doing? When this bloody war is over you are all to come here and live in this house which has the most beautiful view in New York: looking out over water at the towers of Manhattan. The skyscrapers with the exception of Radio City which is one of the architectural wonders of the world, are ugly close to but lovely from a distance. You shall run the house with the help of a black Mammy, and the Master shall teach Greek at Columbia: Bill of course will support us all by painting the inhabitants of Park Avenue, while Louis teaches the New Yorker how to dress. But you'll have to learn to call biscuits cookies and scones biscuits. Love is in excellent health.³⁶⁴

To Auden, who knew he would never experience the sense of community provided by the traditional family unit, 7 Middagh Street became something like a substitute home. Quickly, he assumed the role of the community's patriarch who made sure bills were paid and meals taken on time. Chester Kallman did not officially move to his 'native' Brooklyn, but spent much time at Middagh Street nevertheless.

While Auden lived in the house-share, he wrote his long poem *New Year Letter*. It was dedicated to his great friend, co-translator, and mother substitute, Elizabeth Mayer ('*Das Weibliche*' personified – to Auden the lost connection to something grounded, essential, and earthly that is central to the life-circle. (CP, 226)). Quite obviously, during the writing process he was thinking about the importance of community, homeliness, and friendship, especially as a condition for the creation of art:

Warm in your house, Elizabeth
A week ago at the same hour
I felt the unexpected power
That drove our ragged egos in
[...] And Schubert sang and Mozart played

³⁶³ Bell, "Auden to the Doddses," 110.

³⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 106.

And Gluck and food and friendship made
 Our privileged community
 That real republic which must be
 The State all politicians claim,
 Even the worst, to be their aim. (CP, 219)

Connected with Auden's dedication of his ambitious poem to a German refugee is the omnipresence of German words and reference in the text. The '*Beischlaf* of the blood' (CP, 210); 'Isolde's *Sehnsucht* for the dark' (CP, 211); 'The deep *Urmutterfurcht* that drives | Us into knowledge all our lives' (CP, 226), a reference to Goethe's *Faust II*. All this makes one wonder how many of these rather peculiar German words the 'common' reader would have understood. The same argument holds for the abundance of Latin and French quotations in the text though, and thus the German does not even stand out particularly or gives the text a particularly 'Germanic' feel.³⁶⁵

At the same time, *New Year Letter* is full of political commentary – 'The situation of our time | Surrounds us like a baffling crime' (CP, 203). Even at a time when he presented himself as most reluctant to write undifferentiated engagé poetry, Auden showed himself to be extremely aware of the situation in Europe, and, indeed, the mood in the United States ('As out of Europe comes a Voice, | Compelling all to make their choice [...]'. (CP, 223)). Politics is presented as a symptom of original sin, just like consciousness:

Up in the Ego's atmosphere
 And higher altitudes of fear
 The particles of error form
 The shepherd-killing thunderstorm,
 And our political distress
 Descends from her self-consciousness [...]. (CP, 233)

While consciousness was unnecessary in Eden it is much needed to create order outside of it. Connected with 'consciousness' is the word 'conscience', used on the previous page:

³⁶⁵ For a more detailed discussion of Germanic references in *New Year Letter*, see Waidson, pp. 354-355; for references to Goethe, see p. 356.

Upon each English conscience lie
 Two decades of hypocrisy,
 And not a German can be proud
 Of what his apathy allowed. (CP, 232)

Once again, Auden's 'political commentary' does not take sides along national lines, but looks at the behaviour of humanity as a whole. His critique is that the 'gift' of consciousness does not necessarily imply either conscientious behaviour or the existence of conscience.

One thing, too, is pointed out by Auden as a fact of the post-industrial age:

However we decide to act,
 Decision must accept the fact
 That the machine has now destroyed
 The local customs we enjoyed,
 Replaced the bonds of blood and nation
 By personal confederation. (CP, 236)

As a result, he decided that 'Aloneness is man's real condition' (CP, 237) and enjoyed, all the more, the 'privileged community' at Middagh Street, which grew steadily. Soon it was agreed that after Davies, Auden, and McCullers, Benjamin Britten and Peter Pears would be moving into the house. Gypsy Rose Lee, the famous Burlesque star, too, had a room and – inspired by her literary surroundings – started a second career as a best-selling author, with the help of George Davies.

Next, in January 1941, Auden's brother-in-law Golo Mann moved in for a few months. After half a year spent in various internment camps in France, he had been able to escape via the famous route over the eastern Pyrenees into Spain: together with Heinrich Mann and his wife Nelly Kröger, as well as Franz Werfel and his wife Alma Mahler-Werfel. Thanks to his parents' efforts, Golo had managed to acquire an American visa, and boarded the *Nea Hellas* in Portugal on 3 October 1940. Ten days later, he arrived in America with his uncle, the Werfels, Alfred Döblin, and Fritz von Unruh. When received by his family in New York, he discovered that his sister Monika

had been less fortunate in her attempt to get to America on-board of the English *City of Benares*: the ship was sunk by a German submarine. Monika was rescued miraculously, after clinging to a piece of wood for twenty hours, but she lost her husband.

At his parents' home, Golo Mann struggled to settle and work after having experienced the horrors of Vichy France: by contrast their life seemed stifflingly bourgeois and somewhat inappropriately comfortable to him. When they relocated to Pacific Palisades in California, where they had been building a new family home, Golo followed his brother-in-law's invitation to move into the attic of his Brooklyn Bohemia – which Thomas Mann called 'eine Art von Bohême-Kolonie' in a letter of 1948.³⁶⁶ Golo wrote to a friend about his new home:

Brooklyn ist Romantik anderer Art. Zwei Minuten von dem Haus, in dem diese sonderbare Gemeinschaft wohnt, geht eine riesige Brücke über den East River genannten Meeresarm nach Manhattan; man blickt auf Wolkenkratzer, das Meer mit der Freiheitsstatue und diesen anderen berühmten Dingen, riesige Schiffswerften usf. Tag und Nacht gehen die Sirenen der Schiffe... Das Haus, dreistöckig, alt, victorianisch-surrealistisch eingerichtet, könnte auch in Basel stehen.³⁶⁷

Golo Mann's siblings, Erika and Klaus, had been socialising with 'this curious community' ever since Auden, Davies, and McCullers had moved into the house; Erika had only returned to New York in October after having spent two months working for the BBC in London. On 17 November 1940, Klaus Mann wrote after a visit to Middagh Street: 'In Brooklyn with Erika and her friend Miro. Abendessen mit *Wystan*,

³⁶⁶ Thomas Mann, *Briefe 1948-1955: Und Nachlese*, ed. Erika Mann (Berlin: S. Fischer, 1965), 28. ['A kind of Bohemian colony'.]

³⁶⁷ Quoted in: Lahme, *Golo Mann*, 162. ['Brooklyn is Romanticism of a different kind. Two minutes from the house which is inhabited by this curious community, an enormous bridge leads over the estuary they call East River to Manhattan; one beholds skyscrapers, the sea with its Statue of Liberty, and the other famous things, enormous shipyards etc. Day and night, the sirens of the ships go off... Das Haus, three storeys high, old, furnished in a Victorian-surrealist kind of style, could just as well be standing in Basel'.]

der tragisch hustenden, mausgrauen *McCullers*, und *MacNeice*. Das immer noch chaotische Haus. What a weird set-up, altogether - - - -'.³⁶⁸

Well-connected as the Manns were, Auden was not the only inhabitant of Middagh Street with whom they were acquainted. Earlier in 1940, McCullers had contacted Erika Mann out of the blue in order to hear about her experience in exile and they had taken a liking to one another. Soon, McCullers developed an unhappy infatuation for Mann's friend Annemarie Schwarzenbach, known as Miro, a homosexual novelist and artist in her early thirties who was from a wealthy Swiss family, depressed, and addicted to morphine. Miro in turn had been deeply in love with Erika. She was also friends with Klaus Mann and had financed his first exile journal *Die Sammlung*. Unlike her parents who had Fascist sympathies, Miro had chosen to emigrate to America like her friends. The Mann siblings also knew George Davies, who had become acquainted with Klaus in the late 1920 when both lived in Paris.³⁶⁹ They were all moving in tightly knit circles.

Klaus Mann summarises the various entanglements and captures the atmosphere of 7 Middagh Street in his diary:

Dieses sonderbare Haus in Brooklyn, wo sich *George Davis* niederlässt und einrichtet. (Nach dem Essen mit *Ury* hin, um es anzuschauen...) – George, in einem blau-rot karierten Hemd – das er nach bäurisch-orientalischer Sitte wie einen Kaftan über der Hose trägt – : inmitten eines Chaos von Möbeln, Papieren, Lampen, Farben, Werkzeugen. ----- Zeigt mir das ganze wunderliche Anwesen: die Apartments vom *Wystan* – den ich, samt *Chester*, ein paar Minuten sehe –, von Carson *McCullers*, die später mit ihrer Mutter aus dem Theater kommt. – Welcher Roman wäre hierüber zu schreiben! George's Verlobung mit diesem populären Broadway-Star, Gipsy? - - - - *McCullers*, verzehrt von ihrem Talent, ihrer Schwindsucht und ihrer

³⁶⁸ Klaus Mann, *Tagebücher 1940 bis 1943*, 77. [‘In Brooklyn with Erika and her friend Miro. Dinner with *Wystan*, *McCullers* who is grey as a mouse and coughing tragically, and *MacNeice*. The house still utter chaos. What a weird set-up, altogether - - - -’.]

³⁶⁹ One wonders whether Auden, Isherwood, and Davies realised that they all knew Klaus Mann when they first met in 1937.

unsinnigen Liebe zu Miro - - - (... Miro – E; E – Wystan; Wystan
– Chester. - - -) – Welch ein Roman!!³⁷⁰

What a novel indeed; although in the context of fiction, a similarly complex set of interconnected characters would probably earn criticism for being contrived and unrealistic. Whether Sherill Tippins – who wrote the novel Klaus Mann anticipated – knew of this quotation or not, her book captures what a special place Middagh Street must have been: with such interesting inhabitants, and visited regularly by Kurt Weill, Lotte Lenya, Salvador Dalí and his wife, Lion Feuchtwanger, Alma Mahler-Werfel, and many other refugees from Europe. It is likely that many of the visiting artists were brought to Middagh Street by the Manns, or introduced to Auden or Davies through them. On 15 December 1940, Klaus Mann recorded in his diary: ‘Mit Werfel, Ernest Boyd, Norden, Amster, Auden, Edmund Wilson, Harry Scherman, Louis Nizer, Lincoln Kirstein, Colin, Richard Plant, Lion Feuchtwanger, etc. Abschiedsparty for H.G. Wells bei Harold Peat’.³⁷¹

Thus by and by, the Brooklyn house-share developed a dynamic of its own: becoming one of New York’s most popular social hubs of the early 40s and turning into an experiment in communal living during a period when this had particular significance. First of all, the discussions at 7 Middagh Street were dominated by political topics and first-hand accounts from Europe – except during meals, when Auden apparently blacklisted certain topics such as politics. The opportunity to meet fellow artists who were similarly concerned about the European situation – which was not always the case with Americans of the time, who mostly had no personal connection

³⁷⁰ Klaus Mann, *Tagebücher 1940 bis 1943*, 67. [‘This peculiar house in Brooklyn where *George Davis* is settling and establishing himself. (Went there after eating with *Ury* to have a look...) – George, in a blue-red chequered shirt – which he wears in the manner of oriental peasants like a kaftan over his trousers – : amidst a chaos of furniture, papers, lamps, colours, tools. ----- Shows me the quaint property in its entirety: the apartment of *Wystan* – whom I saw for a few minutes, together with *Chester* –, that of *Carson McCullers*, who later returns from the theatre with her mother. – What a novel could be written about this! George’s engagement with this popular Broadway star, Gipsy? - - - - McCullers, consumed by her talent, her consumptiveness, and her absurd love for Miro - - - (... Miro – E; E – Wystan; Wystan – Chester. - - -) – What a novel!!’]

³⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 78.

with the war in Europe – and in a similar position, personally and artistically, to the house’s residents, attracted many to Middagh Street. Thus the Brooklyn community became a hub where up-to-date information from Europe and personal opinions were exchanged; it also became an important hub for creative projects. Many refugees faced the problem that they, who in their own country had often been at the top of their profession and even famous, were struggling to find work.³⁷² During their time at Middagh Street, Auden and Britten collaborated on *Bunyan*, for instance, their American opera.

2.10 *DECISION*

The main venture to which the members of the Middagh Street community contributed was Klaus Mann’s monthly exile journal *Decision*, which he started to publish in January of 1941. While Erika Mann had moved back to London and worked as an advisor to Alfred Duff-Cooper and a broadcaster for the BBC under the dangerous conditions of war-time London, her brother pursued one of his most important projects: the creation of a new intellectual platform for the European exile avant-garde by founding a journal with a politico-cultural focus. *Decision* – ‘a review of free culture’ – appeared monthly and was meant to bridge the gap between American and emigrant writers: ‘die Beziehungen zwischen amerikanischer und europäischer Geisteswelt zu intensivieren’.³⁷³

The Middagh Street community enthusiastically took on various jobs to help kick-start the journal. The spirit in ‘exile central’ was one of mutually supportive creativity, and the constant stream of refugees passing through kept everyone freshly aware of the

³⁷² Not seldom, this was due to difficulties with the new language, or because they did not have an American network to fall back on. Thomas Mann was a fortunate exception in this respect, because his work had been published in America before the country became his temporary home.

³⁷³ Eva Chrambach, Ursula Hummel, and Münchner Stadtbibliothek am Gasteig. Handschriften-Abteilung, *Erika und Klaus Mann: Bilder und Dokumente* (München: Spangenberg, 1990), 55. [‘[...] to intensify relations between the American and the European intellectual minds’.]

problems faced by those refugee artists whose work was dependent on their native language in which they could not publish in America. Carson McCullers helped with editorial tasks while Davies gave advice concerning the marketing and design targeting an American audience.³⁷⁴ Both contributed texts, as well, in the July issue. Golo Mann himself, who had worked on Klaus's previous exile journal *Die Sammlung*, contributed texts in which he tried to enlighten the American public about the Hitler regime and to argue about the state and future of Germany in a balanced way, always from a historian's perspective. Lloyd Frankenberg, who worked as associate editor to the journal, points out in a memorial essay that Klaus Mann 'wanted *Decision* to be a magazine of honest disagreements. As chief editor, he expressed his own point of view, but he left his co-editors free to express theirs'.³⁷⁵

As early as November 1939, Klaus Mann first mentioned Auden in relation to what would become *Decision*: 'Spas auch an einem Gedanken, hier eine literarische Monatsschrift zu gründen: "The Occident," oder so. Notiere mir Mitarbeiter. Schon "the family" (including Borgese, Auden, Láni) würde ein ganz stattliches Kernstück abgeben [...]'³⁷⁶ This shows, once again, that despite the 'passport marriage', Klaus Mann did not discriminate between Auden and his other 'proper' brothers-in-laws.

Nearly a year later, he was discussing these plans with Auden during a visit in August 1940: 'Ein paar Tage, Logierbesuch von Wystan. Zunächst wieder ziemlich ohne Kontakte mit ihm. Am Schluss aber doch noch einiges ganz herzlich anregendes Gespräch; über die Zeitschrift u.s.w.'.³⁷⁷ During this phase, the brothers-in-law seem to have got on well enough for Mann to involve Auden in his plans at an early stage. On

³⁷⁴ Weiss, *The Erika and Klaus Mann Story*, 165.

³⁷⁵ Lloyd Frankenberg, "Klaus Mann and Decision," *Colby Quarterly* 7, no. 7 (1966): 336.

³⁷⁶ Klaus Mann, *Tagebücher 1938 bis 1939*, 154. ['Also enjoying the idea of founding a literary monthly journal: "The Occident," or something similar. Taking a note of potential contributors. "The family" alone (including Borgese, Auden Láni) would make for a decent core [...].']

³⁷⁷ Klaus Mann, *Tagebücher 1940 bis 1943*, 52. ['Wystan lodging here for a few days. At first again pretty much without being in touch with him. But at last quite a bit of affectionate inspiring conversation; about the journal etc.'].]

11 November 1940, Mann had dinner with Auden in New York, and two days later he wrote in his diary: ‘Vorgestern Abend, Essen mit Wystan Auden. Auch bei ihm grosse, etwas nebelhafte Pläne. Die Zeitschrift “Hemisphere”; State-Dept., Rockefeller Foundation, die Konkurrenz zu MacLeish’.³⁷⁸

Despite his mysterious ‘great’ plans – possibly to do with *New Year Letter* – and despite the fact that really, his interests were already starting to be more metaphysical, Auden was involved with *Decision* in various ways from the journal’s earliest stages. On every issue, his name was listed as a member of the advisory board; and he also contributed reviews, poems, short texts, and translations. *Decision* was a difficult and ambitious venture from beginning to end and Klaus Mann’s further diary entries bear witness to his frustrations over this, one of his most important projects. While he had an incredible network of contributors and donors at his disposal, which allowed the journal a rather promising and glamorous start, *Decision*’s initial success did not last for long.

This was partly due to the fact that the America of the day was not overly susceptible to differentiated views and opinions, which made Klaus Mann’s work all the more important. In the early 40s, the general mood in America began to turn against emigrants; Germans especially were regarded with suspicion. Even the Mann family were followed and intercepted by the FBI, despite the fact that Erika Mann herself regularly and voluntarily provided them with information about German emigré writers from about 1940 onwards to help identifying under-cover agents among them: if anything could be done to prevent Fascist activities, she did not hesitate. But despite all cooperation and attempts at integration, the public and governmental suspicion towards emigrants and associated fear of communism was growing steadily at the time.

Decision has to be regarded as one of Mann’s most admirable achievements: a brave and important attempt to stimulate a public debate about the future of Europe

³⁷⁸ Ibid., 75. [‘Two nights ago, dinner with Wystan Auden. He too has big, somewhat nebulous plans. The journal “Hemisphere”; State-Dept., Rockefeller Foundation, the rivalry with MacLeish’.]

and its diaspora, and to create a platform for the exiled European intelligentsia. Mann also showed particular consideration for his friend Christopher Isherwood, helping him to overcome a bad spell of writer's block by insisting he write an obituary for Virginia Woolf for *Decision*. In the context of this general mood, *Decision* could give courage and a purpose to those who were struggling in a society foreign to them. In the end though, these only constituted tiny fraction of society. Being a high-brow literary magazine, after all, there was nothing *Decision* could achieve against an official policy of suspicion.

Auden's various contributions to *Decision* draw an interesting picture of his own stance at the time. His were not unlike Golo Mann's in sentiment and alignment, favouring a philosophical or historical approach to a political one: true to his 'new' anti-political attitude, which Klaus had detected previously, Auden managed to avoid taking political sides altogether, arguing as differentiatedly as he could while avoiding simplifications.³⁷⁹ This could come across as being somewhat evasive at times.

In the first issue of *Decision*, for instance, published in January 1941 – also featuring contributions by Stephen Vincent Benét, Aldous Huxley, Stefan Zweig, and Jean Cocteau – Auden wrote an essay in response to the question phrased: 'Do you think intellectuals can or should have an influence in political affairs? What should be the role of a cultural review in this connection?' The first question, about which Auden and Mann would be arguing on the radio a few months later, was a great excuse for Auden to continue thinking and writing about questions he had deliberated for years.

What becomes obvious from Auden's contribution to *Decision* is his primary concern for language. He often shows a reluctance to use words in an unreflective way for the construction of a political argument, at least without first clarifying their meaning. This is reminiscent of his own praise for Hannah Arendt's writing (compare Chapter Three, p. 251). Asked about the influence of intellectuals on political affairs in

³⁷⁹ Correspondingly, on April 1942 Auden wrote in a letter: 'I write quite a lot and read Philosophy and History'. (Auden, Letter to A.E. Dodds from 14 April 1942. Fol. 79.)

this example, for instance, Auden could not use the term ‘intellectual’ without first – and rightly – questioning the premises of the question itself:

I do not know why artists have appropriated the term *intellectual* to themselves. Presumably it means a capacity for abstract thinking as contrasted either with the manual skill of the technician, or the organizing skill of the politician. Designing aeroplanes, deciphering codes, planning the strategy of a campaign, are as much the work of intellectuals, as writing poetry.

And Auden followed:

One cannot, therefore, speak of the role of *the* intellectual in wartime, only of the roles of the particular intellectuals. As far as writers are concerned, their problem is not *What should I do as a Writer?* – the answer is the same under all circumstances, *Write as well and truthfully as you can* – but only, *Have I any other capacities e.g., physical strength, which are of direct military value and which I ought therefore to offer to the state?*³⁸⁰

This reflects Auden’s tendency to satisfy himself with supposedly clear approaches to complicated dilemmas. In the case of this example, for instance, one could argue that in time of war most people joining the army would not ask themselves whether or not they have capacities such as ‘physical strength, which are of direct military value’ – these would usually be acquired within a month or so at a boot camp – but whether they feel convinced by the cause or see the need to defend their country. Even Klaus Mann, whose constitution was far from soldierlike, finally made it into the US Army after two refusals on the grounds of his sexuality – because he was determined to help fighting the Nazis by any means. Still, he might have agreed with Auden’s statement about *Decision*:

The value of a magazine like *Decision* seems to me to be independent of peace or war in their political sense. The struggle of culture with ignorance and barbarism is continuous and never-ending. War, as such, is only a sharp reminder that civilized life is always in greater danger than we realize, and that we have never done as much to maintain it as we could.³⁸¹

³⁸⁰ *Decision Vol. 1 No. 1* (January 1941), 44.

³⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 45.

In the same issue of the magazine, Auden also reviewed Harold Laski's *Where Do We Go From Here*, excusing his lack of enthusiasm for the work by stating that 'in the view of what the author and his fellow countrymen are now enduring in the defense of civilization, a certain impudence attaches to any criticism by someone who is not sharing in their suffering'.³⁸² Auden was acutely sensitive about his own uncomfortable role during the war years. His criticism of the work was angled at Laski's evaluation that 'the subject of this world war is the right of mankind to the values inherent in the Democratic way of life', because he felt this was too relativist an attitude.

Men have no right to values; they have an obligation. Nor do values inhere in a democratic or any other way of life. Beliefs and certain values may unconditionally require a man to live democratically. The habit of so doing may make obedience to these values easier, it will never of itself create a belief in them.³⁸³

All this reflects Auden's tendency to think on a scale greater than that of current affairs. Quite tellingly, he wrote in 'Criticism in a Mass Society' around the same time: 'Instead of working within the limits of one regional or national esthetic tradition, the modern artist works with a consciousness of all the cultural productions, not only of the whole world of his day, but also of the whole historical past'.³⁸⁴ Thus he concludes his criticism of Laski with a comment that is not exactly excitedly pro-war: 'But unless it is realized that the true necessity of which to become conscious is internal and absolute, then, when Hitler is defeated and the external compulsion of war removed, the dead and themselves will once again be betrayed by the surviving'.³⁸⁵

Social change, according to Auden, had to happen collectively through the spreading of moral sense through a greater number of individuals. For Auden, the

³⁸² Ibid., 49.

³⁸³ Ibid., 51.

³⁸⁴ Donald A. Stauffer, ed., "Criticism in a Mass Society," in *The Intent of the Critic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1941), 131–2.

³⁸⁵ *Decision Vol. 1 No. 1*, 52.

moral sense was increasingly connected with 'religious' belief. In the May issue of *Decision*, reviewing a book called *Towards a Philosophy of History* by Ortega y Gasset, he wrote: 'A real society can only be composed of persons. A person is an individual who knows his place, *i.e.*, who understands the nature of his relations to God and his fellow creatures, for it is by these relations that his individuality is defined'.³⁸⁶ It is likely that while Auden personally would have thought of a Christian God in this example, he also meant this in a wider sense. Once again, the issue of community and good communal life seems to be at the heart of the matter, and the interplay of a person's identities as individual and as member of a group. 'God' could be any unifying ontology.

Another piece of evidence that religious justifications increasingly started to shape Auden's writing increasingly, is a poem he published in the February issue, beginning with the line: 'The Journals give the quantities of wrong':

What properties define our person since
 This massive vagueness moved in on our lives,
 What laws require our substance to exist?
 Our strands of private order are dissolved
 And lost our routes of self-inheritance,
 Position and Relation are dismissed,
 An epoch's Providence is quite worn out,
 The lion of Nothing chases us about.

[...] And winds of terror force us to confess
 The settled world of past events has not
 A faiblesse any longer for the dull
 To swim in like an aqueous habitat;
 We are reduced to our true nakedness:
 Either we serve the Unconditional,
 Or some Hitlerian monster will supply
 An iron convention to do evil by. [...]

We may, as always, by our own consent
 Be cast away: but neither depth nor height
 Nor any other creature can prevent
 Our reasonable and lively notions in
 This modern void where only Love has weight,
 And Fate by Faith is freely understood,

³⁸⁶ *Decision* Vol. 1 No. 5 (May 1941), 63.

And he who works shall find our Fatherhood.³⁸⁷

To ‘serve the unconditional’, in this poem, written not long after Auden’s experience in the Yorkville cinema, was as close to a commentary on the zeitgeist as Auden was willing to come during these times of ‘massive vagueness’, in his poetry as well as in his political statements. Auden was starting to look for answers in religion more and more, for ‘the vision that objectifies’.³⁸⁸

To the June issue of *Decision*, Auden contributed translations of two poems by the Austrian emigrant film and theatre director Berthold Viertel: ‘Ausgang einer Mutter (Requiem)’ and ‘Der Bauch spricht’. While the former is a straight-forward, direct, and unspectacular translation and does not invite comment, the latter has already been discussed in detail by James Womack in his doctoral thesis *Spectacles for the weaksighted; Braille for the blind: Problems of Ideology in the Translations of W.H. Auden* (2006). Since there is nothing noteworthy to say about the translation in this context, I will refrain from discussing Womack’s conclusions about it.

Overall, one gets the sense that Auden simply may not have spent very much time on the translation. It is possible, for instance, that Klaus Mann asked Auden to translate the poem and Auden agreed as a favour to Mann. He also knew Viertel himself, so this might have been another reason for his agreeing to the task, although this seems unlikely as Auden had already treated Viertel rather ironically in *Letters from Iceland*:

And the Stravisky Scandal in picture and sound
We leave to Alfred Hitchcock with sincerest praise
Of *Sabotage*. To Berthold Viertel just the script
For which he’s waited all his passionate days.³⁸⁹

The relationship seems to have been an interesting one. On 15 May 1937, Viertel himself had written an unpublished poem called ‘The Poet Auden’ for Erika Mann,

³⁸⁷ *Decision* Vol. 1 No. 1 (January 1941), 49.

³⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁸⁹ Auden and MacNeice, *Letters from Iceland*, 239.

portraying Auden as a son who serves as ‘encouragement’ personified to all sons through ‘what he does, what he shouts, and what he whispers in a brotherly way’ (App. F). One wonders if Erika Mann would have shown the poem to Auden: if so, one can readily imagine the two enjoying a good giggle about the hagiographic tone of Viertel’s language. Evidently, Viertel perceived Auden as the voice and whip of the young generation: ‘Viele sind gänzlich versagt, und viele verirrt und verstiegen. | Da taucht Auden auf, wie ein Irrlicht, sie weiter zu locken’. (‘Many have utterly failed, and many are lost or took the wrong path. | Auden suddenly appears like a fen fire, to lure them further’). (Ibid.) While one would like to read the poem as an ironic comment, this seems unlikely to be the case.

Auden’s involvement with *Decision* was probably primarily a favour to Mann, since generally he wrote reviews and essays in order to make a living, and it is unlikely that he would have been paid much. It is clear that Auden admired Mann’s efforts though and he did help, though not with as great an initiative and enthusiasm as his brother-in-law would have hoped. Instead, he was preoccupied with his crumbling private life and withdrew into his work on *New Year Letter*. In the space of the poem, he showed his consistent concern for the role of language and literature in his day and age, writing:

Though language may be useless, for
 No words men write can stop the war
 Or measure up to the relief
 Of its immeasurable grief,
 Yet truth, like love and sleep, resents
 Approaches that are too intense, [...] (CP, 204)

But where to serve and when and how?
 O none escape these questions now (CP, 223)

After a depressing struggle to raise enough money for his project, Mann had to admit defeat early in 1942, after only one year. This was one of the most painful and demotivating ‘failures’ of a project he ever experienced. Maybe the journal’s failure was

partly due to the fact that Mann wanted too much too quickly – installing a proper office in New York was possibly an expense that should have been avoided. Despite all this though, he really had created something very special: a platform for political and cultural debate which was particular in that it allowed the growing number of European refugees to voice their opinions.

2.11 1941: CRISIS? WHAT CRISIS?

It is often claimed that Auden fell out with the Mann family after 1941. Andrea Weiss states, for instance, that this was because of a radio conversation between Auden and Klaus Mann – without even alluding to a source on which she might have based this claim:

This public argument was one of the final blows to their friendship and marked the end of Klaus's visits to the bohemian Brooklyn Heights household (which fell apart nine months later, when the United States entered the war).³⁹⁰

The interview, which went hand in hand with the questions discussed in *Decision*, was indeed represented the most direct clash – and a public one at that – of Auden's and Mann's views on the engagement of the artist in times of war. The radio conversation between the two, broadcast on 19 March 1941 by WEVD radio New York as part of a series that was edited by Mann, who recalled the event, in *Der Wendepunkt*:

17 März. Gestern abend mehrere Stunden bei Wystan (Auden); Arbeit an dem 'zwanglosen Gespräch', das wir übermorgen am Rundfunk miteinander führen sollen. Das Thema – 'Die Funktion des Schriftstellers in der politischen Krise' – ist natürlich viel zu komplex, als daß es sich in einer Viertelstunde nur annähernd erschöpfen ließe. Trotzdem könnte es ein interessanter Dialog werden, gerade durch die Gegensätzlichkeit unserer Gesichtspunkte. Wystan – früher (noch vor drei oder vier Jahren!) ein viel entschiedenerer politischer Aktivist, als ich es

³⁹⁰ Weiss, *The Erika and Klaus Mann Story*, 175.

jemals gewesen bin – ist jetzt der Ansicht, daß der Schriftsteller jede Berührung mit der politischen Sphäre meiden sollte.³⁹¹

The passage – which must have been written quite soon after the conversation since Mann's book was published in 1942 and thus cannot be tainted by very much in the way of hindsight – does not suggest in any way that Mann was insulted because Auden contradicted him in public, rather the contrary: he states that because of their different view points, the conversation might be interesting despite there not being enough time to discuss the complex topic adequately. Mann's summary of Auden's position in *Der Wendepunkt* is fair, unbiased, and nonjudgemental, and implies nothing amounting to a falling out.

Clearly, there were no surprises for Mann when the conversation happened on air: the 'informal conversation' was fully scripted. The interview has not been published, but a typed draft is deposited in the Yale University Library – possibly the draft Auden and Mann produced during and after their preparatory conversation. The exchange between the two could be read as somewhat passive-aggressive in tone at times – though this might have come across as rather more friendly on air – and while Auden does argue in a rather pedantic and theoretical way that Mann clearly disagreed with, being more practically inclined, it is noteworthy that Auden asked Mann an interesting question about *Decision*, too: thus helpfully presenting him with the opportunity to advertise the journal on air.

Having agreed with Mann that 'even the most detached artist is almost bound to mirror the events of his time, if only symbolically', Auden skilfully navigates away from the potential conflict he had invited by his statement that 'When I look back, though,

³⁹¹ Klaus Mann, *Der Wendepunkt*, 446. ['17 March. Yesterday evening several hours with Wystan (Auden); working on the 'informal conversation' we are supposed to have on the radio. The topic 'The Function of the Writer in the Political Crisis' – is of course far too complex to be exhausted even remotely in a quarter of an hour. Nevertheless it could turn out to be quite an interesting dialogue, precisely because of the contradictory nature of our points of view. Wystan – a few (only three or four) years ago a much more determined political activist than I ever was – now holds the view that the writer should avoid all contact with the political sphere'.]

now over the political activities of the literary world during the last ten years, I cannot help feeling that we might have been more effective if we hadn't been so hasty'.³⁹² Mann ended up commenting – though not in an unfriendly way – on this passage in *Der Wendepunkt* as expressing an attitude he was unable to understand or share. In the conversation, Auden changed gear by inviting Mann to talk about *Decision*:

As the editor of *Decision*, you must come into contact with every variety of literary species and try to find a place for them all. In starting such a magazine at this time, how do you propose to co-ordinate them all; what is your general policy to be.³⁹³

Mann's response was that his aim was a balance between quality and 'an outspoken and definite political direction' and to help nurture the growth of 'international co-operation in every sphere of life'; in this case, of international co-operation between writers, a difficult task that would become necessary after the war.³⁹⁴ This, Auden called 'a most interesting project' and 'certainly very valuable for the writers themselves'. Although the conversation did return to more difficult topics, it seems to have remained interesting and respectful throughout and there is no trace of animosity.

In *Der Wendepunkt*, Mann also wrote a more general passage on Auden – once again he proved to be a very good observer of his brother-in-law – looking back at his time in Amsterdam in 1938:

Christopher's Anwesenheit zog andere Briten herbei: [...] W.H. Auden – Wystan, mein neuer Schwager, der sich um diese Zeit gleichfalls noch in seiner aktivistisch-revolutionären Periode befand. Freilich erschien sein Elan schon damals sehr viel weniger naiv als die rhetorische Sentimentalität oder die pedantische Rechthaberei der meisten links-radikalen Barden. Bei Auden ist alles zusammengesetzt, hintergründiger, stiller, geheimnisvoller, geistiger. Ein Mensch von solcher Komplexität wird nie in einer Gesinnung, einer Stimmung völlig aufgehen. Während er die Kameraden in eine gewisse Richtung führt und auf ein bestimmtes Dogma verpflichtet,

³⁹² Conversation between Klaus Mann and W.H. Auden, Forum, WEVD, New York, radio broadcast, March 19, 1941, *Decision* Archive, May. Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University, 3-4.

³⁹³ *Ibid.*, 4.

³⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

macht er sich selbst ironische Vorbehalte. Es war sonderbar, W.H. im Kreise seiner Freunde und Jünger zu beobachten. Was für ein vertrackter, vieldeutiger junger Meister!³⁹⁵

Mann calls Auden too complex a character to follow any single movement religiously and gives an interesting perspective on Auden's political phase, calling this past Auden 'a young master'. While his observations about Auden are insightful and intelligent though, Mann's hindsight had fooled him in one respect: Auden could not have visited him in Amsterdam since the two only met in 1939. Firchow, who helpfully cites part of this quotation in *Contexts for Poetry* – in his own unreferenced translation though – does not pick up on this and states that Mann made this comment 'when he met Auden in Amsterdam not long after his return from Spain'. (Fir, 143) This must also have led to Firchow's earlier comment, in the context of Auden's marriage with Erika Mann, that 'he did develop an affection and friendship for her, something that probably came easily because he was already acquainted with her homosexual older brother, Klaus, and would later become friendly with a younger brother, Golo'. (Fir, 67)

In the months after the radio conversation, *Decision* continued to give Klaus Mann much pleasure but also constant grief. On 20 April 1941 he wrote to his mother:

Ich muss innigst hoffen, daß so etwa in zehn bis vierzehn Tagen *irgendetwas* – wenn vielleicht auch nur Fragmentarisches – zu Stande kommt, da gleich nach dem 1. Mai allerlei größere Rechnungen fällig werden und ich in des Teufels Küche bin, wenn noch kein rettender Engel gewinkt hat. (Auch der gierige Borgi, der mir grade einen Beitrag geschickt hat, *giepert* schon nach dem Honorar, und Wystan läßt gleichfalls nicht mit sich spaßen noch handeln. Oh, diese Schwäger!!)³⁹⁶

³⁹⁵ Klaus Mann, *Der Wendepunkt*, 333–334. ['Christopher's presence attracted other Brits: [...] W.H. Auden – Wystan, my new brother-in-law, who around this time was still in the midst of his activist-revolutionary phase. Of course even then his zeal seemed less naive than the rhetorical sentimentality or the pedantic dogmatism of most leftist-radical bards. In Auden's case, everything is complex; more enigmatic, quiet mysterious, intellectual. A person of such complexity will never be fully absorbed in one attitude, one mood. While he leads the comrades in a certain direction and commits them to a certain dogma, he reproaches himself ironically. It was strange to see W.H. in the circle of his friends and disciples. What an abstruse, ambiguous young master!']

³⁹⁶ Klaus Mann, *Briefe und Antworten*, 1975, 144–145. ['I hope desperately that in about ten to fourteen days something materialises – even something of fragmentary nature – because directly after May 1st all sorts of big bills will need paying and I'll get into hot water if by then no saving angel will have waved to

Although Mann complains about his brothers-in-law, who apparently insisted on being paid for their contributions – unsurprisingly – it is important to see both sides: Auden had very little money when he first settled in the United States. While Klaus Mann's endeavour was important and noble, he could not expect his contributors to work without a salary during a time when everyone had 'his own cross to bear'.

Mann just about managed to keep *Decision* going for another seven months at this point but had to continue to live on his parents' allowance. This, of course, was extremely demoralising for him and his depression was flaring up during the summer of 1941, leaving him suicidal for years. At the beginning of 1942, Mann was eventually forced to give up *Decision*. This seems to have ultimately caused something in him to 'break', possibly the faith that he could 'do' something with his writing. He recognised this himself: 'I had to drop the magazine, and I wanted to die, because I was – I am unable to face and to endure the exorbitant mass of mediocrity and malice, of ambitious ignorance and selfish laziness that rules the world and this country'.³⁹⁷ He traced his depression back to the fact that 'das ganze Schlamassel mir so recht vor Augen rückt, wie wenig man unsereinen in dieser fragwürdigen Welt will, braucht und würdigt'.³⁹⁸

After having argued for years that the writer has a duty to engage with politics in his works, he now developed the wish to fight actively for democracy: 'I want to go into the Army. I want to wear the same uniform as the others. I don't want to be an outsider or an exception any longer. Finally, for once, I'll feel in solidarity with the majority'.³⁹⁹ As early as during his 1929 stay in Berlin, Auden had recognised how self-destructive an element of one's psyche homosexuality could become under social pressures: 'All

me. (Greedy Borgi, too, who has just submitted his contribution, is gagging for his remuneration, and Wystan isn't open to jokes or negotiations either. Oh, these brothers-in-law!!)']

³⁹⁷ Chrambach, Hummel, and Münchner Stadtbibliothek am Gasteig. Handschriften-Abteilung, *Erika und Klaus Mann*, 55.

³⁹⁸ Juliane Schicker, "Decision. A Review of Free Culture" - *Eine Zeitschrift zwischen Literatur und Tagespolitik* (BoD – Books on Demand, 2007), 3–4. ['[...] the whole kerfuffle makes me realise how little our kind is needed and valued in this questionable world'.]

³⁹⁹ Mann, *Der Wendepunkt*, 461.

buggers hate each others' bodies as they hate their own, since they all suffer under the reproach, real or imaginary of "Call yourself a man". (J29)

One could caustically observe that Mann joined the army because he felt he was unable to make a change with his pen – while having always criticised Auden for having come to exactly this conclusion much earlier. But Mann's decision was really too sad for such a reproach: he simply could not stand living with his self-image of being 'weak' any longer. Thus he finally managed to join the Psychological Warfare Branch of the United States Army, and for the first time was financially independent from his parents.

As to the supposed falling-out between Auden and the Mann family, other secondary sources suggest that Auden and Kallman's visit to California during the Christmas holidays of 1941 was so disastrous that it put an end to the previously close relationship. Carpenter states that:

[...] things were not easy between them and Auden. They disliked Chester – Auden of course complained that this was because of anti-semitism – and they made sharp remarks about his having accepted money from Caroline Newton; they also seemed, he thought, to be jealous of his success as a writer. Moreover, they were offended by his criticism of Klaus Mann, whom he considered to be wasting his life in New York, pretending too much and achieving too little. As a result of these differences, Auden's previously warm feelings towards Erika faded into merely social relations. Indeed, he told a friend that he did not want to see the family again, except Thomas Mann, whom he still liked and admired; and there is no record of any further meetings between him and Erika; though when she died in 1969 she left him a small sum of money in gratitude for what he had done for her.⁴⁰⁰

Davenport-Hines provides the additional information that another reason for the Manns' annoyance was that: '[...] perhaps they found traces of an escapade about which he boasted on his return to Ann Arbor: "At the Manns', we took turns screwing a friend

⁴⁰⁰ Carpenter, *W.H. Auden*, 321.

on Thomas's big bed when the family was away."⁴⁰¹ This suggestion is based on Miller's *Auden: An American Friendship*, in which Miller also reported Auden to have spoken 'harshly of the Thomas Manns: "At least they have all the money they can use," [...]'.⁴⁰²

What seems to be a fact is that after 1941 there was less contact between Auden and the Mann family. This alone, however, is not a proof that a dramatic estrangement must have taken place. It is more likely that exactly at this point the interactions between Auden and then Manns grew sparse because all of them were suddenly preoccupied in new ways: Klaus with the 'failure' of *Decision* and then with army life; Erika Mann first travelling to various crisis areas as a war correspondent, then, after Klaus Mann's suicide, looking after his literary estate and her father's after his death; and Auden spent time away from New York teaching at various schools and universities, undergoing a period of great sadness when he was forced to accept that his 'marriage' with Chester Kallman was not what he had hoped it would be.

Indeed, various other facts speak against what Carpenter and Davenport-Hines propose. First of all, the Manns had met Chester Kallman before the 1941 visit. On 28 July 1941, Auden and Kallman had visited Thomas Mann for lunch at Pacific Palisades in California, for example. Klaus and Erika especially would have been fairly well acquainted with Kallman at this point, after numerous evenings spent together at Middagh Street.

In mid-November 1941, Erika had visited Auden in Ann Arbor, and the visit seems to have been pleasant for everyone involved. Auden's letter of invitation to Mann has survived:

⁴⁰¹ Davenport-Hines, *Auden*, 216.

⁴⁰² Miller, *An American Friendship*, 65.

Dear Erika,
 I hear you are coming to this town about Nov 15th [1941]. Please accept the hospitality of your undutiful husband. I have a beautiful house and a good cook.
 Much love,
 Wystan (App. D2)

Charles Miller, who shared Auden's house at the time, is referred to here (as well as in other letters by Auden), as Auden's cook although they were in fact friends. Miller writes about Erika Mann's visit to their house in *Auden: An American Friendship*, remembering that Auden one day said to him: "My wife, Erika, will be eating with us, but sleeping on campus when she comes here to lecture," Wystan told me casually in early October 1941'.⁴⁰³ Miller remembers about the day itself:

Erika came to tea at 1223 and stayed for dinner, a very lively occasion, for the 'tea' turned to a fifth of Dant whiskey. Erika was then a handsome woman with black hair, dark eyes, and swarthy skin; and I for one appreciated her outfit of browns and bronze, her bangles, bracelets, and chain necklaces. She looked – and sounded – like a slim, fancy gypsy. Her manner was hearty, if correct, while Wystan was strenuously polite, flushed with tea and whiskey as well as the challenge of hosting this female ball of fire.⁴⁰⁴

Interesting is Miller's comment: 'at ten I left Wystan and Erika talking more softly in German before the burning logs'.⁴⁰⁵ This shows, again, that Auden's German was very good, so good that even though Erika Mann had been living in the United States and spoke good though heavily accented English, she preferred speaking German with Auden.

The purpose of Mann's visit was a lecture held in the Women's League auditorium 'to a university audience that listened attentively to her warnings of the holocaust already gripping Europe'. Miller comments sardonically:

⁴⁰³ Ibid., 53.

⁴⁰⁴ Ibid., 54.

⁴⁰⁵ Ibid., 55.

In this way, Erika resembled her father, Thomas Mann, who gave many American lectures that were understood by very few American listeners. However, her reception was a social success, admirers crowding around Erika, while Wystan stood beside her and shook as many hands as were proffered, proud to be the husband of a distinguished anti-Fascist activist.⁴⁰⁶

Again, this shows the special nature of the Auden-Mann relationship: although they were not living as man and wife, he had found in Erika someone who was his equal whom he respected and to whom he could – and had to – surrender the stage.⁴⁰⁷ As he had sensed immediately, ‘socially and artistically, it would be an excellent match’ for Auden, if the marriage had been ‘genuine’ (App. A2), and personally, too!

On top of all this, Thomas Mann wrote to Caroline Newton on 10 January 1942, mentioning the recent ‘critical’ visit of her protégé in California, without making the slightest mention about there having been any problems, to the contrary: ‘Auden war bei uns zum lunch zur Zeit, als auch Erika hier war. Er war boyish und nett wie immer, und es sprach in meinen Augen sehr für ihn, daß er sich mit dem Baby so gut zu unterhalten wußte’.⁴⁰⁸ While Thomas Mann might not have wanted to influence Caroline Newton’s own relationship with Auden by sharing information which might have influenced her opinion of him, Mann was close enough to her – given their long-standing, regular correspondance – that he might have been politely open about this matter. And less than a year later, Mann had had tea with Caroline Newman in Princeton, chit-chatting about Auden: ‘Thee mit Caroline u. mich ihr gewidmet. Über Auden, seinen begabten Eklektizismus und Enzyklopedismus [...]’.⁴⁰⁹

⁴⁰⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁷ This is not to suggest that Chester Kallman was not Auden’s equal. However, the fact that he was significantly younger than Auden meant that he had not proved himself by the time Auden crossed his path – which was impossible once he had.

⁴⁰⁸ Thomas Mann, *Briefe 1937-1947*, 231. [‘Auden was here for lunch at a time when Erika was here, too. He was boyish and nice as ever, and in my eyes it spoke very much for him that he got along so well with the baby’.]

⁴⁰⁹ Thomas Mann, *Tagebücher, 1940-1943*, 227. [‘Tea with Caroline a. devoted myself to her. About Auden, his talented eclecticism and encyclopedism [...]’.]

2.12 DRIFTING APART

It seems true though that from this point onward, meetings between all of the Manns and Auden became more sporadic. It was, however, indeed a time when everyone had his or her ‘own cross to bear’ and the growing distance can be easily accounted for by the individual biographies of the Manns: Thomas and Katia Mann were far away in California, not around the corner in Princeton; Klaus Mann was in the army from 1942; and Erika worked from London much of the time or travelled to war zones to report for American and British newspapers. Later, Auden also began to summer first in Ischia (from 1948) and then in Kirchstetten, Austria (from 1957).

Just as they had drifted into the other’s life, Auden and Erika Mann slowly drifted apart again: just as politely, just as formally, just as practically. Although I have no evidence to tell how often Auden and his wife saw one another or corresponded between the early 1940s and the mid-1960s, it does not seem as if they ever liked each other any less during those years. The fact that they never divorced supports this – and because they never did, they had to correspond regularly, whenever bureaucratic reasons made this necessary.

Klaus Mann’s references to Auden from the last five years of his life are sparse. There is a diary entry from 1945 in which he reported reading Auden poems; and on 6 February 1947 he wrote: ‘20.15 h: Mit E: New School (Wystan) Shakespeare-Vortrag (über “Twelfth Night”). Drinks mit Wystan, in seiner Wohnung’.⁴¹⁰ This, as well as another entry from May of the same year, proves that Auden was still being invited to bigger family events even now: ‘Party von Golo, für Z. – M.: Tomski mit Verlobter, John Willig, Wystan, Christiane Zimmer, Tonio Selwart [...]’⁴¹¹ Christiane Zimmer, the daughter of Hugo von Hofmannsthal, became a good friend of Auden’s and would visit

⁴¹⁰ Klaus Mann, *Tagebücher 1944 bis 1949*, ed. Joachim Heimannsberg, Peter Laemmle, and Wilfried F. Schoeller (München: Spangenberg, 1991), 112.

⁴¹¹ *Ibid.*, 120. [‘20.15 h: With E: New School (Wystan) Shakespeare lecture (on “Twelfth Night”). Drinks with Wystan, in his apartment’.]

him in Kirchstetten just as he would visit her New York ‘salon’ where German intellectuals gathered.

Strangely though, after many years of their acquaintance, Mann began to mention Chester Kallman in his diaries with conspicuous frequency. On 7 March 1947 he wrote: ‘Nachtspaziergang; Chester’.⁴¹² And on the 8th: ‘Chester bleibt über Nacht’.⁴¹³ And the first thing on the 11th: ‘Chester’. And again, after descriptions of his day, ‘Spät, Chester mit Bruder’.⁴¹⁴ On the 13th: ‘Bank, mit Chester: “Tschaikowsky”-Scheck eingelöst. Gab Ch. Geld für Hosen’. And in the evening: ‘Spät mit E, Lotte. Ch. taucht nicht auf’.⁴¹⁵ On 2 April: ‘Chester kommt – und geht, geheimnisvoll’.⁴¹⁶ This is mysterious indeed: especially if we remind ourselves of Mann’s diary rant about Auden from 1939: ‘*Wystan Auden und sein Knabe Chester*. (Die eingebildete “grand amour.” Dabei wäre dieser Ch. nicht schwer zu haben.)’⁴¹⁷ This is particularly interesting because it has been claimed that the Manns’ hostility towards Kallman ‘led to a permanent chilling of relations by Auden’, without any reference to the sources supporting this claim.⁴¹⁸ At least Klaus Mann seems to have been fascinated rather than appalled by Kallman: buying him trousers and having him stay overnight? All this sounds rather too unambiguous to be entirely innocent and the overwhelming likelihood is that the two in-laws – by fake ‘marriage’ twice over – had an affair.

On 19 February 1948, a year before he took his own life, Klaus Mann mentions having written a letter to Auden – ‘Brief an Wystan’. The Manns were devastated by their loss, particularly Erika whose life had always been so closely intertwined with that of her brother. She and Auden were in touch every now and then because paperwork

⁴¹² Ibid., 114. [‘Night walk; Chester’.]

⁴¹³ Ibid. [‘Chester stays over night’.]

⁴¹⁴ Ibid. [‘Late. Chester with brother’.]

⁴¹⁵ Ibid., 114–115. [‘Bank, with Chester: cashed “Tschaikowsky”-check. Gave Ch. money for trousers’; ‘Late with E, Lotte. Ch. doesn’t show up’.]

⁴¹⁶ Ibid., 116. [‘Chester comes – and goes, mysterious’.]

⁴¹⁷ Klaus Mann, *Tagebücher 1938 bis 1939*, 114–115. [‘*Wystan Auden and his boy Chester*. (The imaginary “grand amour.” Yet this Ch. Would not be a difficult pick up’.]

⁴¹⁸ Davenport-Hines, *Auden*, 216.

issues needed to be addressed together. In May of 1946, for instance, Mann applied for a US passport and needed Auden to send her some paperwork. He, too, had just received his American citizenship. He wrote to his lawyer with further instructions and replied to Mann:

Many thanks for your letter. Unfortunately I can't send Buchwald a photostat of the certificate of naturalisation till I get the letter. Owing to the delay of going to Europe and changing residence, I didn't actually get my citizenship till ten days ago, and it takes about a fortnight, I understand, for the certificate to arrive. Of course the moment it does, I'll send copies of it and the marriage license straight off.

I was so glad to read in the papers that your father is better. Please remember me to him, and if Golo is with you, congratulate him on the Gentz book.

Hope you are not too exhausted from your trips,
Wystan (App. D3)

The letter proves that at least Auden was still following what his in-laws were up to. Golo Mann's book *Secretary of Europe. The Life of Friedrich Gentz*, which had just appeared in 1946, had initially been written in German but was first published in the US.

The illness of Thomas Mann to which Auden refers was a bronchial carcinoma, from which he recovered with surprising speed. In his first diary entry after the operation, Mann wrote that to finish *Doktor Faustus* was his main goal now: as a result, the interrelatedness between the writing-process and Mann's illness left profound traces in the text.⁴¹⁹ After the novel's publication in 1947, Mann suffered from various ailments but would never be seriously ill again. In the years until his death, he repeatedly quoted a line from *The Tempest*, more precisely from Prospero's epilogue: 'And my ending is despair'.⁴²⁰ Auden's commentary on the Shakespeare play, *The Sea and the Mirror*, had been published in 1944.⁴²¹

⁴¹⁹ See: Thomas Sprecher, *Vom Zauberberg zum Doktor Faustus: die Davoser Literaturtage 1998* (Vittorio Klostermann, 2000), 32.

⁴²⁰ *Ibid.*, 33.

⁴²¹ It would be worthwhile to write an article analysing corresponding themes in Auden and Thomas Mann.

In 1945, Auden had contributed a rather enigmatic text entitled ‘A Toast’ to a ‘Sonderausgabe’ of *Die Neue Rundschau* on occasion of Thomas Mann’s 70th birthday on 6 June. It is hard to say anything about the four stanza-like prose sections, strange and unrelated to Mann as they come across. What is remarkable, though, is that the editors of the ‘Sonderausgabe’ should have found it self-evident that a contribution by Auden belonged in this publication. His close association with the Manns was an internationally known fact.

Thomas Mann’s last reference to Auden in his diary was written a few years later, on 20 February 1949: ‘Neblig und kalt. Eliot, Auden etc. erteilen Ezra Pound den Bollingen-Preis für Poetry. Verteidigen ihre Objektivität, – die wohl nicht standgehalten hätte, wenn Pound, statt Faschist zu sein, Kommunist wäre. Es ist *keine* kühne, sondern eine harmonisch sich ins Ganze fügende Handlung. Die aber objektiv richtig sein mag’.⁴²² Although the choice of Pound caused a great public outcry – because of the poet’s Fascist beliefs and also because his work was not deemed worthy of the prize – Mann was probably right in his assessment.

Indeed, America had arrived at the highpoint of anti-Communist hysteria. The Manns were under constant surveillance by the FBI because of supposed Communist sympathies. Auden, too, was on the FBI’s radar: in 1951, Erika Mann was questioned by the FBI because they hoped to receive information through her concerning the disappearance of two British diplomats in 1951, Guy Burgess and Donald MacLean. In his book *Communazis: FBI Surveillance of Emigré Writers*, Alexander Stephan explains:

Burgess, who alarmed Western intelligences by fleeing to Moscow in May 1951, had belonged to the same circle as Erika’s former husband [incorrect!] W.H. Auden. But the Mann-Auden-Burgess connection turned out to be a dead end. Much time and

⁴²² Thomas Mann, *Tagebücher, 1949-1950*, 24. [‘Foggy and cold. Eliot, Auden etc. award Ezra Pound the Bollingen Prize for poetry. Defend their objectivity, – which probably would not have stood up to scrutiny if Pound had been a Communist instead of a Fascist. It isn’t a daring act but one that fits itself harmonically into a whole. Although it might be right, objectively speaking’.]

effort were spent tracing the missing Erika, who had been hospitalized in Chicago and was found when she was returned to her father's home [...].⁴²³

Auden had been staying at Stephen Spender's place in London a few days before, where Burgess had left a message for Auden. Mendelson explains that Auden never returned the call and Burgess later stated that he had called 'before he realized that he would need to flee together with Maclean – in order to arrange a holiday visit to Auden's summer home in Ischia, a visit proposed by Burgess when he had spoken with Auden in New York a few months before'.⁴²⁴ Thus when Auden left for Italy, MI5 was concerned that he was in fact facilitating Burgess's escape, despite the fact that, as Mendelson points out, it would have been very easy for the intelligence services to find out one of the actual reasons for Auden's visit: 'to help with the rehearsals for a BBC broadcast on 21 May of his translation of a play by Jean Cocteau'.⁴²⁵ The hostile atmosphere in America triggered Erika, Thomas, and Katia Mann's decision to return to Switzerland in 1952. Three years later, Thomas Mann died in Zurich.

Nearly a decade after the Burgess affair, it was Auden who wrote to his wife from Kirchstetten, eventually sorry to bother her given, as he knew through Golo Mann, that she was having severe health issues again:

We are none of us getting any younger and I have to to [*sic*] make a new will. By New York State Law, as I expect you know, a wife is automatically entitled to a large part of the estate. My lawyer tells me, however, that if your lawyer will draw up the appropriate disclaimer and you sign it, everything should be O.K. So, would you be a dear and do this for me. (App. D4)

And he added: 'I dare say you have learned of my Austrian house with which I am absolutely enchanted. If ever by chance you should have to come to Vienna, I should

⁴²³ Alexander Stephan, *Communazis: FBI Surveillance of German Emigré Writers* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2000), 102.

⁴²⁴ Edward Mendelson, "Clouseau Investigates Auden," *The W.H. Auden Society Newsletter*, no. 28 (June 2007): 32–34.

⁴²⁵ *Ibid.*

love you to come and stay for a day or two. No typewriting dogs, only three cats. I am older, fatter, but, I hope a bit wiser than when we last saw each other'.⁴²⁶

In 1964, Erika Mann was rather ill again and had to undergo several operations and had travelled to Oxford for her treatment. She must have mentioned her upcoming visit to the Oxford hospital in a letter to Auden, since on 16 June he replied from Kirchstetten:

Dear Erika:

Many thanks for your letter and photos received yesterday, but terribly sorry to hear that you have had to have another operation – I hope one that really works. Also it must be lonely for you to be in Oxford, as I doubt you know many people there. I'm afraid that, since the term has ended, most of my friends will be away, but I wrote to my old tutor Nevill Coghill asking him to visit you if he should still be there. He is a very nice man indeed.

Nevill Coghill did Auden the favour, as Erika's reply from 18 July proves:

Dear Wystan, –

it was very kind and sweet of you to send me your friend, the Don. He, on his part very kind and sweet, came to see me the very day he had received your letter. He brought flowers as well as 'Meditations on a Hobby Horse' on a lend lease basis. I found Gombrich's approach highly amusing but unfortunately left Oxford so suddenly that I had no chance to return the book to Nevill. Now with that disastrous postal strike on one would seem to have grave difficulties in reaching one's English friends at all. Even so I'll try. (App. D6)

In the same letter of 18 July, Erika Mann also wrote: 'Concerning that document I should be very glad if you'd send it to me under the above address. As I keep changing my wills prior to each major operation I have to undergo, it would be far too expensive to engage the services of an attorney in this context. I do it all by myself'. Mann ended up leaving Auden a small sum of money in her will. She finished her letter stating: 'I shall have to stay in hospital for at least another two months but am working so hard

⁴²⁶ Ibid.

that the time won't seem overly long. All the best to you and Chester from ever Yours Erika'. On 23 July, Auden replied to his wife, who was still in her Zurich clinic, stating that he had signed the document and 'presumed it had been sent to your lawyers. If there has been any mix up, could you let me know, and I will see that all is put in order. [...] What a horrid time you must be having. Mrs Nature can be such a bitch' (App. D7). He finished: 'Everyone who sees your photo says that we look exactly like each other! Did I tell you I have to spend the coming winter in Berlin. I do hope, once you are out of that cast, that business will take you there'.

Erika Mann died in Zurich in 1969. With her death, one of the most curious, fascinating literary marriages ended. The last letter from Auden to a member of the Mann family in the Monacensia Archive was to Thomas Mann's widow, Katia, sent on 6 March 1970:

Dear Katia:

The Document, which I herewith return, and your letter arrived yesterday. 'Hoffentlich ist alles jetzt [*sic*] in Ordnung'. It is, I suppose, a precaution of lawyers to assume that all human beings are crooks, but it is an awful nuisance for those of us who are not!

I expect you know that a new translation of the early Novelle (eg Tonio Kruger [*sic*] (possibly) and Tristan), made by a good friend of mine, David Luke, is appearing shortly. It is excellent.

Please give my love to Golo and Medi.

Yours affectionately

Wystan Auden (App. B2)

Again, undisclosed 'family issues' had to be resolved; and Auden took the opportunity to inform his mother-in-law about David Luke's translations of her husband's works. Noteworthy, too, is that Auden sent greetings to Elisabeth Mann ('Medi'), and to Golo, with whom he was in irregular contact.

Golo Mann was the last of the Manns to write about Auden, the only Mann surviving him whom he had known closely and who was thus in a position to write a

German obituary, published in *Süddeutsche Zeitung* on 6 November 1973.⁴²⁷ On the following day, Golo Mann wrote to Benjamin Britten:

I am sending you a little article on Auden I wrote the very day I learned about his death. Nil nisi bene. I felt really shocked and sad. From 1960, I believe, to 1973 he lived in Austria each year from June to October. And only twice I visited him, because some nonsense came in between and I thought the next year would be as good. This time, I hope, I will learn the lesson.⁴²⁸

Mann wrote a very similar letter in German to the publisher Ernst Klett, stating that ‘mein Ehrgeiz und meine Blödheit’ had kept him from visiting Auden, the man ‘dessen Freundschaft er so schmäählich vernachlässigte’.⁴²⁹

Indeed, Golo Mann and Auden seem to have been on particularly good terms. Mann writes: ‘We came to know each other better in New York and in neighbouring Princeton in the first half of 1939. I have never talked to anyone whose conversation was more striking and provocative’.⁴³⁰ Golo Mann’s obituary alone is enough evidence to show that he, of all Manns, possibly thought about Auden in the most truly open, friendly, and non-judgmental way – perhaps mirroring his general personality. Moreover, the obituary is a most enlightening text about Auden, while also revealing Mann’s sincere sadness about the loss of his brother-in-law.

Mann starts by referring to Auden’s work, stating that he ‘knew it well and love[d] it in some respect’ but refraining from judging it, unlike in many cases his brother Klaus who, as we have seen, may have harboured feelings of jealousy towards Auden.⁴³¹ Golo Mann just wrote: ‘He thought truths out for himself. Many of them could have been expanded into whole books. But he only presented them, in his own

⁴²⁷ An English translation of Mann’s obituary was printed in: Stephen Spender, *W.H. Auden: A Tribute* (New York: Macmillan, 1975), 98–103. A German reprint appeared in: Golo Mann, *Zeiten und Figuren*, pp. 269–276.

⁴²⁸ Golo Mann, *Briefe, 1932–1992*, ed. Tilmann Lahme and Kathrin Lüssi (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2006), 215.

⁴²⁹ Lahme, *Golo Mann*, 374. [‘my ambition and my stupidity’; ‘whose friendship I so ignominiously neglected’.]

⁴³⁰ Golo Mann, “A Memoir,” 98.

⁴³¹ *Ibid.*

particular way, unsystematically. So there is no Auden “philosophy”.⁴³² This is quite true and goes a long way to explain why it is so difficult to explain how Auden felt about certain things at a given time: a result both of his propensity to change his views on certain matters or people and of his tendency to proclaim his views at a given time with much conviction and rhetorical back-up.

Golo Mann felt that Auden was ‘always fresh, always original, and independent beyond description’⁴³³; that he ‘attached no value to the display of possessions, but much to a strictly conducted rule of life’.⁴³⁴ That he had many masters, or none; that he wanted to prove with his life that ‘everything was possible to his genius and his strength of will’, trying not to take notice of how he was talked about in the press, with a certain independent confidence that he would survive whatever happened anyway.⁴³⁵

Mann also noticed a similarity between Auden and Goethe, quoting a text in which Auden commented on the fact that both Goethe and Madame de Staël, having spent an hour conversing, felt that they had not been able to ‘get a word in’. Mann comments: ‘I don’t know whether Auden was thinking of himself here, but he might well have been’.⁴³⁶ Later, he adds that he also thought of Auden’s critical reviews as monologues – indeed a good way of thinking about them.

Very interestingly, Mann thought that the German language to Auden had become a sort of moral barrier he could erect in the face of external enmity. To him, according to Mann, German was the language of disapproval and judgement: in his later years, in conversation with bilingual and English-speaking friends, he often switched into German when he criticised others. In a conversation with Golo Mann, for instance, Auden said about publishers: ‘Sie sind alle Verbrecher’ (‘They are all

⁴³² Ibid., 99.

⁴³³ Ibid., 98.

⁴³⁴ Ibid., 101.

⁴³⁵ Ibid., 100.

⁴³⁶ Ibid., 98.

criminals').⁴³⁷ To Spender, he said about Isherwood: '*Christoph ist falsch*'. As it is written, this means 'Christopher is deceptive' and I assume that Auden went into the trap of what linguists refer to as a 'false friend': 'Christopher is wrong' would be 'Christoph hat nicht Recht'. This is an interesting point, not only because this was a pretty eccentric mannerism to adopt, but also because it speaks of a rather stereotypical view of Germany, home to Kant and others with a reputation for stern morals. Maybe in this respect, Auden was more German than the Germans, but certainly his upbringing and the class-consciousness of his mother's family had smoothed the way for this.

What should the final verdict on this strangely serendipitous connection between one of the originally most exemplary German families and this weird, eccentric Anglo-American Atlantic Goethe be then? Which attitude is appropriate to describe this connection, which words most suitable? Or is this the wrong question? Indeed, it seems that even a relatively cynical account of Auden's engagement with the Manns, such as Colm Tóibín's (culminating in the statement: 'Auden seemed to get infinite amusement from his relationship with the Manns'⁴³⁸), is more true to the reality of the relationship than the Academic 'Chinese Whisper' often encountered in academic circles that it was 'just a marriage of convenience'. While the cynicism makes Tóibín's account a personal – albeit, perhaps, a judgmental one – at least it avoids giving the reader the impression that this was not an important story to follow up.

Rather amazingly, the curious marriage between Auden and Erika Mann lasted for over thirty years. We should trust the historian Golo Mann's appraisal of the matter, who wrote:

I first heard [Auden's] name in 1935 when he married my sister Erika, though he had never set eyes on her before the wedding. It was on his part a generous gesture to a German émigrée, to help her obtain a British passport. Auden's telegram agreeing to the

⁴³⁷ Ibid., 101.

⁴³⁸ Tóibín, *New Ways to Kill Your Mother*, 197.

marriage consisted of a single word: “DELIGHTED”. A few months later he turned up at my parents’ house at Küsnacht, on Lake Zürich, to indicate that he wished to take the relationship seriously. In fact, it developed into a kind of friendship.⁴³⁹

⁴³⁹ Golo Mann, “A Memoir,” 98. This was first published in German in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* and subsequently in translation in the January 1974 issue of *Encounter*.

CHAPTER THREE

RETURNING TO GERMANY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Ever since his first visit to Berlin in 1928/1929, Auden's life-story continued to be shaped in significant ways by his German acquaintances and Germanic influences – to an extent that is truly striking. The kind of life he led in New York after 1939 resembled the lives led by those of his friends who were exiled Germans, Erika Mann, Elisabeth Mayer, and Hannah Arendt, to name only three particularly important ones. Additionally, on his 'honeymoon' with Chester Kallman, Auden visited Frieda Lawrence, née von Richthofen, and once Auden started summering on Ischia, he made the acquaintance of Germans such as Hans Werner Henze and Klaus Geitel. Finally, he insisted that the only house he would ever own should be in a place where German was spoken. For financial reasons, he chose Austria, with the additional benefit of Vienna's excellent opera house.

As an intellectual, Auden evidently saw himself in the 'Germanic tradition' of influence, too. While the often-perpetuated claim that Auden's interest in Germany grew out of his self-image as a 'Nordic type' is uncomfortably close to Nazi rhetoric and seems primarily a retrospective projection, Auden's self-proclaimed German bias had more to do with a feeling of intellectual belonging of which he grew aware during the 1930s, a time where his poetry was shaped by the German poet Rainer Maria Rilke and he became acquainted with the Mann family. It was Germany's literary and philosophical tradition Auden felt himself most drawn to. His various lists of those intellectuals who had shaped his thinking were always dominated by those thinking in German:

[...] Auden was interested more in the *Innigkeit* [*Rilkean terminology!*] of the German tradition than in anything in recent German history. ‘Yes, it is a German Age,’ he had written to a friend in 1943, ‘and the chances are, I have a suspicion, that after the war it will continue to be. What other country in our century has produced anything comparable to the cumulative effect of – to name only a few – Rilke-Kafka-Berg-Strauss-Barlach-Klee-Husserl-Heidegger-Scheler-Barth-Groddeck-Koehler.’⁴⁴⁰

Auden’s conviction that the 20th century was a ‘German Age’ – so much so that it deserved capitalization – is obvious from the many references to German intellectuals populating his work. He himself was also becoming one of the major mediators of German culture and literature in the English-speaking world, through his reviews and translations.

Meanwhile, that side of Germany which had surfaced between 1933 and 1945 stood in crass contrast to the Germany admired abroad for its ‘Denker und Dichter’ tradition (‘thinkers and poets’). Though shaking up Auden’s notion of human nature, the fact that Fascism found such a great resonance in Germany did not alter his love for German literature, culture, and philosophy. While he continued to shy away from any form of political commentary and did not comment openly on the events of the day, throughout the 30s and 40s Auden provided or supported aid for political refugees where he could (see examples mentioned in Chapter Two) and evidently cared greatly about the future of Europe, independent of national affiliations.

Auden’s attitude during the war years has evoked hostile comments and been distorted, especially because he did not return to England and because he did not fight in WWII. Despite what has been claimed, however, it seems that Auden was not trying to avoid a military engagement – while of course not being all too keen on it since he knew his strengths to be in a very different field. On 20 November 1943, Auden wrote from Swarthmore College to his brother John:

⁴⁴⁰ Mendelson, *Later Auden*, 419.

I expect you heard that I was turned down by the American Army (for reasons which I will tell you when I see you) I shall probably be here for some time, and when the war is over, I want to go to Germany, as I have a hunch something interesting may happen there.⁴⁴¹

The myth of Auden the ‘army avoider’ matches that of Auden and Isherwood as ‘ambitious young men with a strong instinct of self-preservation, and an eye on the main chance, who have abandoned what they consider to be the sinking ship of European democracy’, as Cyril Connolly put it in 1940 when British citizens were called back to England.⁴⁴² But when Auden had visited the British Embassy in New York earlier in the same year to inquire about the possibility of making himself useful in England, he had been told that only ‘skilled’ citizens were needed. In *Christopher and His Kind*, Christopher Isherwood paraphrases his friend’s attitude at the time: ‘Did he think of himself as a deserter? He had left England often enough before this and for indefinite periods, with only a vague intention of returning some day or other’.⁴⁴³

Seen from this angle, it becomes obvious that Auden’s position cannot have been an easy one. Aware of the nationalist tendencies on all sides of the political spectrum but unwilling to take clear sides, yet nevertheless feeling the urge to make himself useful and to help, Auden faced a difficult choice between many imperfect options. Meanwhile, this ‘evasive’ uncommitted attitude exposed him to criticism from all sides.

Even his in-laws gossiped about his attitude, as a diary entry by Thomas Mann shows. In October 1942, he heard from his son Klaus about Auden’s rejection from the US Army: ‘Nachricht, durch Klaus, daß W. Auden, entschlossen, um jeden Preis der Einziehung in die Armee zu entgehen, sich vor der Commission als homosexuell

⁴⁴¹ W.H. Auden, Letter to John Auden written on 20 November 1943 at Swarthmore College. Berg Collection, New York Public Library, W.H. Auden collection of papers.

⁴⁴² Carpenter, *W.H. Auden*, 290–291.

⁴⁴³ Isherwood, *Christopher and His Kind, 1929-1939*, 245–6.

bekannt hat und mit Schimpf davongejagt worden ist'.⁴⁴⁴ Mann's comment gives the sense that Auden deliberately used his homosexuality to be turned down from the Army, yet it is possible that Klaus Mann presented the circumstances in a way that made his own attempts to join up seem more heroic. After all, he himself had been rejected for the same reasons as Auden. Other sources seem to contradict Mann's account of the story. According to Davenport-Hines, Auden later said to Alan Ansen: 'If I'd had a heart condition or something like that, a legitimate out, I should have been delighted'.⁴⁴⁵ Being rejected because of his sexual orientation, though, was painful – especially since Auden was of course not keen to be a soldier. The situation was in many ways a moral dilemma. Who would Auden have been fighting against anyway? The Berlin boys he had admired for their strength and on whom he had projected happiness during the late 1920s?

In embracing his international life-style, Auden refused to limit his thinking and living by categorising places as 'home' and 'abroad'. At a time when great numbers of people had to leave their home and country for political reasons, the decision to do so 'without need' raised suspicions. Auden was ahead of his time when he turned internationalism into a way of living. How little he let himself be shaped by nationalist thinking becomes obvious from a letter to Dodds from 1940 in which Auden answers a self-set questionnaire about his state of mind. In response to the question 'Do you care what happens in England?', he answered:

Qua England, not in the least. To me England is bits of the country like the Pennine Moors and my english [*sic*] friends. If they were all safely out of the country, I should feel about the English as I feel about the Spanish or the Chinese or the Germans. It matters what happens to them as it matters what

⁴⁴⁴ Mann, *Tagebücher, 1940-1943*, 483. ['News through Klaus that W. Auden, determined to escape being drafted into the army at every price, has declared himself a homosexual in front of the commission and been chased away in disgrace'.]

⁴⁴⁵ Davenport-Hines, *Auden*, 221.

happens to all members of the human race, but my concern is as a fellow human being not as a fellow countryman.⁴⁴⁶

Auden's humanism is reminiscent of Goethe's vision for a future world where the importance of nationalist distinctions would have diminished and individual be treated in accordance with the human rights. The best poets, Goethe thought, already had such a humanitarian view:

Offenbar ist das Bestreben der besten Dichter und ästhetischen Schriftsteller aller Nationen schon seit geraumer Zeit auf das allgemein Menschliche gerichtet. In jedem Besondern, es sey nun historisch, mythologisch, fabelhaft, mehr oder weniger willkürlich ersonnen, wird man durch Nationalität und Persönlichkeit hindurch jenes Allgemeine immer mehr durchleuchten und durchschimmern sehn.⁴⁴⁷

This describes Auden's poetry well. Lacking a clear sense of national allegiance in the first place, he refused to join in with the nationalist logic of his day and divide the world into 'friends' and 'enemy' along the lines of national borders. In the mid-40s, after a failed – and assumedly half-hearted – attempt to join the US Army and vague plans to join the Red Cross or a neutral unit providing humanitarian aid in Germany, someone put Auden in touch with the Pentagon. In March 1945, a month after his rejection by the Army, Auden renewed his application: this time as a civilian member, as part of the 'United States Strategic Bombing Survey' (USSBS). At this point, Auden as well as the three Mann siblings – Erika, Klaus, and Golo Mann – worked for the US Army as civilian members.

⁴⁴⁶ Bell, "Auden to the Doddses," 113–114.

⁴⁴⁷ Charles Eliot Norton, ed., *Correspondence between Goethe and Carlyle* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1887), 16. [‘Apparently, the efforts of the best poets and aesthetic writers of all nations have been focussed on what is universally human for some time now. In every particular, be it historical, mythological, fabulous, contrived more or less haphazardly, more and more one will come to see this universal element shine and shimmer through nationality and personality’.]

3.2 *THE AGE OF ANXIETY*

In 1945, Auden returned to Germany for the first time after the Nazi seizure of power, apart from a brief stop in 1934. His visit was of a very different nature to his previous ones: he became a ‘Bombing Research Analyst in the Morale Division’, a rank equivalent to major, and successfully encouraged his friend James Stern to apply for the same job. Nicolas Nabokov also joined the project after Auden put him in touch with his Pentagon contact. Stephen Spender, too, had a similar job with the English military government, surveying libraries and making sure that all Nazi literature was being removed and books by Jewish authors reinstated. This resulted in his book *European Witness* (1946). The German writer Ernst Jünger, who was visited by two journalists with a similar task, called this activity ‘eine Art geistige Bestandaufnahme inmitten unseres Trümmerfeldes’.⁴⁴⁸

Equally, Auden and Stern conducted a great number of interviews with German war survivors picked at random in various German cities. The stories they heard were shocking in many ways: the German population suffered greatly during the war years and had much to say about their own hardship. What was most shocking to the interviewers, however, was that the German survivors barely ever acknowledged their own responsibility for the horrors committed during the Third Reich.

Together, Auden and Stern were supposed to write an account of their experiences in Germany. While it is unclear whether this book was commissioned by an editor or initiated by Auden, it seems unlikely that the latter was the case. One reason for this is that after having returned from Germany, Auden abandoned the project and Stern wrote *The Hidden Damage* (1947) alone. Mendelson additionally points out that ‘the

⁴⁴⁸ Kemp, *Foreign Affairs*, 357. [‘The making of a sort of mental inventory amidst this expense of rubble’.]

verse [Auden] wrote in 1945 after his return to New York gave no hint that he had ever left home'.⁴⁴⁹

What Auden saw in Germany was terrible beyond description. He visited a liberated concentration camp and Jewish survivors. Clearly, his experiences shook him up so that his surviving letters from Germany are a disturbing mix of facts and comments:

The intelligentsia seems to be reading Hölderlin and Christian Morgenstern. Last week I went to a hospital at [*Unterschöndorf*?] (was a school) where they have brought Jews from concentration camps. I was prepared for their appearance but not for their voices. They whisper like gnomes. (App. I4)

What made things worse was that Auden did not believe in and even criticised the undertaking he had signed up for, stating: 'This *Morale* title is illiterate and absurd. How can one learn anything about morals, when one's actions are beyond any kind of morality?' (Fir, 68) This criticism was valid since the Bombing Survey data collected would be twisted into a report that suited the US Government to justify past and future military interventions – despite the fact that the interviews did not actually show a 'positive' effect of the bombings, that is, a negative effect on German moral. In an interview, Auden commented on the results of the Bombing Survey, stating that it was not received openly and certainly not well, because 'we proved that, in spite of all of our bombing of Germany, their weapons production didn't go down until after they had lost the war [...] – the bombing does no good. But you know how army people are. They don't like to hear things that run contrary to what they've thought'.⁴⁵⁰ It would take decades for war historians to establish this as a commonly accepted fact.

While Auden felt obliged to produce his reports – albeit grudgingly – since the US Army had paid for his trip and he had accepted to perform the task, he did not really

⁴⁴⁹ Mendelson, *Later Auden*, 285.

⁴⁵⁰ Michael Newman, "W.H. Auden, The Art of Poetry No. 17," *Paris Review*, Spring 1974, <http://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/3970/the-art-of-poetry-no-17-w-h-auden>.

write or speak about his experiences in Germany after his return to the US and did not produce *Hidden Damage* with Stern. This was possible because, unlike in the case of *Journey to a War* or *Letters from Iceland*, Auden had not been paid by the publisher to undertake the journey.

Auden's silence in the face of the destruction of a country whose tradition he loved but which, in recent history, had desecrated its own past, is remarkable. One feels that it would have been extremely valuable for him to document his firsthand experience of a unique situation: the attitude of a people that had committed or at least tolerated genocide. His task – to interview a random selection of those Germans who were still alive and in the country after the extensive bombings by the allied forces – would have put him in the unique situation of having something extraordinary to write about. But he did not.

To understand Auden's decision better, it is necessary to understand the poetics he settled on in the early 1940s. In his questionnaire for Dodds, he wrote: 'I am neither a politician nor a novelist, reportage is not my business'.⁴⁵¹ This corresponds with his passage in 'Christmas 1940':

How can the mind make sense, bombarded by
A stream of incompatible mishaps,
The bloom and buzz of a confessed collapse?
(Eng.A, 459)

Auden's poetics of the early 30s, his hope to improve society through art, had been shaken up thoroughly. Already in 1939, he had written:

The shining neutral summer has no voice
To judge America, or ask how a man dies [...].
(‘In Memory of Ernst Toller’, CP, 247)

⁴⁵¹ Bell, "Auden to the Doddses," 115.

Auden now categorically embraced the position that human suffering should not be made the subject matter of poetry, and that trauma should not be employed to stir the reader's emotion. The result of this could never be as complex as reality, even in a 'great' poem, and would thus 'defile' both writer and reader (SW, 84).

It is no coincidence that at this point, Auden began to write opera libretti, with Auden and Britten's *Paul Bunyan* premiering in 1941. Exactly at the time when he 'renounced as dishonest the grand style he had used in his public poems of the 1930s', as Mendelson has it, Auden started to regard opera as the 'last refuge of the High style' (SW, 116).⁴⁵² Although his sudden passion for opera was of course also triggered by and thus contingent on his meeting with Chester Kallman early in 1939, it was obvious that Auden found liberties in this genre that he no longer saw in poetry. In fact, he later stated about his early plays written in collaboration with Isherwood in the Deutschlandfunk interview: '[...] ich kann jetzt sehen, dass ich habe versucht wirklich ein [*sic*] Oper zu schreiben'.⁴⁵³ Opera allowed Auden to reinvent himself and to channel his creativity that was stalled somewhat by his internalised worries that his poetry might be read as being political, in fresh ways.

At the same time, of course, Auden was too knowledgeable about European history to only address innocuous topics in his poetry. In his longer poems, such as *New Year Letter* (1940), he processed the insights suffering and war had given him about humanity. In the same year, in his lecture at Ann Arbor 'A Sense of One's Own Age' (1940), Auden stated: 'The artist's duty is to recognize suffering, and to develop means of expressing his own suffering'.⁴⁵⁴ Ever since his first visit to Germany, Auden recognised suffering as being an important object of artistic attention and expression

⁴⁵² Edward Mendelson, "Introduction," in *Libretti and Other Dramatic Writings by W.H. Auden, 1939-1973* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), xvi.

⁴⁵³ App. G, p. 290. ['I realise now, looking at those plays I wrote with Isherwood, I realise that sometimes I was really trying to write an opera'. (Ibid., p. 300.)]

⁴⁵⁴ Miller, *An American Friendship*, 5.

(‘How one likes to suffer’ (J29)). While in the early 1930s, with the optimism of the young writer, Auden had still attempted to diagnose and heal the sources of suffering on the social level, he now turned to the equally intricate but artistically less problematic exploration of the texture of an individual’s life (see *Bunyan*).

The question to what degree the darkest sides of human existence can at all be transformed into art occupied many minds at the time, especially among the diaspora of German literati and philosophers. Very clearly, Auden’s own thoughts on the matter were in tune with those of his German colleagues who felt that in the face of the holocaust, the very borders of art and language had been reached. Most famous of all is Theodor W. Adorno’s statement, much debated, about the impossibility to write poetry post-Auschwitz: ‘[...] nach Auschwitz ein Gedicht zu schreiben, ist barbarisch’.⁴⁵⁵ Adorno’s line became the core of a fundamental metapoetic debate. Given the impact of his statement at the time, and given the degree to which Auden was exposed to German thinking both through his reading and through his German friends, it is highly likely that he knew of it.

In fact, Auden may have met Adorno who had emigrated to New York – from England, having spent four years at Oxford from 1934 – a year before Auden did so himself. Even if their paths did not cross in New York, in November 1941 Adorno became a neighbour to Auden’s in-laws in Pacific Palisades.⁴⁵⁶ The following passage in *Secondary Worlds* cannot be read without the context of the debate initiated by Adorno, as Auden seems to reflect and further qualify the famous statement:

⁴⁵⁵ Theodor W. Adorno, *Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft*, vol. 10.1, *Gesammelte Schriften* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1977), 30. [‘to write a poem after Auschwitz is an act of barbarism’.] There is a great number of publications discussing this topic. Important examples are: *Lyrik nach Auschwitz? Adorno und die Dichter*, ed. Petra Kiedaisch (Stuttgart, 1995); Dieter Lamping, “Sind Gedichte über Auschwitz barbarisch? Über die Humanität der Holocaust-Lyrik“, in: *Literatur und Theorie. Poetologische Probleme der Moderne* (Göttingen, 1996), pp. 100-119.

⁴⁵⁶ Between 1943 and 1957, Adorno worked with Thomas Mann on his novel *Doktor Faustus* (1947). He was acknowledged by Mann to be much more than an advisor on musical matters and shaped the novel in significant ways that was, quite consciously, an artistic reflection on the age, its catastrophic events, and their consequences for art. It is a speculation, but given his love for music, it is very likely that Auden would have read one of his father-in-law’s most ambitious works.

To write a play (that is, to construct a secondary world) about Auschwitz, for example, is wicked; author and audience may try to pretend that they are morally horrified, but in fact they are passing an entertaining evening together in the aesthetic enjoyment of horrors. (SW, 84)

This passage – particularly Auden’s choice of the word ‘wicked’ has been discussed by Susannah Young-ah Gottlieb, who argues: ‘For Auden, Adorno’s concern with culture is beside the point; poetry becomes not barbaric but, rather, wicked whenever it fails to acknowledge its limits’.⁴⁵⁷ She points out that Hannah Arendt makes the same distinction, criticising the word ‘barbaric’ as a descriptor for the Nazi reign because: ‘it is a distortion of reality; it is as though Jewish and non-Jewish intellectuals had fled a country that was no longer “refined” enough for them’.⁴⁵⁸ While the word ‘barbaric’ indeed connotes unculturedness and lack of learning, ‘wicked’ connotes moral depravation and an inclination to practise evil, as the OED has it.⁴⁵⁹ This both gives an sense of why Auden and Arendt got along so well intellectually and exemplifies Auden’s agenda as a poet: ‘[k]eeping language free of corruption remains, for Auden, the paramount duty of the writer, and this demands that distinctions be made’.⁴⁶⁰

Auden’s engagement with a discourse that was dominated by German thinkers shows how much he himself was part of this world. Intellectually, Auden was interested in the same phenomena as his German friends in American exile, through a sensitivity shaped by his own first-hand experience of horrors that could not be described adequately in language. While, to continue the discussion of their respective literary reactions to their experiences in 1945 Germany, Spender and Stern wrote most valuable accounts – producing pieces of ‘reportage’ – Auden himself could not reconcile this with what he considered to be the poetic mission.

⁴⁵⁷ Susannah Young-ah Gottlieb, *Regions of Sorrow: Anxiety and Messianism in Hannah Arendt and W.H. Auden* (Stanford University Press, 2003), 19.

⁴⁵⁸ Quoted in: *Ibid.*

⁴⁵⁹ OED Online Edition. Accessed on 14 December 2014.

⁴⁶⁰ Gottlieb, *Regions of Sorrow*, 19.

Despite all this, after his return to New York, in his study, where ‘domestic noises and odors, the vast background of natural | life are shut off’, Auden did turn his apparent ‘silence into objects’ (‘The Cave of Making’, CP, 690): not only later – in ‘Memorial for the City’ (1949), which has been said to reflect Auden’s experiences in Germany – but immediately.

Auden’s personal interest in the end of the war, the state of Germany, and his visit to the war-torn country shaped the composition of his long, complex poem *The Age of Anxiety*, first published by Random House in October 1947 (the UK version appeared in 1949) but begun in 1944. This has not been discussed much, as most often the poem is discussed in the light of capitalism and modernity and has been called ‘[...] a jeremiad against suburban America, mass society and consumerism’.⁴⁶¹ The poem is one of Auden’s most complex and difficult pieces. At the same time, it is the text which is most influenced by his visit to Germany at the very end of WWII.

Textual evidence for this is scattered throughout *The Age of Anxiety*. The poem opens with the observation that ‘in war-time [...], [w]hen the historical process breaks down and armies organize with their embossed debates the ensuing void which they can never consecrate, when necessity is associated with horror and freedom with boredom, [...] everybody is reduced to the anxious status of a shady character or a displaced person’ (CP, 447). War concerns everybody, and the radio reaches vast audiences with its news:

Now the news. Night raids on
Five cities. Fires started.
Pressure applied by pincer movement
In threatening thrust. Third Division
Enlarges beachhead. Lucky charm
Saves sniper. Sabotage hinted
In steel-mill stoppage. Strong point held
By fanatical Nazis. Canal crossed

⁴⁶¹ Sharpe, *W.H. Auden in Context*, 33.

By heroic marines. Rochester barber
 Fools foe. Finns ignore
 Peace feeler. Pope condemns
 Axis excesses. Underground
 Blows up bridge [...]. (CP, 452)

In poetic form, Auden supplies a list of WWII events, factually and in the rhetoric of the media, but without comment or judgement. ‘Fires started’ seems to be a reference to Humphrey Jennings’s 1943 documentary *Fires Were Started*. Likewise, the Yalta conference seems to feature, as the German writer Gottfried Benn points out in his preface to the German translation *Das Zeitalter der Angst* (1951):

Four who are famous confer in a *schloss*
 At night on nations. They are not equal:
 Three stand thoughtful on a thick carpet
 Awaiting the Fourth (CP, 456).

In addition to these factual references, which contextualize the poem and make it somewhat occasional – much more so than is the case with ‘Spain’ or ‘In Time of War’ – Auden objectified his own subjective sense of the suffering he witnessed:

Dull through the darkness, indifferent tongues
 From bombed buildings, from blacked-out towns,
 Camps and cockpits, from cold trenches,
 Submarines and cells, recite in unison
 A common creed, declaring their weak
 Faith in confusion. The floods are rising;
 Rain ruins on the routed fragments
 Of all the armies; indistinct
 Are friend and foe, one flux of bodies
 Miles from mother, marriage, or any
 Workable world. (CP, 510-511)

‘All war’s woes I can well imagine’ (CP, 454), claims Quant, one of the four characters appearing in *The Age of Anxiety*, and in the same sense Auden’s imagination was stirred by the visit to Germany, much more distinctly than by his former visits to war-zones. He imagines, for instance, the ambivalence felt by those on ‘his’ side who had bombed Germany:

[...] we began our run;
 Death and damage darted at our will,
 Bullets were about, blazing anger
 Lunged from below, but we laid our eggs
 Neatly in their nest, a nice deposit,
 Hatched in an instant; houses flamed in
 Shuddering sheets as we shed our big
 Tears on their town [...]. We watched others
 Drop into death; dully we mourned each
 Flare as it fell with a friend's lifetime,
 While we hurried on to our home bases
 To the safe smells and a sacrament
 Of tea with toast. (CP, 453)

While never having experienced action himself, Auden's months with the US Army sufficed to make him recognise the absurdity of army life: the constant, necessary concurrence of both the unspeakable experience, horrific beyond understanding, and the unchanging banalities of the daily life. He concludes: 'In times of war even the crudest kind of positive affection between persons seems extraordinarily beautiful, a noble symbol of the peace and forgiveness of which the whole world stands so desperately in need'. (CP, 516) These insights had grown out of his own perspective on the 'suffering' surrounding him, limited as it was ('What can I say about Army Life? Well, it's like a nunnery where one's better fed than the outside world, but is sealed off all the same' (App. I1)).

A passage reflecting Auden's time in Germany even more directly is Rosetta's war vision:

I see in my mind a besieged island,
 That island in arms where my home once was.
 [...] I think too of
 The conquered condition, countries where
 Arrogant officers, armed in cars,
 Go roaring down roads on the wrong side,
 Courts martial meet at midnight with drums,
 And pudgy persons pace unsmiling
 The quays and stations or cruise the nights
 In vans for victims [...] (CP, 455-6)

In *Hidden Damage*, Stern reports how Auden himself had driven down the autobahn at great speed on the wrong side, thus suggesting a flux of German memories into Auden's text during its genesis. More traumatic experiences, too, are represented in the poem, as Young-ah Gottlieb recognizes: '*The Age of Anxiety* is the first major poem in English that touches on the extermination camps: "When bruised or broiled our bodies are chucked / Like cracked crocks onto kitchen middens [...]" says the Jewish character named Rosetta at the poem's climax'.⁴⁶²

In the poem, the quotation in question is contextualised in a passage generally describing the fate of the Jewish people, presenting Rosetta as a believer who has not lost faith in her God:

[...] let history be.
 Time is our trade, to be tense our gift
 Whose woe is our weight; for we are His Chosen,
 His ragged remnant with our ripe flesh
 And our hats on, [...] like firearms through frightened lands,
 Transpose our plight like a poignant theme
 Into twenty tongues, time-tormented
 But His People still. [...]
 Fly, let's face it, to defend us now
 When bruised or broiled our bodies are chucked
 Like cracked crocks onto kitchen middens
 In the time He takes. We'll trust. He'll slay
 If His Wisdom will. He won't alter
 Nor fake one fact. (CP, 529)

As in so many other cases, Auden here processes and makes poetic sense of what is beyond sense by putting the events addressed in a context greater than the present and the personal. The recent war and its destruction are only one debris field amongst many:

[...] The reticent earth,
 Exposed by the spade, speaks its warning
 With successive layers of sacked temples
 And dead civilians. (CP, 457)

⁴⁶² Gottlieb, *Regions of Sorrow*, 19.

Nothing has changed since the original barbarian ages, really, ‘What pain taught | Is soon forgotten’ (CP, 458); and towards the end of the poem, Malin thinks: ‘Do we learn from the past? [...] No’. (CP, 529)

WWII, the Holocaust, his personal traumatic experiences in 1945 Germany: all these ‘unspeakables’, Auden classifies as nature’s ‘unending stream of irrelevant events without composition or center, her reckless waste of value’ (CP, 513). Although some might take offence to the word ‘irrelevant’ here, Auden’s focus on the long-term – cushioned by his own religious belief – justifies this view somewhat: the use of the word irrelevant in this context is characteristically blunt but not meant to reflect a disrespect for the individual victims of ‘the historical process’. Generalisation and classification into a general picture were Auden’s methods for referring to what he felt could not be expressed in words (and should not be made the subject matter of art) because it would trivialise them and ‘defile’ all those engaging with the product. This approach, of course, could be said to banalise human suffering just as much as an approximation of it through the imperfect medium of language – or more so.

Despite his traumatic experience of post-WWII Germany, the traces he witnessed of the Shoah, as well as the utter devastation of both land and people, Auden’s 1945 visit to Germany did not change his attitude towards Germany: to the contrary, it inspired him to write to A.E. Dodds on 3 May 1947: ‘I should like to go and teach in Germany and still hope that in a year or two it will be possible, but at present (in the American zone at any rate) one is at the mercy of directives by ignorant big-wheels’.⁴⁶³ In the same humanitarian spirit in which nearly ten years previously he had announced that, if at all, he would get involved in WWII with a neutral unit providing help for wounded Germans, Auden still felt drawn to Germany in her darkest hour. He retained

⁴⁶³ Auden, Letter to A.E. Dodds from 3 May 1947. Fol. 73.

his special connection with the country whose essential qualities, he felt, would ultimately transcend the deprivations of the Third Reich.

3.3 DAS ZEITALTER DER ANGST

The Age of Anxiety not only reflected Auden's 1945 visit to Germany but in turn also made Auden famous in Germany. While he ultimately never did move to Germany to take up a teaching post, it was this poem that provided him with reasons for visiting Germany.

The publication of *Das Zeitalter der Angst* (1951) caused a stir among some of the most famous contemporary German writers and it soon attained the status of a modern classic. Perhaps most important to mention in this context is the Austrian writer Ingeborg Bachmann, a close friend of Hans Werner Henze whom Auden provided with opera libretti. Both Bachmann and Henze considered *Das Zeitalter der Angst* (presumably the German version rather than the original) to be a canonical text. Bachmann, in particular, was influenced by Auden work: so much so that she called her autobiographical novel *Malina* (1971) after Auden's character Malin in *The Age of Anxiety*.⁴⁶⁴

That Auden, in turn, knew of Ingeborg Bachmann, is proven by a letter Henze sent to Bachmann from Ischia on 24 October 1953. In it, Henze mentions a review of Bachmann's ballet-pantomime *Der Idiot* that had just appeared in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*. Bachmann had read an excerpt from the piece at the previous meeting of Gruppe 47, where Alfred Andersch had criticised it for being too spiritual and her images for being too 'aerial' and unable to withstand the logic of language.⁴⁶⁵ Henze, who had composed the music for the ballet, wrote triumphantly about the positive review: 'den bericht las ich gerade in den themen castaldi, als auch auden dort eintraf

⁴⁶⁴ In 'Intertextuelle Bezüge: W.H. Audens "The Age of Anxiety" und Ingeborg Bachmann "Malina"' (2003), Christine Kanz provides a most useful in-depth comparison between the two texts and thus examines Auden's influence on Bachmann.

⁴⁶⁵ Ingeborg Bachmann and Hans Werner Henze, *Briefe einer Freundschaft*, ed. Hans Höller, 2 Aufl. (München: Piper, 2004), 441.

um zu baden, ich gab ihm das document'.⁴⁶⁶ Happy that the review contradicted Andersch's harsh criticism, Henze shared the good news with Auden, who must have known the personae involved. Later letters from Henze to Bachmann show that he asked her and Max Frisch – they were a couple at the time when Henze worked on *Elegy for Young Lovers* – for their opinions on the opera libretto Auden had produced.

Most fascinating about Bachmann's interest in *Das Zeitalter der Angst* is her independent interest in and exploration of the border area between what can and what cannot be expressed through language, and her reluctance to address war and its effects on society in her work, as she considered this 'too easy'. Instead, it was her aim to write about the daily war, the war-like elements in the daily life that we don't recognise. She studied Wittgenstein's philosophy of language and reflected his theories in her essay 'Sagbares und Unsagbares', quoting the final sentence of his *Tractatus logico-philosophicus* (1921): 'Worüber man nicht sprechen kann, darüber muß man schweigen'.⁴⁶⁷ In verse, she consciously zeroes in on the boundaries of the expressible:

Wir aber wollen über Grenzen sprechen,
und gehn auch Grenzen noch durch jedes Wort:
wir werden sie vor Heimweh überschreiten
und dann im Einklang stehn mit jedem Ort.⁴⁶⁸

That of all writers, Bachmann – who devoted much of her work to the reflection and transcendence of language boundaries – should have been so interested in *Das Zeitalter der Angst* is telling about the work and its underlying sense of anxiety.

⁴⁶⁶ Ibid., 22. ['was reading the report while at the castaldi thermal bath when Auden arrived there, too, to bathe, I gave him the document'.]

⁴⁶⁷ Quoted in: Ingeborg Bachmann, "Sagbares Und Unsagbares" (München: Piper, 2005), 123–44. ['What one cannot talk about one has to be silent about'.]

⁴⁶⁸ Ingeborg Bachmann, *Anrufung Des Grossen Bären* (München: R. Piper & Co Verlag, 1956), 14. This is my very literal translation:

[But we shall speak about borders,
even if borders may pass through every word:
we will transcend them out of homesickness
and then be in harmony with every place.]

In *Malina*, Bachmann explores the same problem through the medium of fiction. In one scene of the novel, the ‘I’ replies to her lover Ivan after being told that he has to leave for Paris: ‘Ich sage leichthin: ach so, weil zwischen seinen und meinen sparsamen Äußerungen und dem, was ich wirklich sagen möchte, ein Vakuum ist’.⁴⁶⁹ The source of the frustration and anxiety experienced by the ‘I’ – the gap between her innermost reflections of the world and that which she can communicate – is reminiscent of the four characters’ inability to truly connect through language in Auden’s poem:

So one by one they plunge into the labyrinthine forest and
vanish down solitary paths, with no guide but their sorrows, no
companion but their own voices. Their ways cross and recross
yet never once do they meet though now and then one catches
somewhere not far off a brief snatch of another’s song. (CP, 505)

This context makes plain that Auden’s interest in ritual and community really was a linguistic interest: his conviction – that pre-industrial society had consisted of closely-knit communities sharing an extra-linguistic understanding of life by way of sharing practical tasks – is the flip side of his belief that certain things could never be expressed adequately through the medium of language.

This trope lies at the very heart of *The Age of Anxiety*. In view of that, it is surprising that anxiety as a psychological phenomenon has not been discussed extensively in relation to Auden’s oeuvre generally and his long poem in particular. Consulting the OED, one finds anxiety defined as ‘uneasiness or trouble of mind about some uncertain event; solicitude, concern’ or as a ‘condition of agitation and depression, with a sensation of tightness and distress in the præcordial region’.⁴⁷⁰ This rather vague definition shows two things, first, that the cause of anxiety itself is vague (‘some uncertain event’), and second, that the physical effect of anxiety on the affected person is a state of fearful inner claustrophobia. Bringing the two together, one sees that anxiety

⁴⁶⁹ Ingeborg Bachmann, *Malina* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1971), 47. [‘I say offhandedly: I see, because there is a vacuum between our few respective utterances and what I really wish to say’.]

⁴⁷⁰ OED online version. Accessed on 16 December 2014.

can be thought of as the inability to voice a fear that is too complex or subtle for language – in the moment when anxiety is felt. Fear, to the contrary, is felt in the face of a concrete danger, as all OED definitions show (for example: ‘Apprehensive feeling towards anything regarded as a source of danger, or towards a person regarded as able to inflict injury or punishment’.) Being undefinable and uncategorisable, anxiety could thus be thought to be more disturbing than fear, defying understanding, and, in turn, making it difficult for the individual to remove its trigger. It follows that speechlessness itself is an essential characteristic of anxiety.

The distinction between anxiety and fear constitutes a major problem for any German translator of *The Age of Anxiety*. This is reflected in Gottfried Benn’s introduction to *Das Zeitalter der Angst*, which is well known in Germany despite the fact that Monroe K. Spears writes of it that it ‘was so ignorant and irrelevant that it was dropped from the later printing’.⁴⁷¹ The problem was that Benn, who had been banned by the American occupying powers from publishing in West Germany until 1949, spoke no English and based his text exclusively on the translation.

At the very beginning of his introduction, Benn states: ‘Um mit einem Negativum zu beginnen: warum diese Arbeit das Zeitalter der Angst heißt, ist mir nicht klar geworden. Die vier Menschen, die die Träger der Ereignisse sind, haben meiner Meinung nicht mehr Angst, als sie alle Generationen des Quartär empfanden [...]’.⁴⁷² This criticism, which aims straight at the heart of what Benn thought to be Auden’s central message in this poem, is valid – in relation to the translation. The poem is not about ‘Angst’ (‘fear’) but about anxiety. Thus, correspondingly, a translation of Benn’s

⁴⁷¹ Spears, *Auden*, 9.

⁴⁷² W.H. Auden, *Das Zeitalter der Angst. Ein barockes Hirtengedicht*, trans. Kurt Heinrich Hansen (München: Heyne Verlag, 1985), 7. [‘To begin with a negative statement: it has not become clear to me why this piece is called the Age of Anxiety. In my opinion, the four human beings, who are its protagonists, do not experience more fear [!] than all preceding generations throughout this age [...].’]

statement into English should not render ‘Angst haben’ as ‘being anxious’ but as ‘being fearful’.

In *The Age of Anxiety*, through language, Auden manages to convey to the reader a sense of that gnawing, diffuse feeling inspired in his four protagonists by the living conditions and realities of modern life – a feeling they themselves cannot ever quite translate into language. This is what fascinated Bachmann, the international post-war avant-garde, and Benn, too, who was despite everything a great proponent of Auden’s poem and had initiated its publication. Through coining the catchy phrase ‘Age of Anxiety’, which resonated with many, Auden even secured himself a place in his beloved OED.

While Benn himself did not realise that his lack of understanding for Auden’s epochal undertaking was due to an inaccurate translation, this was undoubtedly the case. The German translation *Das Zeitalter der Angst* does not recreate the same sense of wordless panic and even dangerously distorts what Auden expresses in most subtle ways. One danger, of course, is that the seeming similarity between the words in the German and the English title give the illusion of being the closest title in meaning: *Zeitalter des Unbehagens* is a less attractive title, perhaps, but closer in meaning to the English original.

Auden himself might not have picked up on this problem either. On 14 May 1950, he wrote to Hans Paeschke, the editor of the magazine *Der Merkur*, from Ischia:

I congratulate you on your magazine and the kind of thing you are doing. Would you please convey to Herr Hansen my thanks for his translations from *The Age of Anxiety* which seem to me to have been done with great skill and sensibility. (You might tell him, however, that his description of the original metre is incorrect). (App. J2)

On 20 October 1951, Auden also sent Benn a cable thanking him for his major contribution to European culture.⁴⁷³

Das Zeitalter der Angst and Gottfried Benn's effort to promote his work helped to establish Auden's reputation as a major poet of the 20th century in West Germany. This had been anticipated in a preprint of Benn's introduction in *Literarisches Deutschland* on 20 January 1950, which the editor introduced as 'ein für diesen Dichter charakteristisches Stück Prosa, das die Art der Aufnahme Audens in Deutschland stark beeinflussen wird'.⁴⁷⁴ This prediction proved true and probably helped Auden on the list for potential Ford Foundation stipendiaries. Three years later, Limes published a collection of Auden's poetry called *Der Wanderer* with translations by Astrid Claes and Edgar Lohner.⁴⁷⁵ In East Germany, too, Auden would eventually be surprisingly well-represented, not by any means a given for an Anglo-American author. First, Auden was honoured with a so-called *Poesiealbum* in 1975, an inexpensive pamphlet containing the German translations of some of Auden's most famous poems sold at kiosks and thus reaching a vast audience. There is also the beautiful edition *Glück mit dem kommenden Tag* (1987), which is extremely well curated, contains facing poems in German and English, and has a particularly insightful, non-ideological postface by Günter Gentsch.⁴⁷⁶ Both GDR editions even used translations by Claes and Lohner, among others, mentioning Limes Verlag in their copyright section.

⁴⁷³ W.H. Auden, Telegram to Gottfried Benn from 20 October 1951. Marbach Literatur Archiv.

⁴⁷⁴ Gottfried Benn, *Prosa 3* (Klett-Cotta, 1986), 695. ['a piece of prose that is characteristic of this poet and will strongly influence Auden's reception in Germany'.]

⁴⁷⁵ W.H. Auden, *Der Wanderer*, trans. Astrid Claes and Edgar Lohner (Wiesbaden: Limes Verlag, 1955). Meeting Stephen Spender on 15 March 1951 at a reception for him in Berlin, Benn wrote: 'Für mich, der ich alle Jahre nur einmal in die Öffentlichkeit gehe, war es ganz nett, einmal alle diese Koryphäen zu sehn. [...] Übrigens ist Spender ein alter Freund von Auden (ich glaube allerdings jetzt guter Feind), er meinte, die anderen Sachen von Auden seien noch besser als das Zeitalter der Angst. Diese Publikation von Ihnen findet überall stärkstes Interesse, wie ich gestern merkte'. This may have got Max Niedermayer, Benn's publisher, interested in publishing some of Auden's other poems. (Gottfried Benn, *Briefe an Den Limes Verlag 1948-1956*, vol. 8, Briefe (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2006), 97.) ['For myself, only appearing in public every few years, it was really nice to get to see all these luminaries. [...] Spender, by the way, is an old friend of Auden's (now a good enemy, I sense), he said Auden's other stuff is even better than *The Age of Anxiety*. This publication of yours is met by great interest everywhere, as I observed yesterday'.]

⁴⁷⁶ W.H. Auden, *Glück Mit Dem Kommenden Tag* (Berlin: Verlag Volk und Welt, 1987).

While this thesis cannot provide an in-depth discussion of the reception of Auden's poetry in Germany, it is interesting to note that Auden played a small role in Benn's private life – though not through any choice of his. In 1954, Benn, who was married, had begun an affair with a woman called Ursula Ziebarth. He also courted another young woman, Astrid Claes – the Auden translator – who had finished her doctoral thesis on Benn's poetry in 1953 and wrote poetry herself. Ziebarth knew of Claes, and of Benn's correspondence with her, published in 2003, suggest that she regarded Benn's dealings with the young woman suspiciously.

Auden visited Berlin in 1955. On Wednesday, 13 April 1955, Benn wrote from Berlin: 'Am Montag gehe ich zu Auden, der in der Buchhandlung Schöller vorliest'.⁴⁷⁷ In a letter sent two days later, Benn added: 'Ferner ist Auden eingelaufen u. hat mich zum Essen einladen lassen, habe aber abgesagt, gehe nicht mit fremden Leuten essen, ausserdem kann er kein Deutsch u ich kein Englisch u keinen Ponny [*pet-name UZ*] zum Dolmetscher haben wir nicht'.⁴⁷⁸ Benn was not an easy character, and evidently he did not care much for formality. It embarrassed him that he spoke no English and could not communicate with Auden, as he thought, though Auden's German would have been good enough for an interesting conversation. The dinner to which Auden had invited Benn would have been a formal, sophisticated affair, though, and evidently, Benn did not succeed in overcoming his idiosyncrasies to accommodate the famous English poet.

Another letter from Benn, written on the day of the poetry reading, shows that Ziebarth, who had only just moved to Cologne, was uneasy about Auden's visit: more precisely, about the possibility that Astrid Claes could be making an appearance at the

⁴⁷⁷ Gottfried Benn, *Hernach: Gottfried Benns Briefe an Ursula Ziebarth* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2001), 306. ['On Monday I will go see Auden, who has a reading at the Schöller bookshop'.] Auden gave a reading in the famous bookshop Marga Schöller, visiting West Berlin. It is unclear how long his stay lasted. He would read in the same venue again on 5 March 1965 during his Ford Foundation Residence.

⁴⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 307. ['Additionally, Auden has arrived and arranged for me to be invited for dinner, but I declined, I am not eating out with strangers, also he does not speak German and I no English and we have no Ponny [*pet-name UZ*] to do the interpreting'.]

bookshop as well and meet Benn – while she herself was unable to attend. On the day of the reading, Benn replied to Ziebarth, a little annoyed perhaps: ‘Von Astr. habe ich nichts gesehen u gehört. Ihr Schreiben war von Ostersonnabend aus Köln. Vermutlich ist sie gar nicht hier. Woher sollte sie wissen, dass Auden hier ist? Ich habe gar kein Interesse an ihr’.⁴⁷⁹

In 1955, Auden returned to Berlin to read from his poetry. Benn wrote to his publisher Niedermayer on 20 April 1955:

Bei *Auden* war es sehr interessant, allerdings für mich nur, ihn zu sehn und zu beobachten: Er las resp. zitierte alles Englisch. Sprach im Stehen aus dem Gedächtnis. Sehr eindrucksvolles Gesicht. Davon, daß er ein großer Säufer sein soll, habe ich nichts bemerkt. Wir waren sehr nett u. höflich miteinander, so im Umgang spricht er ganz leidlich Deutsch.⁴⁸⁰

Another letter by Benn to his publisher shows that his liking for Auden was something special for the poet whose enthusiasm was not quickly stirred: ‘[...] Sie wissen ja meine Urteile über Lyrik sind nicht objektiv, und eigentlich hat mir ja nur der Auden gefallen’.⁴⁸¹ While Auden did not find a friend or even an occasional acquaintance in Benn, the German writer turned out to be instrumental in establishing Auden’s reputation in Germany by continuously recommending his work to his publisher. Limes duly were the first to publish Auden’s work in Germany and to open up new opportunities for him. Over time, Auden accumulated a large number of acquaintances in Germany – without ever quite making close friends.

⁴⁷⁹ Ibid., 308. [‘[...] Neither heard from Astr., nor saw her. Her letter was dated Easter Sunday and sent from Cologne. She is probably not even here. How should she know about Auden being here? I am not even interested in her’.]

⁴⁸⁰ Gottfried Benn, *Augewählte Briefe* (Wiesbaden: Limes Verlag, 1957), 284–285. [‘The *Auden* event was very interesting, though for me only as far as I saw and observed him: he read everything in English. Spoke while standing and from memory. Very impressive the face. Could not find evidence for him being a great boozier. We were very nice and polite with each other, he speaks decent German ‘.]

⁴⁸¹ Benn, *Briefe an Den Limes Verlag 1948-1956*, 8:149. [‘[...] as you know, my judgements about poetry are not objective ones, and really I only liked the Auden’.]

In 1963, Auden spent some time in Germany to help with various performances of *Elegie für junge Liebende*. The premier in Munich happened on 18 January but there was also a Berlin production – with Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau as the main character Mittenhofer – later on.

3.4 AUDEN'S FORD FOUNDATION RESIDENCE IN BERLIN 1964-1965

In October 1964, Auden returned to Berlin for six months, for his 'second Berlin year': this time participating in an artists-in-residence program sponsored by the Ford Foundation. He directly succeeded Ingeborg Bachmann in this position, who had accepted the Foundation's invitation to spend 1963 in Berlin after her final separation from Max Frisch. She remained in Berlin until 1965 and may well have met Auden.

The Ford Foundation residencies were instituted in isolated West Berlin as a means to connect Berlin-based artists with artists from around the world. At the initiative of Willy Brandt, then mayor of the city, and General Lucius Clay, the military governor of the American occupation zone, the Ford Foundation decided to institute a cultural program in Berlin at the time of the construction of the Wall.

A letter to Cecil Day-Lewis Glad from August 1963 shows that, quite in tune with his idea that art 'makes nothing happen', Auden did not take the purpose of the artists-in-residence very seriously at all while being prepared to enjoy its benefits: 'Some lunatic – bless his heart! – has had the idea that it would be good for the morale of the Berliners to have "cultural figures" living in Berlin'.⁴⁸² This was the Foundation's official line coated in cynicism; and really, there was a certain madness to it: after having been employed by the American Army to research the effects of American bombs on the morale of German civilians, Auden was now paid and given board by an American foundation so that he could set a moral example for the same people.

⁴⁸² W.H. Auden, Letter to Cecil Day-Lewis [19 August 1963], CDL 1, The uncatalogued archive of Cecil Day-Lewis and Jill Balcon, Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford.

There were only a few ‘Artistical Activities’ organised that Auden was supposed to attend. He continued in his letter to Day-Lewis: ‘I go there for six months – more if I wish. The Ford Foundation pays me a handsome salary, the City of Berlin provides me with a free apartment, and I have absolutely ~~no~~ official duties. What more could one ask for?’⁴⁸³ In Auden’s case, the ‘Artistic Activities’ consisted of four readings, two lectures (‘Probleme des Opern-Librettos’, ‘Shakespeare’), and a dinner with other cultural figures.

The 1960s were a fascinating period of transition and political awakening:

[...] they saw the end of Adenauer’s State; art and literature smashed conventional taboos; in the figure of Willy Brandt politics and morality seemed reconciled; stuffy cultural institutions were opened up to a breath of fresh air; political conformity gave way to irreverent criticism which never lacked for subject matter – the Emergency Laws, the Vietnam War, Persia under the Shah, economic colonialism in the Third World and so on. Writers and students became hard-working political activists.⁴⁸⁴

Auden, however, had outgrown his own phase of political engagement. Various accounts make plain that he had no sympathy for the students’ revolt and thus his Berlin life was a domestic, productive one. Unlike during his last visit, the city’s charged atmosphere had no impact on Auden’s writing or thinking.

This time, Auden seems to have made an effort to connect with German writers though. Carpenter writes that Auden invited Günter Grass for dinner one evening. Speaking to Grass a few years ago, he confirmed that he had indeed met Auden on several occasions, but that their relationship had always remained ‘*oberflächlich*’ (‘superficial’) and ‘*kollegial*’ (‘like between colleagues’). Carpenter also points out that Auden visited the ‘weekly Literary Colloquium at the Technische Hochschule,

⁴⁸³ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁴ Heinz Ludwig Arnold, *Literary Journals in West Germany* (manuscript of an unpublished talk).

conducted by Professor Walter Höllerer'.⁴⁸⁵ He hoped to become so much a part of the institution that he could establish an 'open house', just as he had done at the American Colleges where he taught, and at Oxford. Probably Auden's reputation was not established amongst the students, however, or they were too revolutionary to call by Auden's house for tea.

Auden's acquaintance with Walter Höllerer led to Auden's invitation to an event organised by the Literarisches Colloquium Berlin (LCB) between 18 and 23 May 1965. The literary critic and writer Höllerer, who 'monopolised' Berlin's literary scene at the time, had only just founded the Colloquium in 1963. Quickly it became, and still is, a major centre of Berlin literary life. Höllerer was also a member of Gruppe 47 and founder of the literary journal *Akzente*. Being invited to the LCB, Auden found himself at the heart of the German literary scene.

While at the LCB archive no notes about the event seem to have survived, my father Heinz Ludwig Arnold, too, attended the event. He remembered seeing Auden and feeling somewhat in awe of the strange-looking, famous poet: he himself was only 25-years-old at the time, had founded his own literary journal *TEXT+KRITIK* two years previously, and was at the very beginning of his career as a critic, editor, and cultural mediator. Amazingly, he was still able to produce Höllerer's letter of invitation, which lists the other participants: among others 'Michael Hamburger, Erich Fried, Hans Magnus Enzensberger, Rudolf Hartung' – and 'Wystan Auden'. The event was supposed to begin with a discussion on the 'work and theory of Heissenbüttel' – the novelist Helmut Heißenbüttel, whose ideas about the novel as a collection of 'authentic material' rather than 'fiction' were probably thought controversial enough to spark a good debate, which could then be expanded. Sadly, my father did not remember anything about the debates nearly forty years afterwards. It would have been

⁴⁸⁵ Carpenter, *W.H. Auden*, 411.

interesting to know how Auden, who spoke German fluently but incorrectly, behaved in this kind of situation, with the personal and public discussions and debates being held in German. Given Auden's perfect capability to answer complex questions in a lively manner during the Deutschlandfunk interview, it seems likely that he would not have kept back with his opinions, even in the 'foreign' language.

The Deutschlandfunk interview with Horst Bienek, a German writer, must have been recorded during Auden's Ford Foundation residence. The 25-minute-long conversation allows one to judge Auden's German first hand – without having to rely on secondary accounts – and thus constitutes a most useful source. This is crucial because most accounts give the impression that his German was only rudimentary. Firchow writes for instance: 'How good was Auden's German? His spoken German was heavily accented, ungrammatical but intelligible, definitely good enough to use for effective communication in most ordinary situations'. (Fir, 225) This seems an exaggeration to me. Auden never spoke flawless German, but his accent was not too bad and his grammatical mistakes rarely prevented him from expressing himself fully. Golo Mann, too, thought that Auden grasped every nuance of the language.

By 1965, Auden was certainly very proficient and fluent, and so confident in his command of the language that he frequently interrupted Horst Bienek during the interview whenever his questions 'just wouldn't do'. Auden's impatience was not unjustified, as Bienek is not at his best in this interview. Most of his questions are vague, badly phrased, and suggest bad preparation. This is most obvious when he asks whether Auden was the first poet to have become Professor of Poetry at Oxford, a post inaugurated in the 18th century. On the whole, Bienek's insight into Auden's life and work seems based on clichés more than on his personal engagement. As a result of this, Auden's answers are just as unoriginal, German versions of his token replies in various other English interviews.

Most interesting about the interview, perhaps, is to hear how much Bienek's praise of Auden's poem 'Spain' inflamed Auden. He reacted agitatedly, protesting vehemently and loudly, and uttering his well-known assessment of the poem as being dishonest without further qualification. Even in German, Auden was able to quickly dodge unwanted questions about his political phase and to change the topic. Language-wise, I have no doubt that Auden would have stood his ground in any German discussion round. Content-wise, it is hard to tell how much he would have engaged with Heißenbüttel's work in preparation, but then it is equally unclear – given that the discussion seems not to have been documented by the LCB – how long Heißenbüttel would have been discussed.

In reply to Bienek's questions about his Ford Foundation residence and how it felt to be back in a city that had shaped him so much as a young man – and whether he felt that Berlin had changed much – Auden stated:

Aber natürlich, Sie wissen alle das [*sic*] alte wilhelmische Stadt ist weg und es ist kein [*sic*] Hauptstadt mehr, aber natürlich es war ein großer Erlebnis für mir, mit alle meine [*sic*] Erinnerungen von Berlin wieder hier zu sein und auch, für der [*sic*] Arbeit! Das Klima ist so herrlich. Und ich habe der [*sic*] Berliner so gerne, er ist nicht verendet, diese Kessheit, der Humor, das hatt ich sehr gerne.⁴⁸⁶

Auden's use of the word 'Kessheit' is noteworthy as it is not exactly common – but it is accurate as a description of Berlin humour: cheeky, and difficult to handle for those lacking in self-irony. Auden clearly liked this Berlin humour and discovered that it had not at all changed since 1929. Asked if he would return to Germany in the near future, Auden stated: 'Das weiß ich noch nicht, ich glaube, dass nächstes Jahr ich muss hier kommen, weil die *Bassariden* sollen in der Berlin Oper präpariert werden [*sic*], nicht und

⁴⁸⁶ App. G, p. 292. ['Oh yes, of course, you know, the old Wilhelmine part of the city is gone, and it is not a capital any longer, but of course it is a great experience for me, to have returned here with all my memories of Berlin, and for the work, too. The climate is so wonderful. And I like the 'Berliner' so much, he has not changed, the pertness, the humour, I liked that very much'. (Ibid., p. 302.)]

natürlich ich muss da sein'.⁴⁸⁷ Work on those Henze operas whose libretti Auden had written would bring him back to Germany again and again: not only to Berlin. But he never returned to Berlin for a prolonged period of time.

Auden's second long visit to the German capital seems to have been a strangely uncanny and not overly happy time for Auden. Not only the city had changed, Auden himself had. In the few sources giving one a sense of his stay, his nostalgia for the old Berlin days is tangible. Between 1964 and 1965, Auden kept a second Berlin diary that is even less journal-like than the first diary. What is most reminiscent of the 1929 journal though – strangely and uncomfortably so – is a list of 'dirty German words'. Unlike in the first diary, where the list 'Boys had in Berlin' was jotted down at the end of the journal, this list stands at the very beginning of the second diary. While it is unnecessary to reproduce the entire list of 25 words, it is probably enough to say that these cover the ground between 'Brustwarze' (nipple) and 'im Arsch ficken' (to fuck in the bum).

That Auden, approaching sixty, would have set down to compile a list of German smut is most curious. While this indicates his nostalgia for that time of his life when he could engage most openly with sexuality, it also shows that – in his mind, not in public – the German language always remained the language of a world far removed from polite or intellectual society.

Actively, too, Auden tried to reconnect with his old Berlin Kiez. Carpenter states that Auden found a way to get in touch with his former Berlin flame Gerhart Meyer and that Meyer agreed to a meeting. That this encounter ruptured Auden's memories of the old Berlin days is evident and not very surprising: 'He hadn't just put on weight – has was *grotesque* like someone in a circus'.⁴⁸⁸ Auden also stated that 'the city of my

⁴⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 291. ['I don't know yet, I think I will have to come back next year because the *Bassarids* are meant to be staged at the Berlin opera, and of course I will have to be there'. (Ibid., p. 301.)]

⁴⁸⁸ Carpenter, *W.H. Auden*, 411.

youth has now gone – the juke boy and rock-and-roll have ruined it’, which again suggests that he was not able to see the city for what it was at present.⁴⁸⁹ Clearly, Auden was not happy during this phase and his ‘chemical life’ began to take its toll on his health and ability to concentrate.

We are granted a little glimpse into Auden’s state in the mid-60s in an interview conducted by me on 31 July 2014 with the German music and theatre critic Klaus Geitel. He was born in 1924 and met Auden repeatedly over the course of his stay in Berlin. I first became aware of Geitel when, looking through the Mann family autographs at the Monacensia archive in Munich, a letter caught my attention. On 15 December 1965, Auden wrote to Erika Mann as, shortly after leaving Berlin, he had received a letter from Geitel whom he knew since their initial meeting on Ischia through Hans Werner Henze. Geitel was also a close friend of Ingeborg Bachmann.

Since 1958, Geitel had been writing for the German daily newspaper *Die Welt* and it was in this capacity that he appealed to Auden. On 12 December 1965, Geitel wrote to Auden from his Berlin flat – where he still lives today, fifty years later – apparently full of hope that his friend would be able to pacify his enraged wife. Erika had taken offence to a sentence in a review by a young journalist, Ulrich Schnappauf, who had written in an article about the infamous Mephisto case that Erika’s relationship with her brother Klaus Mann had been more than that of siblings:

Lieber Wystan,
 Du weisst ja, wie unerquicklich Prozesse sind. Und nun ist ein Freund von mir und Kollege, dessen Arbeiten ich ebenso schätze wie seine Anständigkeit, in eine sehr unangenehme Sache hineingetappt. Frau Erika Mann bedroht ihn mit einem Strafprozess wegen Verleumdung – und ausserdem meine Zeitung DIE WELT mit einem Zivilprozess.
 Der kleine Ulrich Schnappauf hat in einem Bericht über den Prozess von Gründgens’ Adoptivsohn Gorski gegen die Veröffentlichung von Manns ‘Mephisto’ eine Formulierung

⁴⁸⁹ Ibid., 410–411.

benutzt, für die er nun eventuell mit Gefängnis bedroht wird. Er schrieb – ohne sich Böses dabei zu denken: ‘Hat Gründgens das Verhältnis Klaus-Erika zerstört, das mehr als bloß geschwisterlich war?’.

Auf die kühne Idee, man könne aus diesem Satz den Vorwurf des Inzests herauslesen, ist er – im Gegensatz zu Frau Mann – nicht gekommen. Und ich übrigens auch nicht. (App. D8)

Geitel’s way of arguing is unconvincing, given that the sentence in question is most certainly ambiguous at the very least: he claims that neither he nor the journalist had been aware of how it might be perceived. Geitel’s defence of the young journalist is rather patronising, too. He argues that young people are stuck in their minds to the exclusion of all other faculties, calling this a purity and integrity of his imagination and claiming even that ‘für den kleinen Schnappauf gibt es gar nichts anderes’. At the same time, Geitel adopts a nearly threatening tone towards the end of the letter, stating that through bringing up the whole affair in the context of a court case, the memory of Klaus Mann would be soiled – while pointing out that in the past he had reviewed Mann’s books very favourably.

Clearly, Auden was not convinced by this. It is interesting to note his complete loyalty to his wife here, although it is not quite clear to me how much Auden liked Geitel before receiving this letter – let alone afterwards. In any case though, Auden he did not try to influence Erika while making plain his own opinion that of course she was right in feeling that the sentence was ‘obviously criminally libellous’. He simply forwarded Geitel’s letter to her:

Dear Erika:

The enclosed letter is self-explanatory. I have written to Mr Geitel pointing out that, whatever Mr Schnappauf may have intended to say, for every reader of Die Welt, his sentence will only have one meaning. I know Geitel quite well and I believe him when he says that Schnappauf didn’t intend to say what in fact he said. What really puzzles me is how on earth the editor of Die Welt could have let it pass, when it is so obviously criminally libellous.

Anyway, i have done all I can. What a damned unpleasant business. Rumors reach me that your health is a little better and that you are no longer bed-ridden. I do hope this is true. (App. D8)

And he added in handwriting: 'I am fine and busy. Alles gutes [*sic*] for Christmas and the New Year. Love, Wystan'. To this, Erika Mann replied on 14 January 1966, three years before her death. It is the last letter to her husband which I have been able to find. She was still very ill, unable to leave her bed, and explained that she had to write in German because her secretary was on holiday and the replacement did not speak English:

Herzlichst danke ich Dir für Deinen guten Brief und die beiliegende Epistel des Herrn Klaus Geitel. Aber ich bin im Zusammenhang mit diesem verflixten Mephisto-Prozess so vielfach verleumdet worden, dass ich irgendwo einmal einen Punkt setzen musste. Und da, wie Du weisst, 'Die Welt' die meistgelesene Zeitung Deutschlands ist, entschloss ich mich, den Punkt ebendort zu setzen. Eine weitere Klage meinerseits läuft gegen die 'Kölner Rundschau' und den Journalisten Werner Helwig. Herr Helwig hatte sich nicht entblödet, Folgendes zu schreiben: 'Diese Ehe (zwischen Gründgens und mir) musste missglücken. Erika hatte nur eine Frau, und die hiess Klaus'. Kann man das überbieten? Dazu kommt, dass Gründgens diesen Prozess nicht wünschte und ihn nicht angestrengt hat, obwohl der 'Mephisto' über zwei Monate vor seinem Selbstmord öffentlich angekündigt worden war. Der unfähige und stellunglose Herr Gorski, mit dem Gründgens seit langem nicht mehr gut stand, erhoffte sich von seinem schmutzigen Vorgehen einen Haufen leuchtender publicity, die er denn auch bekam.
Thanks again, alles Gute
And love. (App. D9)

The Mephisto case, which had been the original cause for the various libel cases Mann mentions in her letter, was filed by Peter Gorski, Gründgens's adoptive son. Apparently, Erika knew that Gründgens and Gorski did not get on very well around the time of her first husband's 'suicide' – he died of an overdose of sleeping pills and the cause of his death was never clearly determined – and thought that Gründgens himself would never have wanted the case to happen. Still, the court agreed with the suitor only two months

after Auden and Mann exchanged their letters, and two years later the petition for a revision of the case was declined.

Interested in the relationship between Auden and Klaus Geitel, I visited the nearly 90-year-old man in his Berlin flat. Immediately, we began an hour-long conversation about Auden. He told me, how he met Auden on Ischia through Hans Werner Henze. Geitel had met Henze in Paris in 1951 after which both developed a deep and lasting friendship; Auden and Henze had met in 1953. Henze was then lodging with an Italian farmer and his wife, Geitel said, and relying on money from the composer William Walton, who lived around the corner and every now and then left cash on Henze's piano.

Talking about the collaboration between Auden, Chester Kallman, and Henze, Klaus Geitel conveyed Henze's suspicion that Kallman might have been the more important librettist of the two. He described the impression Kallman made on him whenever they met, feeling that he suffered greatly from being constantly pushed aside and taking the second place after Auden. Geitel also acknowledged that despite this impression, he himself had always been happy when he could be alone with Auden, whom he said he liked very much, because of Kallman's fervent attempts to put himself in the foreground. About Auden specifically, Geitel said that he was true to himself and did not diverge a centimetre from what he thought was appropriate and right – that he was always very polite but absolutely resolute when it came to what he did and did not want.

Most of all though, we talked about Auden's time in Berlin during the Ford Foundation residence. During the year, Geitel met Auden occasionally, though not often. Before Auden's arrival, Geitel had been asked to organise a car for the poet, a tricky undertaking because Auden did not provide or have the right paperwork. In the

end, a friend who ran a car hire firm was able to help Geitel out and the car was produced – the cause of more drama:

Dann passierte das Unglück. Sein erster Auftritt in Berlin war hier bei mir, da hatte ich ein paar Leute eingeladen, und er saß als König in der Mitte und wurde bestaunt und beglötzt und belächelt und so. Aber er ging ja, wie Sie wissen, jeden Abend um zehne nach Hause und bis dahin hatte er wohl schon genügend getankt, so dass wir alle fünf oder sechs ihn rausbrachten an sein Auto. Mensch, wir hätten ihn natürlich gar nicht fahren lassen sollen, wirklich, hatten aber nicht gesehen, wie viel er getrunken hatte. Und er fuhr jedenfalls los. Und am nächsten Morgen kam die Polizei. Er war angezeigt worden, weil er so bibberig fuhr – er hatte keinen überfahren oder angefahren, er hatte nur so deutliche Fahrschwierigkeiten gezeigt, dass ein anderer Fahrer auf ihn aufmerksam geworden ist und die Polizei alarmierte. Und dann gab es ein großes Hin- und Her zwischen der Polizei und der einladenden Stadt Berlin, die Gastgeberin war. Die haben das dann alles unter den Teppich gekehrt und er musste das Auto wieder abgeben. Es war schon sehr unangenehm alles.⁴⁹⁰

Geitel said that this episode was ‘ungemütlich’ (uncomfortable) for his relationship with Auden and that he felt doubly guilty: because he had organised the car for Auden and because he had not noticed his state of advanced inebriation.

And things continued to be difficult for Geitel. Soon afterwards, Auden had his first public reading in the ‘Amerika Haus’. Documents about Auden’s residence I received from the Ford Foundation archive show that the reading happened on 24 March 1965: ‘An Evening with W.H. Auden’ with W. Engel and K. Geitel. For Geitel as a host, it was a terrible experience since, as he put it, there was no way of guiding

⁴⁹⁰ All quotations from my interview with Klaus Geitel conducted on 31 July 2014 are direct transcriptions from the audio file. A version of this passage has been published, with Klaus Geitel’s kind permission: Hannah Arnold, “Klaus Geitel at Forty and Ninety,” *The W.H. Auden Society Newsletter* 37 (October 2014): 20–27. [‘Then the disaster took its course. His first performance in Berlin was here in my flat, I invited a few people and he sat kinglike in the middle and was being marveled at and stared at and smiled at and so on. As you know, it was his habit to go home around ten every evening, but until that time he must have had quite enough to drink, so that all five or six of us escorted him outside to his car. Gosh, of course we should not have let him drive, really, but we hadn’t realised quite how much he had had to drink. And so he drove off. And the next morning, the police came. He had been reported because he had driven in such a wobbly way – he hadn’t run into anyone or hit anybody but had shown such difficulty at driving that another driver had noticed it and alarmed the police. Then there was a big to-do between the police and the city of Berlin, his host, who ended up brushing everything under the carpet. And he had to give up the car again. It was all rather unpleasant, the whole affair’.]

Auden during the reading: he did exactly what he wanted. It all began with a dinner invitation Auden extended to Geitel before the reading, to discuss details:

Er hatte gekocht, das war eine seiner Lieblingsbeschäftigungen, außer Gedichte schreiben. Während ich mit Lampenfieber schon viel aufgeregter war. Er war ja überhaupt nicht aufgeregter. Aber da ich ja gar nicht wusste, wie es gehen würde, aß ich also seine Rouladen, oder was er da gemacht hatte, und die Zeit verging und ich sagte, wir müssen doch rechtzeitig da sein!⁴⁹¹

They just about made it to the reading in time, where ‘ein Fritze vom Goethehaus’ (‘some guy from the Goethehaus’ – the Goethe Institute, and W. Engel, I assume) felt he was supposed to be on stage as well, which seems to have been correct according to the programme. Auden, however, was not happy with this because he did not know the man. In the end, he did join Auden and Geitel on stage but was completely ignored by Auden. Geitel continued:

Ich hielt also den einleitenden Vortrag über Auden oder so, und Auden las dann ein paar Gedichte in English, und ich las dann die Übersetzungen dazu. Und dann, als ich dachte, nun ist die Sache bald aus, griff Auden auf einmal in die Brieftasche und zog ein endloslanges Gedicht hervor, das ich gar nicht kannte, noch nie gesehen hatte. Und das drückte er mir nun in die Hand – die deutsche Fassung von dem Gedicht – und ich musste das nun dem Publikum improvisiert vorlesen, ohne es gelesen zu haben vorher.⁴⁹²

The most extraordinary bit of the story is that – because by now, it was ‘past his bedtime’ – Auden fell asleep on stage while Geitel was reading out the long German translation and only woke up when the audience started applauding. After this, Geitel did not see Auden very often.

⁴⁹¹ [‘He had cooked, that was one of his favourite occupations, apart from writing poems. While I was already much more nervous, with my stage fright. He wasn’t nervous at all. But since I did not know how it would all work out, I simply ate my roulades, or whatever it was he had made, and time passed and I said, but we have to get there on time!’]

⁴⁹² [‘I think I gave an introductory talk on Auden, and then Auden read a few poems in English and I the corresponding translations. And then, at some point, when I thought that the thing was going to be over soon, Auden suddenly reached in to his briefcase and pulled out an endless poem, which I didn’t even know, hadn’t ever seen. And he put it into my hand – the German version of the poem – and I now had to read to the audience improvising, without having read it through before.’]

Finally, I asked Geitel whether he knew if Auden regularly attended church in Berlin, and, if yes, which one. Geitel only said: ‘von Religion und Kirche war hier nie die Rede’ (‘he never talked about religion or church here’). Geitel, too, voiced his impression that hit by nostalgia, Auden was trying to re-live his old Berlin life. This did not involve going to church but to the same kind of bars as back in the day, borderline illegal, where he ‘felt at home’ (‘Er war ja ein Abenteurer innerlich’ – ‘he was an adventurer on the inside’). Geitel thought that Auden had not been disappointed as much by the city as by himself: he was too old, as Geitel put it, to ‘loaf around’ with ‘all these young people’ whose company he so liked.

While initially, the Ford Foundation residency had seemed to be the perfect opportunity for revisiting Berlin to Auden, he ended up feeling rather isolated, struggling to make new friends and began to attract negative attention with his eccentricities, as he would when returning to Oxford before his death.

3.5 AUDEN AND HANNAH ARENDT

Perhaps the story of Auden’s Berlin adventures had always had something very sad about it. After Auden’s death, his close friend of late age, Hannah Arendt, wrote in her obituary ‘Remembering Wystan H. Auden’ about his longing and propensity for great love, which had been disappointed so repeatedly throughout his life:

[...] here I think lies the key both to his extraordinary unhappiness and to the extraordinary, intensity, of his poetry. Now, with the sad wisdom of remembrance, 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.⁴⁹³

Auden’s Weimar Berlin adventures were no light-hearted pass-time. Especially in retrospect, after the whole debacle of Auden’s private life had unfolded, his relationships

⁴⁹³ Hannah Arendt, “Remembering Wystan H. Auden,” in *W.H. Auden: A Tribute*, ed. Stephen Spender (New York: Macmillan, 1975), 183.

with the boys – his lasting, stubborn infatuation with Gerhart Meyer – seem sadly prophetic of how things would continue in the long run. Arendt, too, felt that Auden’s love for Berlin was not triggered by the golden elements of the golden 1920s, but, much rather, that there was something Arendt calls ‘tristesse’ in Auden that resonated with the imperfect, the dark, the intensely vibrant elements of Berlin’s gay scene:

I think that it was this animal *tristesse* and its ‘dance while you can’ that made Auden feel so attracted and almost at home in Berlin during the famous twenties, where the *Carpe diem* was practiced daily in many variations.⁴⁹⁴

Despite their late acquaintance, Arendt came to understand Auden strikingly well. His proposal to her – very shortly after the death of her beloved husband and not long before his own – was an expression of the curious closeness that developed between them around the codex of a shared ‘formal order’. Arendt, like the Manns, and like Auden, was old-fashioned when it came to manners. More than is true in their case, exile had made her somewhat distant and cautious, and grateful for friends who spoke German and were familiar with the German culture she was missing:

Both by accident and by choice, Hannah Arendt was schooled in a German tradition of exalted solitude that sometimes baffled her American friends. She had lost her father at six [... and] even before she left Hitler’s Germany and became a refugee in Paris, acquiring the sense of ‘homelessness’ of which she often spoke, she had impressed her fellow students at the University of Marburg as exceptional: ‘shy and withdrawn, with strikingly beautiful features and lonely eyes she stood out immediately’ [...].⁴⁹⁵

Auden, in a way her American friends could not, was able to sometimes share Arendt’s isolation with his matching love and even nostalgia for the old Germany.

⁴⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁵ Carol Brightman, “Introduction: An Epistolary Romance,” in *Between Friends: The Correspondence of Hannah Arendt and Mary McCarthy, 1949-1975*, ed. Carol Brightman (London: Secker & Warburg, 1995), xvii–xviii.

The Berg Collection of the New York Public Library owns a set of red pocket diaries in which Auden recorded all sorts of events: hair cuts, the appearance of the first morning glories in July, or a meeting of the ‘Women’s Natural Body Association’.⁴⁹⁶ Most conspicuous, though, is the number of entries mentioning ‘Hannah’. A first one – in the 1959 notebook, on ‘Jan 10 (6.30)’ – refers to ‘H. Arendt’. In 1962:

Wednesday 21 March: 7.0 Hannah
 Sunday 16 December: 6.30 Hannah
 Friday 28 December: Hannah.⁴⁹⁷

Arendt, who, at that stage, had spent most of her life in ‘exile’, consciously distinguished between old friends and new ones. Auden was counted amongst the latter:

I met Auden late in life at an age when the easy knowledgeable intimacy of friendships concluded in one’s youth can no longer be attained, because not enough life is left, or expected to be left, to share with each other. Thus we were good friends but not intimate friends.⁴⁹⁸

Both Auden and Arendt resembled each other in their acceptance of that isolation necessitated by their professions as ‘thinkers’ and through their life on a ‘foreign’ continent; they recognised this. Thus, when writing Auden’s obituary, Arendt remembered ‘a certain reserve in him that would discourage familiarity, not that I tried it ever; I rather gladly respected it as the necessary secretiveness of a great poet [...]’.⁴⁹⁹ Arendt was one of the women Auden got closest to during his life. Spender wrote: ‘The women he knew best – Elizabeth Mayer, Ursula Niebuhr, Hannah Arendt – were to him priestesses like Moneta in Keat’s ‘The fall of Hyperion’.⁵⁰⁰

⁴⁹⁶ There are other curious entries: at the back of the 1963 diary, above the line ‘December Cash Account’, Auden noted: ‘It’s a parody of Kraut Prose’. But the diaries are truly revealing, too. There are lists of names and addresses of Auden’s acquaintances, among these various Germans he must have met during his various visits to Germany: Ernst Schnabel; Siegfried Lenz; Prof Alfred Kurella at the Berlin Akademie der Künste; Heiner Müller; Hans Bunge, who was trained as an actor by Bertolt Brecht.

⁴⁹⁷ W.H. Auden, 10 pocket diaries 1959 – 1973, 10 v. in 1 box, Berg Collection, New York Public Library, W.H. Auden collection of papers.

⁴⁹⁸ Golo Mann, ‘A Memoir,’ 181.

⁴⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰⁰ Stephen Spender, *Journals, 1939-1983* (London: Faber & Faber, 1985), 367.

Auden's respect for Arendt as a thinker is evident from one of his last letters to her, written on 5 July 1973. Previously, he had expressed his wish that she would come visit him in Oxford:

Dear Hannah:

Delighted to get your letter. I, too, miss you very much. I'm sorry you have a 'thing' about Oxford. I should so love to see you as a visiting Fellow of All Souls, even though that would mean enduring A.L. Rowse's lunatic conversation [!]. After all, you are one of the most intelligent persons now living. (App. H10)

While it is unclear how Auden and Arendt met in the first place, they moved in similar circles in New York and had mutual friends and acquaintances: the circles in which émigrés moved were closely-knit. As a result, it was inevitable that both old friendships and old feuds re-emerged on the new continent together with the émigrés themselves. This was the case with Hannah Arendt and Auden's brother-in-law, Golo Mann.

The story begins in the middle of Auden's Berlin year 1928/1929, when Hannah Arendt completed her doctoral thesis in philosophy at Heidelberg University and Golo Mann began his, taking over Arendt's place as Prof. Karl Jaspers's supervisé(e). Jaspers supervised both Arendt's thesis 'Der Liebesbegriff bei Augustin' ('Augustine's concept of love')⁵⁰¹ and Mann's thesis 'Das Einzelne und das Ich in Hegels Philosophie' ('The singular and the I in the philosophy of Hegel'), which he defended in 1932. While the two did not overlap at Heidelberg, they were both profoundly influenced by Jaspers and kept up a correspondence with their professor long after completing their doctorate. Of course, they also came to hear about each other. But while Hannah Arendt remained Jaspers's pet-student, the relationship between Golo Mann and Jaspers was not easy and ended in bitter dispute.

The first problem arising between Jaspers and Mann was Jaspers's occasional criticism of Thomas Mann's writing. Although Golo Mann did not have an easy

⁵⁰¹ This is interesting in connection with Arendt's comment on Auden's lovelessness, referred to earlier. Clearly, love as a phenomenon interested both Arendt and Auden.

relationship with his father either, he still reacted defensively. Worse problems were caused by Mann's increasingly critical attitude towards Hannah Arendt. In 1951, Jaspers had rebuked him for writing a moderately critical review of *The Origins of Totalitarianism* and corresponded with Arendt about it, trying to explain Mann's 'difficult' character to her. It was ten years later, when Mann criticised Arendt's way of reporting about the Eichmann Process, that Jaspers finally broke with him and even planned to write a book entitled *Vom unabhängigen Denken. Hannah Arendt und ihre Kritiker*, which never appeared. The notes, however, show that this would have been a most unfairly critical account of Golo Mann.

Clearly, Jaspers felt acutely the difficulty of his situation, caught in between his two famous pupils, but finally took Arendt's side. In 1963, Jaspers wrote to her: 'Zwischen Golo und mir ist etwas gerissen'.⁵⁰² Other intellectuals also involved themselves in the dispute: Adorno, for instance, who commented positively on Golo Mann's polemic against Hannah Arendt in a letter to the editor of the *Neue Rundschau*, Rudolf Hartung.⁵⁰³ Both Mann and Arendt would have known of each other's connection with Auden, who, through both, was exposed to and possibly influenced by Jaspers. There was a direct link, too: Jaspers had founded the journal *Die Wandlung* in 1945, which he edited from Heidelberg, and both Auden and Arendt contributed – so did Thomas Mann, T.S. Eliot, and Bert Brecht. Elisabeth Young-Bruehl points out that '*Die Wandlung* war kein deutsches, sondern ein europäisches Magazin; es brachte Europa nach Deutschland'.⁵⁰⁴ This is correct, but one should add that it brought Europe to Germany via the US as its contributions were for the most part by emigrants and refugees.

⁵⁰² Lahme, *Golo Mann*, 317. ['Something broke between Golo and myself.']

⁵⁰³ *Ibid.*, 301.

⁵⁰⁴ Elisabeth Young-Bruehl, *Hannah Arendt: Leben, Werk und Zeit* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1991), 307. ['*Die Wandlung* was not a German but a European magazine; it brought Europe to Germany'.]

Auden and Arendt shared another friend in the theologian Paul Tillich, whom Auden knew well and whose work he liked very much. While Auden respected both Tillich's and Arendt's work, the two distinctly disliked each other's approaches and finally agreed not to discuss work at all, apparently at the suggestion of Tillich's mistress Hilde Fränkel, who was one of Arendt's closest friends: 'Tillichs christlicher Sozialismus erschien Arendt zutiefst widersprüchlich, und ihr existenzphilosophisches Studium bei Martin Heidegger, vor dem Tillich kaum Respekt hatte, war in seinen Augen ein Irrtum, den sie besser schnell überwinden sollte'.⁵⁰⁵

Both Tillich and Arendt did however agree on one important matter: that, after the end of WWII, the German people should not be held responsible collectively for the crimes committed under Nazi-rule ('Kollektivschuld'). This opinion was opposed to the position held by Erika Mann, for instance. Generally, the German 'Schuldfrage' was the most discussed topic between members of the German exile community. In the post-war years, *Die Wendung*, whose title alone implies the journal's purpose as an organ of renewal and change, became a major organ for these discussions. Questions about guilt and punishment were omnipresent and clearly influenced both Auden's and Arendt's thinking profoundly.

Auden, whose response to visiting Germany after it had been defeated in the war had been silent, careful, and hidden, and Arendt, who was emotionally involved in these questions, both sought to '[...] articulate responses to the catastrophic events of the 20th century that are at every moment responsive to the incapacities of language in the presence of outrageous brutality', as Susannah Young-ah Gottlieb puts it.⁵⁰⁶ In *Regions of Sorrow: Anxiety and Messianism in Hannah Arendt and W.H. Auden* (2003), Gottlieb shows convincingly that Auden and Arendt influenced each other's thinking significantly and

⁵⁰⁵ Ibid., 340. ['Tillich's Christian Socialism seem to be full of contradictions, while her studies under Martin Heidegger, whom Tillich did not respect much, of existentialist philosophy seemed a mistake in his eyes, which she should move on from as quickly as possible']

⁵⁰⁶ Gottlieb, *Regions of Sorrow*, 5.

thought similarly anyway. Evident signs of this are that Arendt used a quote from Auden's dedication to Stephen Spender of *The Orators* – 'Private faces in public places | Are wiser and nicer | Than public faces in private places'⁵⁰⁷ – as her own preface to *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, to only name one example. Auden cites her work on numerous occasions in *A Certain World* and *The Dyer's Hand*. He dedicated *Forewords and Afterwords* to Arendt while in turn, she dedicated 'Thinking and Moral Considerations' to Auden.

While even Edward Mendelson does not know how Auden and Arendt first met, the red notebooks prove that they were personally acquainted by 1956 and began to meet on a regular basis then. They were well suited and it is not hard to see why they got on so well: they could argue on a par, politely, but to the point. Auden was 'German' enough and philosopher enough to be interesting to Arendt. Young-Bruehl states that Arendt felt at home with those friends 'mit denen man Deutsch sprechen konnte, die Freunde, die auf ein Goethe-Zitat mit einem Heine-Zitat antworten konnten, die deutsche Märchen kannten'.⁵⁰⁸ This would have been true for Auden, 'wahldeutsch' as he was, and well versed in the German culture.

By Christmas 1960, Auden frequently called by at Arendt's place and was duly invited for dinner if he overstayed his time. Arendt wrote to a friend: 'This time of the year is hectic as usual. Even I have to give a dinner party – you can see how bad it is. For Auden and the Lowells and Erich Heller. They probably all hate each other, I hope not, but if they do, I can't help it'.⁵⁰⁹ Four years later, Auden had reached a special status amongst her friends: 'I haven't seen many people, only Dwight and Auden'.⁵¹⁰

At some point in 1960, Auden called Hannah Arendt to thank her for her book *Vita activa* or, in English, *The Human Condition* (1958), which had made a special

⁵⁰⁷ Auden, *The Orators: An English Study*, 5.

⁵⁰⁸ Young-Bruehl, *Hannah Arendt*, 18. ['[...] with whom one could speak German, those friends, who could answer a Goethe quote with a Heine quote, who knew German fairy-tales']

⁵⁰⁹ Carol Brightman, ed., *Between Friends: The Correspondence of Hannah Arendt and Mary McCarthy, 1949-1975* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1995), 108.

⁵¹⁰ *Ibid.*

impression on him. He also wrote a very personal review of the book, entitled ‘Thinking What We Are Doing’:

Every now and then, I come across a book which gives me the impression of having been written for me. In the case of a work of art, the author seems to have created a world for which I have been waiting all my life; in the case of a ‘think’ book, it seems to answer precisely those questions which I have been putting to myself. My attitude toward such a book, therefore, is one of jealous possessiveness. I don’t want anyone else to read it; I want to keep it all to myself. Miss Hannah Arendt’s *The Human Condition* belongs to this small and select class [...]. (PIV, 184)

He continued by voicing his opinion, echoing to a degree Benn’s criticism of *The Age of Anxiety*, that men of all ages feel ‘anxious’ about ‘the age in which they live’ but that their age was one that a much greater number of individuals was truly worried (Ibid.). Most interestingly, Auden then stated:

It would not be inaccurate, I believe, to call *The Human Condition* an essay in Etymology, a re-examination of what we think we mean, what we actually mean and what we ought to mean when we use such words as nature, world, labor, work, action, private, public, social, political, etc. (PIV, 184)

Fascinating about this is Auden’s praise of a method he himself practiced. As, for instance, in his contributions to *Decision*, he always argued for the necessity to define words before using them – hence his love for the OED. This was partially what constituted Auden’s idea of protecting the purity of language, and what would have predisposed Auden and Arendt as intellectual friends.

While his review of *The Human Condition* is exclusively positive, Auden must have raised some questions about Arendt’s assumptions in private, because on 14 February 1960, she replied with a two-sided, deliberated letter. Young-Bruehl suggests that she might have been relieved by Auden’s constructive criticism, since a letter from Arendt to

her friend and confidant, Mary McCarthy, shows that she was quite uncomfortable about his unrestricted praise.⁵¹¹

The ensuing debate between the two thinkers centred on the concept of forgiveness:

Dear Wystan Auden –

I just read the Falstaff piece – had some trouble getting the old issue of *Encounter* –, think it is quite wonderful, have a number of points I'd like to raise, especially about Greek tragedy; but am writing now because of 'forgiving.' (App. H1)

In *Later Auden*, Mendelson writes about Auden's interest in *The Human Condition* that it was a book '[...] which he evidently valued less because it gave him new ideas than because it systematically expounded his existing ideas about vocation and alienation, the private and public worlds, and the relation between speech and responsibility'.⁵¹² Related to this was Auden's singular interest in the phenomenon of forgiveness, which he granted a central place in his thinking and in his poetry.

A textual search for occurrences of 'forgiveness' throughout Auden's oeuvre reflects this. As early as 1929, in '1929', Auden recognised the importance of self-forgiveness, 'saying in thinking':

In grown man also, may see in face
In his day-thinking and in his night-thinking
Is wareness and is fear of other,
Alone in flesh, himself no friend.

He say 'We must forgive and forget',
Forgetting saying but is unforgiving
And unforgiving is in his living;
Body reminds in him to loving,
Reminds but takes no further part [...]. (CP, 47)

⁵¹¹ Young-Bruehl, *Hannah Arendt*, 509.

⁵¹² Mendelson, *Later Auden*, 260.

In the poem, being unforgiving is linked with self-hate and the growth of a death wish. The I, having made himself aware of this connection, decides to change his life and to practice forgiveness, which is equated with love.

In 1934, Auden still presented the inability to forgive both oneself and others as a central human problem and cause for social misery in ‘So, under the local images your blood has conjured’:

We show you man caught in the trap of his terror, destroying himself.
[...]
Man divided always and restless always: afraid and unable to forgive:
Unable to forgive his parents, or his first voluptuous rectal sins [...].
(Eng.A, 281)

The curious ‘rectal sins’ are a reference to Auden’s least favourite of Berlin memorabilia, a rectal fissure, which seem to have triggered a shift in Auden’s thinking.

His ‘Letter to a Wound’, printed in *The Orators*, is a most strange account of this, describing Auden’s transformation of what remained of his shame about the homoerotic practices he enjoyed (‘rectal sins’) into a self-assured pride projected onto his ‘wound’. Auden remembers his feelings after seeing a doctor, who must have told him that the fissure would never quite heal, meaning that he should never have anal sex again: ‘Outside I saw nothing, walked, not daring to think. I’ve lost everything, I’ve failed. I wish I was dead’.⁵¹³ His suffering allows him to gain new insights, as described in ‘Letter to a Wound’, and he is able to forgive himself and accept the wound: ‘And now, here we are, together, intimate, mature’.⁵¹⁴ Self-acceptance is equated with growth and maturity.

In ‘In Memory of Ernst Toller’ (1939), Auden again establishes a connection between suffering and forgiveness, suggesting that only suffering can effect a profound change in one’s thinking and thus trigger true forgiveness:

⁵¹³ Auden, *The Orators: An English Study*, 37.

⁵¹⁴ *Ibid.*

[...] the friends who are sad and the enemies who rejoice
 Are chased by their shadows lightly away from the grave
 Of one who was egotistical and brave,
 Lest they should learn without suffering how to forgive. (CP, 247)

In 'Music is international' (1947), Auden acknowledges that

To forgive is not so
 Simple as it is made to sound; a lot
 Of time will be quite wasted, many
 Promising days end badly, and again
 We shall offend [...] (CP, 340),

after having already advised Elisabeth Mann and Giuseppe Antonio Borgese at their 1939 wedding that they should 'Kindly to each other turn, | Every timid vice forgive' ('Epithalamion', Eng.A, 456). With similar optimism, Auden concludes about the human species in 'The common life' (1963):

Still, they do
 manage to forgive impossible behavior,
 to endure by some miracle

 conversational tics and larval habits
 without wincing (were you to die,
 I should miss yours). (CP, 714)

Finally, in Auden's famous 'Agape' poem 'A Summer Night' – written in 1933 of all years – the reader is urged at the end of the poem to '[f]orgive the murderer in his glass' (CP, 117). This is one of Auden's more prophetic poetic moments, especially if we return to our starting point: Auden's discussion about the phenomenon of forgiveness with Hannah Arendt.

In *The Human Condition*, Arendt deduces that if revenge and forgiveness were polar opposites, the only true alternative to forgiveness was punishment – insofar as both phenomena sought to end a potentially endless state of affairs. Auden must have pointed out to Arendt that there was a difference between forgiveness and a pardon in a court of law. While Auden's argument cannot be reproduced exactly since his letter is lost, it is

possible to deduce a likely angle from her response. Auden must have argued from a Christian point of view, linking ‘forgiveness and judicial pardon’, since Arendt retorts that, in her opinion, ‘Christian charity has more in common with judicial pardon than with forgiving’ (App. H1).

Her main criticism of Auden’s argument is that charity – which Auden seems to have presented as a form of love, and which, like love, is unconditional in its ideal state –

[...] violates the integrity of the wrongdoer if it forgives without having been asked to. Is not forgiving without being asked to really impertinent, or at least conceited – as though one said: Much as you tried, you could not wrong me; charity has made me invulnerable? The trouble with charity as with the law is that it levels out distinction. (Ibid.)

Arendt admits to being ‘prejudiced’ against charity, but follows up this statement with solid arguments, questioning Auden’s notion that forgiveness falls into the same general category of ‘doing good as an activity’ as ‘resisting evil’ and ‘giving’, strengthening her argument that essential for the act of forgiveness is also the counteract of asking for forgiveness – instead of bestowing it on an unwilling, unrepentant object to whom it does not matter whether he is forgiven or not: ‘[...] the mutuality of the whole business, remains outside all consideration in “doing good”, but it is essential for the act of forgiving’. (Ibid.)

Arendt finished cordially with the following admission, demonstrating both her respect for Auden as a thinker and person, and her humor:

You are entirely right (and I was entirely wrong) in that punishment is a necessary alternative only to judicial pardon. I was thinking of the absurd position of the judges during the Nuremberg trials who were confronted with crimes of such a magnitude that they transcended all possible punishment. But this surely is another matter.

I better stop. I hope you don’t think I am being quarrelsome and, worse, tiresome. But if you do, you will, please, be kind, and forget it.

Thanks ever so much for birthday invitation. I accept with pleasure. I'll be a bit late (have a dinner engagement before) but long before 'carriage time'. (Ibid.)

Categorical discussions like this one influenced Auden in turn, as well as Arendt's writing. On 27 February 1969, six days after his birthday, Auden wrote to her from Texas:

Dearest Hannah:
Touched and delighted to get your birthday telegram, and now immensely grateful for your Reflections, which I read on the plane yesterday and am about to re-read. (App. H5)

On this same day, her essay 'A Special Supplement: Reflections on Violence' had appeared in the *New York Review of Books*, which Auden must have spotted right away and studied with great interest.

Despite the intellectual interests they shared, despite their apparent affection for one another, and despite the fact that others probably would have called their friendship a close one, Arendt always kept a certain level of distance. Only once did she speak about Auden as 'Wystan': in a letter to Mary MacCarthy written after his death. Whatever Arendt's reasons were for her privacy, Auden did not share her reticence, her German formality and 'narrow strictness'.

By the time of Erika Mann's death in 1969, Auden's loneliness had become so acute that he was blind to all rules of decorum and propriety. Very soon after the death of her husband Heinrich Blücher on 30 October, Auden visited Arendt and proposed. Shortly after, on 22 November, Arendt wrote to McCarthy:

Auden came – looking so much like a clochard that the doorman came with him, fearful that he might be God knows what. The evening was strange to say the least. (The following just for you, please remember): Said he came back to New York only because of me, that I was of great importance to him, that he loved me very much, etc. I tried to quiet him down and succeeded quite well. In my opinion: Oxford where he hoped to go for good has

turned him down (I suppose) and he is desperate to find some other bearable place. I see the necessity but I know that I can't do it, in other words, have to turn him down. I have a hunch that this has happened to him once too often, namely being turned down, and I am almost besides [*sic*] myself when I think of the whole matter. But I can't change that; it would simply be suicide – worse than suicide as a matter of fact. I have got to call him up – his poem in *The New Yorker* [*The Aliens*, *The New Yorker*, 21 November 1970], tomorrow at the latest. I don't know what to do. When he left he was completely drunk, staggering into the elevator. I did not go with him. I hate and am afraid of pity, always have been, and I think I never knew anybody who aroused my pity to this extent.⁵¹⁵

Before this passage, reflecting acutely the state in which Auden passed his last years, Arendt had explained that she had spent ten years fearfully anticipating the moment when her beloved husband would die exactly 'such a sudden death': 'This fear frequently bordered on real panic. Where the fear was and the panic there is now sheer emptiness. Sometimes I think without this heaviness inside me I can no longer walk. And it is true, I feel like floating. If I think even a couple of months ahead I get dizzy'.⁵¹⁶ No wonder, in any case, that Arendt was horrified and overwhelmed by Auden's proposal.

McCarthy replied to Arendt's letter, sympathetic but not surprised, that Stephen Spender had asked her if she did not think Auden would make an excellent new husband for Arendt. Wisely, she wrote: 'Anyway, of course I shall say nothing to Spender when I see him again. It's typical of a homosexual – I mean Spender – to have been married for twenty years and know so little about marriage that he could venture such a thought'.⁵¹⁷ If the idea of marrying Arendt had really entered Auden's mind at Spender's suggestion, this might suggest that, faced with Spender's private life as a family man, Auden now saw himself haunted by the consequences of the life he had chosen in 1929.

⁵¹⁵ Brightman, *Between Friends*, 269–270.

⁵¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 269.

⁵¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 272.

After Arendt's refusal, the friendship between her and Auden continued. Their knowledge about forgiveness was not just theoretical: Arendt gave Auden her late husband's favourite jacket as a gift and Auden kept visiting her until his final departure from America. On 7 February 1972, Arendt wrote to her German friend, the writer Uwe Johnson, who had been her neighbour in New York:

P.S. Dies ist für meine Verhältnisse ein sehr langer Schreibebrief, dem immerhin noch hinzuzufügen ist, dass Auden nach England geht – erst Lowell, dann Berryman (Selbstmord), nun Auden: Verlassen die Dichter das sinkende Schiff?⁵¹⁸

After Auden's arrival in the UK, he began to correspond with Arendt, which shows how much he had been relying on her to alleviate his solitude. Two letters from Oxford make plain how much he wanted Arendt to visit him, and that he felt as lonely in England as he had in New York. On 3 April 1973, he wrote:

Dearest Hannah.
 Hope you enjoyed Forewords and Afterwords.
 All well here. The colleges are nice but Oxford City is sheer hell.
 Compared with N.Y., it is four times as crowded, and the traffic noise is at least six times louder.
 I have a day-dream of you being invited to lecture here. Do you have any contacts?
 Much love
 Wystan

Arendt's letters to Mary McCarthy show how concerned Arendt was about her friend, and also how well she knew him:

I also saw Auden before he left for England. For the first time he looks not only unhappy and neglected but sick. I hope it was only exhaustion from packing and leaving, but I doubt it. He looks as though something serious has happened to him, God knows what.⁵¹⁹

⁵¹⁸ Hannah Arendt and Uwe Johnson, *Der Briefwechsel 1967-1975* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2004), 68. [P.S. For me, this is a very long hand-written letter, to which I still have to add that Auden is leaving for England – first Lowell, then Berryman (suicide), now Auden: are the poets leaving the sinking ship?]

⁵¹⁹ Brightman, *Between Friends*, 323.

Arendt must have sensed that this was to be their last meeting and probably feared that, soon again, she would get news of a sudden death.

Indeed, Auden's death on 29 September 1973 is said to have left Hannah Arendt more visibly shaken than her husband's passing. Arendt's obituary for Auden shows her deep affection for him and her regret not to have heard and responded to what she could now see was simply a friend's call for help.

CONCLUSION

Over the course of his life, ‘International Auden’ moved with striking regularity: in 1928 he first left England for an extended period; in 1939 he moved to the United States; in 1948 he began to summer in Ischia; and finally, in 1957, he bought the only home he would ever own, his beloved farm house in Kirchstetten, Austria.

Roughly once every decade Auden changed his summer habitat, while continuing to spend his winters in New York. But there is symmetry to his wandering as well. In 1970, Auden reflected in a notebook: ‘The first time I ever left England was in 1923 when I went first to the Salzburg Festival and then to Kitzbühl, both now very changed and I cannot say for the better. Except for a brief visit in 1934, I did not see Austria again until [...] 1957’.⁵²⁰ Hindsight reveals this striking symmetry: Auden first came to Austria aged 16, and he moved to Austria 16 years before his death in Vienna.

Adding to Auden’s international flair is the fact that he could only afford to buy his Austrian home – which, quite tellingly, he called ‘a place | I may go both in and out of’ (‘Thanksgiving for a Habitat’, CP, 690) – when he was awarded the Italian Feltrinelli prize in June 1957. Kirchstetten fulfilled Auden’s criteria for long-term settlement: being affordable, within comfortable reach of a city with an excellent opera house (Vienna), and in a country where German was spoken.

Evidently, by the 1960s Auden’s ‘Germanic bias’ had become one part of his complex identity. The continuity and diversity of Germanic elements in Auden’s life is striking, as a brief summary makes plain.

As this thesis has shown, Auden’s life was shaped by a variety of German ‘elements’: places, people, writers, language, books, and concepts. The conditions of his childhood shaped Auden in a way that facilitated his subsequent ‘coup de foudre’ with

⁵²⁰ W.H. Auden, Holograph Notebook 1970. Berg Collection, New York Public Library, W.H. Auden collection of papers.

German culture in many small ways: he loved Germanic myths and fairy-tales, developed a fascination with the North as a concept, was encouraged to spend time in Austria by his germanophile parents, and took German at school.

Auden was sent to Berlin by his parents, for a year abroad after his anticlimactic 'going down' from Oxford. His father's own interest in German culture was probably a main trigger for Auden's growing enthusiasm. While it is unclear how excited he was about his Berlin-year at first, Auden fell in love with the city and with the German language. Both in Berlin and through the language of its 'boys', he lived a self-determined adult life for the first time, experimenting with his sexuality, his self-image, and his voice.

After returning to England, Auden could have drawn a line under his time in Berlin and enjoyed the laurels he was beginning to earn with his poetry in Britain. Instead, he revisited Germany every year until 1934, meanwhile writing Brechtian verse plays, and developing a voice in English that puzzled its readers with Germanic syntax and obscure references. In 1935, Auden married into Germany's intellectual 'Royal Family', in order to provide Erika Mann with a passport, thus forging a life-long connection with the Mann family.

Auden's decision to leave Britain, for which he was criticized heavily, has to be seen in connection with his Berlin experiences, as they first made him acutely aware of the ways in which he was limited by his native culture. Once he was in America, the Manns introduced Auden to their vast circle of influential and wealthy friends and acquaintances, many of whom were of German descent. This facilitated Auden's first years in America and influenced his thinking. In some ways, he lived the life of an exiled German in New York and read widely across the spectrum of German literature in the original: Rilke, Hölderlin, Kassner, Goethe and many others. In Goethe, particularly, Auden saw an intellectual soul mate and actively helped to make his work accessible to

an English-speaking audience. Like Thomas Mann, Auden felt aligned with the tradition of Weimar Classicism. Golo Mann later stated that generally, Auden 'liked to model himself on the eighteenth century'.⁵²¹

In 1945, Auden returned to Germany with the US Army and conducted interviews with German civilians. His utter devastation in the face of the horrors he witnessed, as well as his scruples about having supported this mission in the first place, led to his near-complete silence about the visit. Although Auden was very much shaken by WWII, he did not engage with German politics openly. In New York, Auden befriended further German exiles who would play major roles in his life: most importantly perhaps Elizabeth Mayer, his maternal friend and co-translator, and Hannah Arendt. Auden's profound understanding of German culture made it easy for him to connect with German refugees.

After the war, Auden forged many connections among members of the German literary scene – once his work started to be translated into German and once he collaborated on opera with Hans Werner Henze. One acquaintance in West Germany was the German critic Klaus Geitel whom Auden had met on Ischia and saw again in 1964, when a circle was closed and he returned to Berlin for a Ford Foundation residence.

All these Germanic elements, pervading Auden's life over a period of more than forty years, make it necessary to consider the question of whether it is, after all, possible to generalise about what 'Germany' meant to Auden. His connections were curiously disparate; strands of 'Germanness' woven into the complex texture of this poet's life and work.

A possible answer can be derived from two poetic utterances Auden made in 1964. These show to what extent all points of contact with German culture shaped his

⁵²¹ Mann, "A Memoir," 99.

thinking as well as his self-image. In 1964 – the year of his return to the German capital where his quest for self-love had first allowed him to find an authentic voice – Auden wrote in ‘The Cave of Making’:

[...]. I should like to become, if possible,
 a minor atlantic Goethe,
 with his passion for weather and stones but without his silliness
 re the Cross: at times a bore, but,
 while knowing Speech can at best, a shadow echoing
 the silent light, bear witness
 to the Truth it is not, he wished it were, as the francophil
 gaggle of pure songsters
 are too vain to. (‘The Cave of Making’, CP, 692)

This short passage has monumental implications: Auden does nothing less than to express his hope to be taken up into German Parnassus, bringing his oeuvre as an offering. While he never felt strict allegiance to a particular country or nationality and liked America for its melting-pot character, when it came to his intellectual identity, Auden had always proudly exhibited his German bias.

Having turned away from involved ‘Brechtian’ poetics during the early 30s, and both absorbed and grown critical of ‘Rilkean’ abstraction by the 40s – the ‘gaggle of pure songsters’ that he came to regard as too temporary, too removed from the realities of the world – Auden returned to his early love of stones and the elemental powers in his love for Goethe. Although critical about Goethe’s ‘silliness re the Cross’, his disbelief in organised religion while conceiving of the divine as manifested in the world, Auden shared Goethe’s humanist, world-embracing attitude. Although unlike Goethe, Auden was a devout Christian for the most part of his life, he similarly undertook his own ontological explorations questioning the relationships between the language, existence, and truth.

A second poetic bow to Goethe, written around the same time, is hidden in Auden’s good-bye poem to his ‘Italian phase’ in which he states that:

[...] between those who mean by life a
Bildungsroman and those to whom living
 Means to-be-visible-now, there yawns a gulf
 Embraces cannot bridge. [...]
 ('Good-Bye to the Mezzogiorno', CP, 643)

Assuming that Auden considered himself to be one of those seeking the life of a *Bildungsroman* hero, his isolation and juxtaposition of two opposites in the poem is more significant than it might seem at first sight.⁵²² Through this, Auden nostalgically associated his work and person with the literary tradition of eighteenth-century Weimar, wishing to be 'a minor atlantic Goethe' and implying that he felt his life was under the aegis of that tradition which had given birth to and was reflected in *Bildungsromanen*. Just as he avoided reading or reviewing contemporary English poetry, Auden was never particularly interested in or associated himself with the German and Austrian literary world of his day.

In comparison to the German humanist tradition, the Italian 'Dolce Vita' and its yearning 'To be visible now', as he put it in 'Good-Bye to the Mezzogiorno' – the simple affirmation of one's being – could not satisfy Auden's yearning for a *vita activa* and a new form of communal life. Practically, he had always sought or even created environments that allowed for communal living and intellectual exchange: most evidently at Middagh Street and Ann Arbor. In Kirchstetten more than anywhere else, Auden found what he had anticipated in a letter to Dodds:

I welcome the atomization of society and I look forward to a socialism based on it, to the day when the disintegration of traditions will be as final and universal for the masses as it already is for the artist, because it will be only when they fully realize their 'aloneness' and accept it, that men will be able to

⁵²² *Bildungsromane* focus on one individual and the development and gradual shaping of his self, portraying him on the search for kindred souls, meeting friends, love, and challenges, overcoming the challenges and learning from them. Finally, the hero finds his place in the world and a vocation. It was Thomas Carlyle who first introduced the term 'world literature' into the English language. Carlyle had begun his correspondence with Goethe in 1824, sending to him a copy of his English translation of *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship and Travels* (1824), a book considered to be the archetypal '*Bildungsroman*'. The friendship between Goethe and Carlyle was an example of lived 'world literature', which was not only a literary phenomenon but what today could be called a 'life-style'.

achieve a real unity through a common recognition of their diversity [...].⁵²³

Similarly, in Kirchstetten every individual had his specific place in the village hierarchy: Auden was given the honor to walk behind the Mayor in processions and was part of the community – he was Kirchstetten’s ‘loved | old family dog’ (CP, 756) just as much as Josef Weinheber was. At the same time, everyone was left to his own devices in the village. It took a long while, for example, until the Kirchstetter realised that Chester Kallman was not Auden’s cook. In his thinking, too, Auden kept deliberating the relationship between solitude and (comm)unity in an ideal society.

Considering solitude to be the price he had to pay for creating poetry, ‘visibility’ was not important to Auden since, in his view, a good poem did not require external support to unfold the magnificence contained in it. To the contrary: virtually all of Auden’s most ‘popular’ poems – which happened to be those which were thought to be most political by the public – were later disowned by him, crossed out of friends’ poetry collections, and banned from his collected works.

Really, the one-dimensional, loud, lively poetic utterance had never been Auden’s natural response to events. Not even his ‘dishonest’ political poems are obviously political: they do not express a clearly identifiable message, and have no one distinctive ‘I’ with an obvious political alignment. Auden’s thinking, and consequently his poetry, resembled the somewhat pedantic, controlled manner of a German philosopher or historian, interested in the big picture with its subtle, general truths.

If he had ever truly sung ‘in the old grand manner | [...] from a resonant heart’ (‘We Too Had Known Golden Hours, CP, 620), Auden came to deem this style inappropriate for modernity, especially after the horrors of Auschwitz were known to

⁵²³ Quoted in: Bell, “Auden to the Doddses,” 99.

the world and directly to him after his 1945 visit to Germany. In the 1950 poem 'We Too Had Known Golden Hours', Auden reflects on this:

No civil style survived
That pandemonium
But the wry, the sotto-voce,
Ironic and monochrome:
And where should we find shelter
For joy or mere content
When little was left standing
But the suburb of dissent? (CP, 620)

From the 1940s onwards, it was the operatic form that best served Auden as his creative space for joy and contentment – but also as a space for heavy 'content', for dissent and commentary. The untoward, immediate nature of opera, as well as Auden's need as a librettist to create very simple lines that could be understood despite being sung, were a 'narrow strictness' that inspired some of Auden's best work. Music had always had a special place in Auden's life and was to a degree associated with Germany by Auden. He wrote to Chester Kallman from destroyed Munich in June 1945: 'I'm longing to hear a few notes myself which I don't. Think of being in Germany and unable to hear a sound' (App. I5). Music, to Auden, was the most direct utterance, a secondary world beyond Babel in which it was possible to express what was inexpressible through language.

In 'meaning by life a Bildungsroman', Auden presents life itself as a secondary world. This goes hand in hand with his repeated claims that he preferred to relate to the world through the written word, through secondary worlds ('Writing is the enjoyment of the living' (J29)). The creation of a secondary world, a piece of art, constitutes the creation of a new, personal reality; the filtering of reality through the poetic lens. In *Secondary Worlds*, Auden affirmed that this selectivity was the writer's prerogative, and a necessity, since certain topics, such as the Holocaust, were unsuitable for poetry: 'We can, if we wish, create arcadian secondary worlds from which evil and suffering are

excluded [...]’ (SW, 52). The engagement with or production of secondary worlds had always been Auden’s chief occupation, regardless of whether they were written or read by him.

Another aspect of Auden’s double-alignment with Weimar Classicism is the connection this proposes between Auden’s internationalism and Goethe’s cosmopolitanism, Goethe’s interest in and coining of the term ‘Weltliteratur’ in his work from about 1827 onwards.⁵²⁴ This was a quintessentially humanist ‘project’ with implications reaching far beyond national boundaries, at least as far as intellectual matters were concerned. Elements that ‘qualified’ Auden for Goethe’s ‘school’ were his general curiosity and awe in the face of life (‘we are the guests of existence, which must be honoured with delight’⁵²⁵); his ability to make the world his home; his urge during WWII to do humanitarian aid; and his work across language barriers, as a translator and reviewer. Flexibility, openness, and willingness to learn about the world in its stunning complexity were qualities Goethe expected the best thinkers of all ages to possess.

Probably, Goethe would have approved of Auden as a Weltbürger. As early as 1930, Auden had created a beautiful, timeless poem – an Anglo-Saxon echo – reflecting his first ‘Wanderjahr’ in Berlin:

Doom is dark and deeper than any sea-dingle.
 Upon what man it fall [...]
 That he should leave his house,
 No cloud-soft hand can hold him, restraint by women;
 But ever that man goes [...]. (‘The Wanderer’, CP, 62)

⁵²⁴ All factual information on Goethe’s Cosmopolitanism is taken from: Rüdiger Görner, “Goethe’s Cosmopolitanism,” in *Cosmopolitans in the Modern World: Studies on a Theme in German and Austrian Literary Culture*, ed. Suzanne Kirkbright (München: Iudicium, 2000), 33–40. A detailed investigation of Auden’s and Goethe’s respective cosmopolitanism would be most fruitful, especially including a discussion of Thomas Carlyle’s reception of Goethe in England, but is beyond the scope of what I can do here.

⁵²⁵ Geoffrey Griegson, “A Meaning of Auden,” in *W.H. Auden: A Tribute*, ed. Stephen Spender (New York: Macmillan, 1975), 16–25.

Auden later stated that his coming to Berlin in 1928 and his growing love for German culture were ‘sehr zufällig’.⁵²⁶ This is reflected in his wanderer, who has been ‘forced’ to leave his house by ‘Doom’ instead of choosing to do so as a free agent. ‘Zufällig’ is a wonderful German word that, incidentally, resonates with Auden’s line ‘Upon what man it fall’. In both cases, the impression is created that a major turn in the personal history was brought about by a twist of fate: a narrative strategy rooted in the epic tradition.

It is a striking fact, however, that indeed, ‘ever that man went’. From the time of his first portentous crossing of the Channel as ‘a stranger to strangers over undried sea’, Auden would remain a wanderer: a lover of German culture, a European, a pan-Atlantic Goethe.

On 29 September 1973, after giving a last reading in Vienna – from a first German-language collection of his poetry and the English originals – W.H. Auden died in an Austrian hotel bed in the Walfischgasse. As Auden had requested, ‘Siegfried’s Trauermarsch’ (‘Siegfried’s Funeral March’) from Wagner’s *Götterdämmerung* was played by local musicians as his coffin was carried to the Kirchstetten graveyard.

OUTLOOK

While this thesis makes a beginning in assembling information about Auden’s interactions with the German world, much remains to be researched, explored, deliberated, and linked. A book in which all elements of Auden’s German and Austrian life are put in relation and linked would be both a great challenge to produce and a precious contribution to the canon of Auden criticism.

That this book is evidently lacking has been confirmed by eminent people in the field to whom I have spoken about my research over the years. The obvious difficulty of

⁵²⁶ App. G, p. 284. [‘It was pure coincidence.’ (Ibid., p. 295.)]

such an endeavour lies in the breadth and complexity of Auden's life and work, which is pervaded by German connections throughout. When planning my thesis, I felt that it should be possible to write a comprehensive account of Auden's interest in Germany, the German language, German literature, and of his personal and professional relations with German writers and intellectuals. As it turned out, the space of a thesis was nowhere near enough to accommodate all this. For pragmatic reasons, I thus limited myself to the more biographical aspects of the topic, and to those that were the least well explored, but there is scope for much further study.

A great number of subtopics are yet to be researched in detail. Particularly Auden's interest in the work of Rudolf Kassner and in the poetry of Hölderlin would be fruitful fields for future exploration. Auden's life in Austria, too, could be investigated more thoroughly – though this might require 'field work' while some last witnesses of 'Austrian Auden' are still alive. More work on 'Auden and Goethe' could be done, especially on Auden's adoption of him as a poetic role model. This should be explored with a comparative look at Auden's father-in-law, Thomas Mann, who – in his own right and before Auden – had modelled himself on the great German national poet.

In order to structure the many outstanding questions and topics, I suggest that 'Auden and Germany' should be divided into several thematic complexes that might be more manageable and coherent when presented on their own. A book should summarise and expand how German literature has influenced Auden's writing while not engaging too much with biographical issues. This would require a very broad and thorough knowledge of German literature, since – as we have seen – Auden was interested in German writers from across the spectrum. In the same publication, or, indeed, a separate one, it would be useful to examine the influence of Auden's work on German or Austrian writers such as Ingeborg Bachmann and Gottfried Benn, as well as the small role he played in the literary scenes of post-war Germany and Austria.

Most importantly, I am convinced that a book on Auden's relations with the Mann family should be written: a view endorsed by the Mann family specialist Irmela von der Lühe. While I have already found many letters at the Monacensia Archive, I was not familiar with Erika and Klaus Mann's handwriting and may have overlooked other interesting passages in letters that were not typed. Additionally, the relationship between Auden and Golo Mann should be explored in more detail. The friendship between the two brothers-in-law seems to have been a very positive and lasting one and thus I suspect there might be quite a few unpublished documents relating to Auden in the Golo Mann archive in Bern. This project would probably best be published as a 'popular' biography as it is both entertaining and an important artefact of contemporary history.

It would also be very useful if a 'master transcript' of Auden's Berlin Journal would be made and deposited with the manuscript in the Berg Collection. It is likely that faulty claims in some of the accounts of Auden's time in Berlin have been occurring because the journal is difficult to decipher, complex, and full of thoughts and concepts. Even when I first transcribed the manuscript as an undergraduate, I was surprised that there was no transcription available to scholars. If everyone writing on Auden's time in Berlin has to start from scratch, it is not surprising – given the limitations of research time and Auden's notoriously illegible hand – that scholars do not plumb the depths of this fascinating document.

APPENDICES

A) UNPUBLISHED LETTERS FROM W.H. AUDEN TO JAMES YATES
(BERG COLLECTION, NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY, W.H. AUDEN COLLECTION OF PAPERS)

1

Downs School, Colwall, N Malvern

Dear Mr. Yates,

I want your professional advice in a confidential matter. I have been asked to marry Erika Mann, the daughter of Thomas Mann, the German novelist. She cant return to Germany, and her pass-port has nearly expired. Her only hope to go on with her work (she is an actress) or indeed to exist at all, is to get another nationality through marriage.

At the moment she is in Holland, but it would be simplest if she could be married over here. If she can get permission to enter England, it will I suppose be only for a limited period, so what I want to know is how long she has to be resident before we can get married in a registry office, the state of law about acquiring a nationality etc, in fact all the details about marrying a foreigner. I should be most grateful if you could let me know all this as soon as possible, as time is short and I don't want there to be any hitches.

She is twenty nine. I have never seen her but I'm told she's awfully nice.

Please thank Mrs Yates very much (for her letter and say I hope she is not overdoing herself with housework). Also remember me to Peter and Tim. I had a letter from Michael the other day in which he said he was actually doing some work.

Yours ever,

Wystan Auden

2

Dear Mr. Yates,

Thank you very much indeed for answering my questions so promptly, and for your kind letter.

You mustn't think that my views about marriage are 'advanced'. When one marries by choice, I believe it is for better, for worse etc. This business on the other hand is, of course, the purest formality. It is very likely that I shall never see her again after the ceremony. There is not the least intention on either side of cohabitation.

As to the future and the financial aspect

- 1) She is prepared to sign any document I like renouncing all financial claims on me
- 2) She is quite willing, after a decent interval, for divorce proceedings to be instituted. Personally, unless either of us wishes to re-marry, I shall try to avoid this, chiefly for my parents' sake. The proceedings are always sordid and expensive, and it is difficult to avoid publicity altogether.

I know all this looks rather odd at first sight, and it is certainly a reflection on the present state of Europe that anything so ridiculous should be necessary. I don't think it particularly quixotic or 'tender-hearted' to be

prepared to be put to some inconvenience to save somebody's life, and somebody whom I have every reason to believe is well worth saving. For that is quite literally what it amounts to if she doesn't get a new nationality before her passport expires, she will be sent back to Germany and that means for her, as she is well-known on the continent as an Anti-Nazi, death in a concentration camp.

I, on the other hand, am neither immediately contemplating marriage with somebody else, nor have I complications of property to justify a refusal. Indeed, if it were genuine, socially and artistically, it would be an excellent match for me.

I hope you will understand all this, and not think either that I think marriage as a [?] a trivial thing, or that I haven't considered seriously what I intend to do.

I feel very happy that you should bother about what happens to me.

Yours ever,

Wystan Auden

3

Dear Mr. Yates,

Erika and I were married last Saturday, and she has now returned to Switzerland. Could you draw up a document for us, by which we are completely financially independent of each other both now and for the future. I suppose there will be no trouble with the Income Tax authorities, will there?

Her full Christian names are Erika Julia Hedwig, and mine are Wystan Hugh. I shall be most grateful if you will do this and then I'll send it out to her to sign.

She is extremely nice and obviously completely honest, but it's better, I suppose, to have everything in legal order.

What have you decided about James?

Please remember me to Mrs. Yates.

Yours ever,

Wystan Auden

B) UNPUBLISHED LETTERS FROM W.H. AUDEN TO THOMAS/KATIA MANN
(THOMAS MANN ARCHIV. ETH ZÜRICH)

1

24.9.39

Dear Mr. Mann,

I was glad to hear from Erika that you at least have got back safely, though its horrible about Bibi being caught in England. Let's hope they make him an interpreter or something. I had a nice letter from Mady in Mexico. When does she get back?

The New Yorker wants to do a Profile of you, one of those 'bright' [?] little pieces of journalism which seem so popular nowadays. They asked me to do it, and I refused as I thought it in rather bad taste. On thinking it over

though I thought that, if they are going to do one anyway, I should perhaps invent fewer lies than anyone else. I talked to Erika yesterday about this and she agreed, but of course I couldn't do anything without consulting you.

If a profile has to be done, would you rather I did it or someone else? If the latter, I'll tell the New Yorker that I'll do it, but i would rather the decision lay with you. Greetings to Frau Mann and any of the family who may be at Princeton.

Yours ever
Wystan Auden

2

March 6th, 1970

Dear Katia:

The Document, which I herewith return, and your letter arrived yesterday. 'Hoffentlich ist alles jetzt in Ordnung'. It is, I suppose, a precaution of lawyers to assume that all human beings are crooks, but it is an awful nuisance for those of us who are not!

I expect you know that a new translation of the early Novelle (eg Tonio Kruger (possibly) and Tristan), made by a good friend of mine, David Luke, is appearing shortly. It is excellent.

Please give my love to Golo and Medi.

Yours affectionately,
Wystan Auden

C) UNPUBLISHED LETTERS FROM W.H. AUDEN TO KLAUS MANN
(MONACENSIA. LITERATURARCHIV UND BIBLIOTHEK MÜNCHEN)

1

[Letter with a wonderful envelope, with Klaus Mann's complicated Budapest address, many corrections in Auden's hand. On the back: 'Absender' W.H. Auden. G.P.P Film Unit. 21 Soho Square. London W.I. England. Envelope stamped 14.x.1935. Zürich. Hauptbahnhof.]

Sonntag

Schiedhaldenstrasse 33
Kusnacht
Bei Zurich

Lieber Klaus Mann,

Herzlichen Dank für den Tschaikowsky-Roman. Ich habe es noch nicht gelesen aber I 'look forward very much to doing so.' (Ich weiss nicht wieviel English sie können. Hoffentlich ist es ~~mehr~~ mehr als mein Deutsch).

Es tut mir sehr leid, dass sie nicht jetzt hier sind, dass ich noch mit [*words crossed out, written above:*] einen schweiger Bruder treffen könnte.

Finde Dein ganze Familie reizend.

Wann kommen Sie nach England? Ich soll sollen sollt (mich?) mich wirklich freuen, wenn Sie mich besuchen wurden.

With many thanks and best wishes,
Wystan Auden

[Sunday

Schiedhaldenstrasse 33
Kusnacht
Bei Zurich

Dear Klaus Mann,

Many thanks for the Tschaikowsky novel. I haven't read it yet but 'look forward very much to doing so.' (I don't know how much English you have. Hopefully more than my German).

I am terribly sorry that you are not here now, that I could meet with another brother-in-law.

I find your entire family charming.

When are you coming to England? I should be delighted if you came to visit me.

With many thanks and best wishes,

Wystan Auden]

2

30.8.37 9 East Cliff Dover

Dear Klaus,

Many thanks for your letter. I am telling Faber's to send you a copy of Spain. There is one bad misprint.

'They clung like birds to the long Expresses'
shall read

like BURRS.

I'm not going to America this January after all as Christopher and I are being sent to the East.

Can you stop off a day or so in England this September. I would so like to meet you.

Please remember me to the family

Yours ever

Wystan

3

[Postcard]

To: Mr Klaus Mann
III E 39th Street
NYC

From: 1 Montague Terrace, Brooklyn Heights, Feb 4th 1940

Klauschen,

O.K. Thursday the 9th

Dein

Wystan

D) UNPUBLISHED LETTERS BETWEEN W.H. AUDEN AND ERIKA MANN
(MONACENSIA. LITERATURARCHIV UND BIBLIOTHEK MÜNCHEN)

1

[undated, evidently written after Ernst Toller's suicide on 22 May 1939]

St. Mark's School
Southborough
Massachusetts

Dear Erika,

Terribly sorry to miss you the other week. I had no idea you were in town. Any chance of seeing you next week-end. When do you leave for Europe. I hear you've had an awful time over Toller. I was horrified to hear about it. I've written a poem in his memory which I hope the New Yorker will print. I feel we have seen much too little of each other in these last three months, but, believe me, my dear, I cannot say how much I like and admire you, and you know, I hope that whenever and if ever I can help you in any way, you must ask me.

Don't do too much and don't – here uncle is speaking or the cheeky young brother

don't hate too much.

Much love

Wystan

2

1223 Pontiac Trail, Ann Arbor, Michigan

Dear Erika,

I hear you are coming to this town about Nov 15th [1941]. Please accept the hospitality of your undutiful husband. I have a beautiful house and a good cook.

Much love,

Wystan

3

31/5/46 421 W. 57 N.Y.C.

Dear Erika,

Many thanks for your letter. Unfortunately I can't send Buchwald a photostat of the certificate of naturalisation till I get the letter. Owing to the delay of going to Europe and changing residence, I didn't actually get my citizenship till ten days ago, and it takes about a fortnight, I understand, for the certificate to arrive. Of course the moment it does, I'll send copies of it and the marriage licence straight off.

I was so glad to read in the papers that your father is better. Please remember me to him, and if Golo is with you, gratulate him on the Gentz [*Secretary of Europe. The Life of Friedrich Gentz* (1946), initially written in German but first published in the U.S.] book.

Hope you are not too exhausted from your trips,

Wystan

[Attached:]

6/6/46 421. W. 57. N.Y.C.

Dear Mr Buchwald,

My wife, Erika Mann, tells me that she is applying for citizenship, and that in this connection you will require some information from me.

I enclose a photostat of our marriage license.

I planned to send you a photostat of my naturalisation certificate but learn this is illegal. I hope the following details will be sufficient.

Certificate No. 6658041.

Petition No 533890.

Issued by Southern District Court in New York City on May 20th 1946.

Yours faithfully

W. H. Auden

4

May 24th, Kirchstetten

Dear Erika:

Please excuse my bothering you, as I know how busy you must be and also (from Madie and Golo) what a ghastly time you have been having with your leg.

My problem is this:

We are none of us getting any younger and I have to to make a new will. By New York State Law, as I expect you know, a wife is automatically entitled to a large part of the estate. My lawyer tells me, however, that if your lawyer will draw up the appropriate disclaimer and you sign it, everything should be O.K. So, would you be a dear and do this for me. My lawyer's name and address is

Mr Robert Slaughter, Jr
c/o Paskus, Gordon & Hyman
733 Third Avenue
N.Y.C.

I dare say you have learned of my Austrian house with which I am absolutely enchanted. If ever by chance you should have to come to Vienna, I should love you to come and stay for a day or two. No typewriting dogs, only three cats.

I am older, fatter, but, I hope a bit wiser than when we last saw each other.

Yours ever,

Wystan

5

Kirchstetten June 16th [1964]

Dear Erika:

Many thanks for your letter and photos received yesterday, but terribly sorry to hear that you have had to have another operation – I hope one that really works. Also it must be lonely for you to be in Oxford, as I doubt you know many people there. I'm afraid that, since the term has ended, most of my

friends will be away, but I wrote to my old tutor Nevill Coghill asking him to visit you if he should still be there. He is a very nice man indeed.

Of course I will get my lawyer to send you the appropriate document. Could you let me have his name and address as I don't suppose you want to be [?] into the business.

Chester is in Hamburg at the moment for a conference on Opera, so I have to do my own cooking.

all the best for a swift recovery,
Wystan

6

July 18, 1964

Dear Wystan, –

it was very kind and sweet of you to send me your friend, the Don. He, on his part very kind and sweet, came to see me the very day he had received your letter. He brought flowers as well as 'Meditations on a Hobby Horse' on a lend lease basis. I found Gombrich's approach highly amusing but unfortunately left Oxford so suddenly that I had no chance to return the book to Nevill. Now with that disastrous postal strike on one would seem to have grave difficulties in reaching one's English friends at all. Even so I'll try.

Concerning that document I should be very glad if you'd send it to me under the above address. As I keep changing my wills prior to each major operation I have to undergo, it would be far too expensive to engage the services of an attorney in this context. I do it all by myself.

I am still rather ill with a horrid plastercast all round me and no idea of what the operation will eventually turn out to have achieved. Despite my plight, though I did quite some work at Oxford, collaborating with Harry Craig on a 'Death in Venice' film which José Ferrer will start producing next march. You never can tell but there is a chance of something quite fine being in the offing.

I shall have to stay in hospital for at least another two months but am working so hard that the time won't seem overly long. All the best to you and Chester from ever

Yours

[no signature, carbon transcript]

7

Frau Erika Mann-Auden
Klinik Hirslanden
Zürich 8
Witellikerstrasse 40

23. VII. 64

Dear Erika:

Many thanks for your letter. As to the 'document' I signed one over a month ago and presumed it had been sent to your lawyers. If there has been any mix up, could you let me know, and I will see that all is put in order. The name of my lawyer, by the way, is Mr Rober Slaughter: Paskus, Gordon and Hyman, 733 Third Avenue. N.Y.C.

What a horrid time you must be having. Mrs Nature can be such a bitch.

I had no idea you knew Harry Craig.

Everyone who sees your photo says that we look exactly like each other!
Did I tell you I have to spend the coming winter in Berlin. I do hope, once you are out of that cast, that business will take you there.

love

Wystan

8

77 St Mark's Place

NYC 3

NY 10003

Dec 15th, 1965

Dear Erika:

The enclosed letter is self-explanatory. I have written to Mr Geitel pointing out that, whatever Mr Schnappauf may have intended to say, for every reader of Die Welt, his sentence will only have one meaning. I know Geitel quite well and I believe him when he says that Schnappauf didn't intend to say what in fact he said. What really puzzles me is how on earth the editor of Die Welt could have let it pass, when it is so obviously criminally libellous.

Anyway, i have done all I can. What a damned unpleasant business. Rumors reach me that your health is a little better and that you are no longer bed-ridden. I do hope this is true.

[Added in handwriting] I am fine and busy.

Alles gutes for Christmas and the New Year.

Love

Wystan

[Attached:]

12.12.65 Klaus Geitel . Berlin 31 . Livländische Str. 10 . Tel. 87 53 75

Lieber Wystan,

Du weisst ja, wie unerquicklich Prozesse sind. Und nun ist ein Freund von mir und Kollege, dessen Arbeiten ich ebenso schätze wie seine Anständigkeit, in eine sehr unangenehme Sache hineingetappt. Frau Erika Mann bedroht ihn mit einem Strafprozess wegen Verleumdung – und ausserdem meine Zeitung DIE WELT mit einem Zivilprozess.

Der kleine Ulrich Schnappauf hat in einem Bericht über den Prozess von Gründgens' Adoptivsohn Gorski gegen die Veröffentlichung von Manns 'Mephisto' eine Formulierung benutzt, für die er nun eventuell mit Gefängnis bedroht wird. Er schrieb – ohne sich Böses dabei zu denken: 'Hat Gründgens das Verhältnis Klaus-Erika zerstört, das mehr als bloß geschwisterlich war?'.

Auf die kühne Idee, man könne aus diesem Satz den Vorwurf des Inzests herauslesen, ist er – im Gegensatz zu Frau Mann – nicht gekommen. Und ich übrigens auch nicht. Für junge Menschen wie Schnappauf spielt sich halt alles in der Welt des Geistes ab. Soll man ihn drum tadeln und verdammen? Grade die Reinheit und die Lauterlichkeit seiner Vorstellungen liess ihn darauf verzichten, dieses angeblich gestörte Verhältnis zwischen Klaus und Erika als ein rein geistig-seelisches

Verhältnis zu bezeichnen. Denn für den kleinen Schnappauf gibt es gar nichts anderes. Und deswegen soll er nun vor den Kadi.

Lieber Wystan, Du kennst mich seit vielen Jahren. Du weißt, ich würde nicht für den Jungen eintreten, wenn ich nicht von seiner Unschuld wüsste. Vielleicht wäre es dir möglich, Frau Mann dazu zu bewegen, diese unseligen Prozesse zurückzuziehen, die doch nur böses Blut machen und zu nichts Gutem führen. Sie strafen die offensichtliche Unschuld, und das ist nun auch wiederum kein so stolzes Ergebnis.

Hinzu kommt, dass natürlich die Sensationspresse, die es ja liebt im Dreck der Vergangenheit zu stochern, sich der Sache mit Vorliebe annehmen wird. Ich habe bisher für DIE WELT – und wie ich glaube, sehr liebevoll – die Neuausgaben der Bücher Klaus Manns besprochen. Ich sehe keinen Sinn darin, wenn durch das erneute Aufkochen von alten Geschichten vor aller Öffentlichkeit möglicherweise ein Schatten auf sein Andenken fällt. Ich glaube, ein Einlenken Frau Manns läge in aller Interesse – in dem der Toten wie der Lebenden. Lege doch bitte ein gutes Wort für meine Ansichten ein. Und lass den kleinen Schnappauf nicht in die Grube fallen, wo er ganz gewiss nicht hingehört.

Ich wäre Dir herzlich dankbar, wenn Du mir in diesem Falle, der gar nicht mich persönlich betrifft, beistehen könntest – wie Du so vielen beigestanden hast, die Dir möglicherweise ferner standen als ich,

Die herzlichsten Grüße,

Dein Klaus.

[Dear Wystan,

You know how, unedifying lawsuits are. And now a friend of mine and colleague, whose work I value as highly as his decency, has stumbled into this unpleasant affair. Mrs Erika Mann is threatening to sue him for libel – and also my own newspaper DIE WELT with a lawsuit.

Little Ulrich Schnappauf used a phrase in a report about the lawsuit of Gründgens's adoptive son Gorski against the publication of Mann's 'Mephisto' on the grounds of which he is now being threatened with jail. He wrote – without meaning any harm: 'Did Gründgens destroy the relationship Klaus-Erika, which was more than just that of siblings?'

He – unlike Mrs Mann – did not even conceive of the audacious idea that one could detect an accusation of incest in this sentence. And neither did I, by the way. For young people like Schnappauf, everything happens in the world of the mind. Should we criticize and condemn him for it? It was exactly the purity and integrity of his ideas that kept him from calling this apparently dysfunctional relationship between Klaus and Erika a relationship that was purely between the minds and souls. Because for our little Schnappauf, there is nothing else. And for this reason, he is now supposed to go to court.

Dear Wystan, you have known me for many years. You know that I would not defend this boy if I didn't know of his innocence. Maybe you could move Mrs Mann to withdraw these unfortunate lawsuits, which only create bad blood and do no good whatsoever. They punish blatant innocence, and this again is not really a result to be proud of.

Additionally, the sensational press, with its love for rooting through the dirt of the past, will be only too keen to pick up on the matter. Up to this point, I have always reviewed new editions of Klaus Mann's books for DIE WELT –

and, I believe, very affectionately. I see no point in allowing for the possibility that by publically reviving old stories, his memory may be tainted. I believe it would be in everyone's interest if Mrs Mann could be brought around – the interest of the dead as well as that of the living. Please do put in a good word for my point of view. And don't let little Schnappauf fall into the pit where, most certainly, he does not belong.

I would be very obliged to you if you could support me in this case which does not even concern me personally – as you have supported many who were possibly less close to you than I am,

Kindest regards,

Yours,

Klaus]

9

14. Januar 1966

Dear Wystan, –

Bitte verzeih das Deutsch, aber meine Sekretärin ist in Urlaub, die freundliche Aushilfe kann nicht englisch, und mein eigenes Bett-Gekritzel ist nicht recht lesbar. Doch, mit Ausnahme von anderthalb Stunden täglich, die ich schmerzhaft auf Krücken und auf einem extrahohen Stuhl verbringe, bin ich noch immer bettlägerig.

Herzlichst danke ich Dir für Deinen guten Brief und die beiliegende Epistel des Herrn Klaus Geitel. Aber ich bin im Zusammenhang mit diesem verflixten Mephisto-Prozess so vielfach verleumdet worden, dass ich irgendwo einmal einen Punkt setzen musste. Und da, wie Du weisst, 'Die Welt' die meistgelesene Zeitung Deutschlands ist, entschloss ich mich, den Punkt ebendort zu setzen. Eine weitere Klage meinerseits läuft gegen die 'Kölner Rundschau' und den Journalisten Werner Helwig. Herr Helwig hatte sich nicht entblödet, Folgendes zu schreiben: 'Diese Ehe (zwischen Gründgens und mir) musste missglücken. Erika hatte nur eine Frau, und die hieß Klaus'. Kann man das überbieten? Dazu kommt, dass Gründgens diesen Prozess nicht wünschte und ihn nicht angestrengt hat, obwohl der 'Mephisto' über zwei Monate vor seinem Selbstmord öffentlich angekündigt worden war. Der unfähige und stellungslose Herr Gorski, mit dem Gründgens seit langem nicht mehr gut stand, erhoffte sich von seinem schmutzigen Vorgehen einen Haufen leuchtender publicity, die er denn auch bekam.

Thanks again, alles Gute

And love.

Yours as ever,

[

14. Januar 1966

Dear Wystan, –

Please forgive the German but my secretary is on holiday, the kindly temp does not speak English, and my bed-scrawl is not really legible. Yes, with the exception of one and a half hours a day which I spend painfully on crotches and an elevated chair, I am still bed-ridden.

Thank you kindly for your good letter and the epistle attached by Mr. Klaus Geitel. But I have been slandered so frequently in the context of this darned Mephisto lawsuit that I had to draw the line somewhere at some

point. And since, as you know, 'Die Welt' is the most widely read newspaper in Germany, I decided to draw the line just there. I am running another lawsuit against the 'Kölner Rundschau' and the journalist Werner Helwig. Mr. Helwig hasn't refrained from writing the following: 'This marriage (between Gründgens and myself) had to fail. Erika had only one wife, and she was called Klaus'. Can this be outdone? Additionally, Gründgens didn't want this lawsuit and didn't initiate it, even though 'Mephisto' had been announced publically two months before his suicide. The incompetent and unemployed Mr. Gorski, with whom Gründgens hasn't been on good terms for a long time, expected a heap of gleaming publicity from his dirty dealings, and he got it.

Thanks again, all the best

And love.

Yours as ever]

E) LETTERS BETWEEN KLAUS MANN AND ERIKA MANN
(MONACENSIA. LITERATURARCHIV UND BIBLIOTHEK MÜNCHEN)

1

Exilaisst. Groningen 28. Iv. 36

[...] Jack Mortimer läuft nun hier, – einmal lacht das Glück doch jedem. Ich muss hin. In jedem Falle (und obwohl ich meinen Wysti übermorgen in Leiden erwarte!!!!) fahre ich wohl [?] gegen den 12. nach London, von wo aus Kommerherz mir unaufgefordert und pedantisch telegraphierte dass es sechs Wochen lang im Ritz sitzen wolle, – dann hole ich mir den Friederich und wir treffen uns mit Deinereinem. Die Giehse hat nichts (oder doch beinahe nichts, – es fängt an, eine sehr ernste Sorge zu werden, –. Vielleicht dass Wysti Rat weiss.)

Tod und Verklärung.

E.

[

Groningen 28. Iv. 36

[...] Jack Mortimer is on here now, – everyone has to be lucky some time. I have to go. In any case (and despite the fact that I expect my Wysti in Leiden the day after tomorrow!!!!) I will probably [?] go to London around the 12. from where 'Kommer heart' sent me an unprompted and pedantic telegram, that he intended to sit in the Ritz for six weeks, – then I will go fetch Friedrich and we will meet with you. Giehse has nothing (or at least nearly nothing), – it is starting to be a serious worry, –. Maybe that Wysti has some advice.)

Death and Romanticisation.

E.]

2

Küsnacht, 28. August 1936

Liebe Buben

[...] Miro reiste gestern abend, – ich gedenke es in etwa einer Woche zu tun. Und zwar zu euch. Im Grunde neige ich der Auffassung zu, dass ich, ehe

denn ich segele, noch nach England muss, – falls Wytisysti nämlich dorten ist; Kommer hin und her, – Geld hat keins herausgeschaut aus seinen dämlichen Arrangements bisher, – sondern im Geigentiell, – Kontrakt auch nicht, – also muss ich nunmehr meinem Köpfchen, dem ausgeruhten, folgen, und innerlich darauf gefasst sein, sehr vieles auf englisch darzubieten. Da heisst es Gattenlieder mitnehmen und eigene, zwecks Uebersetzung von Gattenhand, in Birmingham zurückzulassen. Wie das geschehn soll, liegt noch im Nebel (wann denn kommt er, der sexappeal, – er möchte in Rotterdam winkend stehn, – ich kenne ihn!) Vielleicht, dass ich einfach ein paar Tage vor der Zeit hinfahre, um erst in Southampton die Statend am [?] besteigen, – Gott, – wäre das langweilig. Lieber Frieder, – danke für Deinen Brief, – die Federn sind ja, trotz der infamen Schweigsamkeit, – sehr sehr gut in Schuss....

Ich bin Eure Erimaus.

[Küsnacht, 28. August 1936
Dear boys

[...] Miro left yesterday evening, – I am intending to do so in about one week. To visit you. Essentially, I tend to think that I need to go to England before I can sail off, – just in case Wytisysti is there; Kommer or no Kommer, – money has not seen the light of the day so far as a result of his daft arrangements, – quite to the contrary, – nor a contract, – so I must now follow my own little head, well-rested as it is, and prepare myself internally to be performing largely in English. Which means: taking along the spouse's songs and leaving own ones with him, for the purpose of their translation by spouse's hand, in Birmingham. How that is supposed to happen is still up in the air (because when is he going to come, the sex appeal, – he will want to be standing in Rotterdam, waving good-bye – I know him!) Maybe that I simply go there a few days ahead of time, to only board the Statend in Southampton [...], – God, – would that be dull. Dear Frieder, – thank you for your letter, – the feathers are, despite the disgraceful reticence, – very well-oiled....

I am your Erimaus.]

3

Princeton. 17.III.39

Frau Gespinst,
ich lege bei:

- 2.) Klein-Scheck von 'Nation'. (Die hiermit von mir honierte Rezension war nett. Auch die 'Vogue'-Schmonzette so übel nicht – was Wytis immer Oxforderisch mummeln mag. Ich bin ohnedies FAST verfeindet mit ihm – während die Angèle, auf Basis ernster Diskussion, sich anfreundete. Er sprach gestern erstmalig auf grossem Spanien-Dinner – Wytis, meine ich. Soll es üsis ernst genommen haben. – mit Christopher bin ich gut. Er hat eigenhändig meine Klein-Hymne über sein Buch translated. Kommt in 'Nation'. Chr. möchte sehr sehr gern, dass auch Z. [*Thomas Mann*], nur ein paar Zeilen...: bist du mein klein Engel?)
- 3.) Einen politischen Brief, von mir geschrieben, an die Kommunisten, in Paris

[...]

[Mrs Spectre,
I attach:

Princeton. 17.III.39

- 1.) A little cheque from 'Nation'. (The review, herewith renumerated by myself, was nice. The kitschy 'Vogue' piece not so bad either – whatever Wysty might be murmuring in his Oxford way. He has NEARLY made an enemy of me anyway – while Angèle has become chummy with him after their serious discussions. Yesterday, he spoke at a big Spain dinner for the first time – Wystan, that is. Is supposed to have taken it very seriously. With Christopher I am getting on well. He himself translated my little hymn on his book. Appears in 'Nation'. Chr. would like it veryvery much if Z. [*Thomas Mann*] would..., just a few lines...: would you be my little angel?)
- 2.) A political letter, written by me, sent to the Communists in Paris
[...]]

4

Klaus Mann to Erika Mann:

The Bedford 18.IV. 42

[...] Genug. Golo sollte sich um einen Guggenheim Fellowship bemühen: Alvin Johnson wird behilflich sein. Dass Wystan sich eine ergattert hat, ist, in Anbetracht von Carolines regelmässiger charity, schnöde bis zum Unanständigen.

[[...] Enough. Golo should try for a Guggenheim Fellowship: Alvin Johnson will help. That Wystan managed to get one is utterly indecent, given Caroline's regular charity.]

F) POEM BY BERTHOLD VIERTEL FOR ERIKA MANN
(DEUTSCHES LITERATURARCHIV MARBACH)

Der Dichter Auden – Berthold Viertel

Dich erfreuen an dir, die Summe deiner Gefühle
Eigensüchtig zu ziehen – es ist dir verboten.
Diese Welt ist kein Teppich, kein rippiges Muster,
Dessen Figuren ein Magier zur Lust sich betrachtet.
Nein, zur Unlust! Denn all diese Maschen leben,
Aber können nicht leben, denn unrecht ist die Verknüpfung,
Denn das Unrecht wuchert in diesen Bildern, die Ohnmacht,
Und so lösen sich schon, zur neuen Verknüpfung die Fäden,
Bruch und Riss ward sichtbar, bald fällt dieses Werk auseinander,
Das die Vergangenheit, die Hand der Väter, geknüpft hat.

Auden ist der Sohn. Ermutigung allen den Söhnen
Ist, was er treibt, was er ruft und brüderlich flüstert.
Wie ein schweifender Geist, so mischt er sich unter die Brüder,

Hier ist er, da – er will sie alle, alle umarmen.
 Ja, und belauschen sie alle, sie prüfen und sie verfolgen,
 Sie erbittern, erhellen, wo sie heimlich im Dunkel versagen.
 Einer hält reine Würde offen, sie ist die Geliebte,
 Die er ewig umarmt – so wird er den Kampf umarmen.
 Viele sind gänzlich versagt, und viele verirrt und verstiegen.
 Da taucht Auden auf, wie ein Irrlicht, sie weiter zu locken
 Und vorauszuflackern, des Wanderers zum grauenden Ziele-

Auden, was alles weißt du, Knabe, von uns, was tief wir verschweigen.
 Unsere Abgöttereien, die Steckenpferde, die goldenen Kälber
 Und den Missbrauch der Stimme, weil wir die Ernüchterung fürchten,
 Weil wir nicht wollen, wie wir doch sollen, weil den Verzicht wir umgehen.
 Du weißt näher und ferner, als je ein Helfender wußte,
 Spielgenosse du, du jung gebliebener Lehrer,
 Strenger als je einer war, und doch barmherziger bist du,
 Und Geduld ist der Genius deiner betreuenden Hände,
 Hilfsplatz dein Zelt, du Samariter im Chaos,
 Was so langsam sich umwälzt zu einem treuer Leben.

G) DEUTSCHLANDFUNK INTERVIEW (DEUTSCHLANDFUNK RADIO ARCHIV)
 (PUBLISHED IN THE *W.H. AUDEN SOCIETY NEWSLETTER* #36, JULY 2013)

The interview was conducted by the writer Horst Bienek and first broadcast on 9.9.1965. In both the German transcription and the English translation, I have attempted to reproduce the interview as accurately as possible, in terms both of content and tone. I have not corrected errors in Auden's German though, as they rarely obscure his meaning and as I felt that to annotate my translation with corrections would have been disruptive rather than beneficial. In any case, there are only a few instances where Auden misuses a word. In most of these cases the context makes his intended meaning obvious, and so I have added my suggestions in brackets. Through my translation I have attempted, as far as possible, to convey a sense of Auden's German as he spoke it. While I have not rendered any incorrect phrases into correspondingly inaccurate English, I have also not tried to make Auden sound like the 'English Auden'.

HORST BIENEK. Mr. Auden, es heißt man soll am Anfang anfangen, und so möchte ich Sie fragen: Wie kamen Sie zur Literatur? Wie kamen Sie zum Schreiben; wie kamen Sie zum Gedichte Schreiben? In ihrer ersten Oxforder Vorlesung sagen Sie: rein zufällig, ein Freund habe Ihnen an einem Märznachmittag im Jahre 1922 dazu geraten. Verzeihen Sie mir, aber ich glaube nicht an einen solchen Zufall. Außerdem waren Sie damals erst 15 Jahre alt und in diesem Alter werden einem von Freunden, Tanten, wohl die merkwürdigsten Berufe und Tätigkeiten angeraten.

W.H. AUDEN. Nein, ich muss sagen, es ist ganz wahr. Also, in diese Zeit, ich meine, ich hätte eine Sakral-Privatwelt, der mit Bleibergwerke und

Geologie und Maschinen zu tun hätte, ich hätte fast keine Gedichte gelesen und die Idee hat nie in mein Kopf gekommen. Natürlich später ich sehe, dass ich hätte immer ein großes Interesse für die Sprache. Aber es war ganz, in diese Zeit, es war ganz zufällig. Ich weiß nicht, was bei mir passiert ist, wenn mein Freund hat das nicht gefragt.

BIENEK. Und wann fingen Sie dann an zu schreiben, ihre ersten Gedichte zu schreiben?

AUDEN. Oh, dann natürlich ich habe sofort angefangen, Gedichte zu schreiben. Das erste, ich erinnere mich, war über eine kleine See in der Lake District in England. Und dann, ich glaube, das erste Stück von mir der herausgekommen war, das war in *Public School Verse* in '23, das war ein Pastiche von einem englischen Dichter, W. H. Davis.

BIENEK. Da waren Sie wie alt?

AUDEN. Sechzehn.

BIENEK. Sechzehn Jahre. Und wann ist Ihr erster Gedichtband erschienen; und wie hieß der?

AUDEN. Das war in 1930. Und das hat ganz einfach *Poems (Gedichte)* geheißen.

BIENEK. Und der hat Sie dann ja sehr rasch bekannt gemacht.

AUDEN. Ja, es ist gut gegangen, das muss ich sagen.

BIENEK. Ich möchte Sie fragen, was hat Sie damals an der Literatur am stärksten beeindruckt und bewegt, hatten Sie da schon gewisse Vorlieben für bestimmte Autoren, für bestimmte Dichter?

AUDEN. Oh selbstverständlich. Zuerst, als ich in der Schule war, ich war sehr beeinflusst von Thomas Hardy, von Edward Thomas, von Robert Frost, dann als ein Student der Universität, da war Wilfred Owen, da war Eliot, da war Yeats. Das war ganz einfach, ja.

BIENEK. Aber wenn wir von Ihrem Hauptwerk sprechen, das, sagen wir mal im Jahr 1930 begonnen hat, welchen Dichter würden Sie dann als den bezeichnen, der am stärksten Sie beeinflusst hat – bis heute eigentlich?

AUDEN. Natürlich, es gibt da eine lange Reihe von Dichtern, von wem man beeinflusst ist, die gründliche Richtung, ich glaube, vom Anfang und noch, war anglosächsische Gedichte und auch mittelalterliche. Dann später, was soll ich sagen, Horaz, Hölderlin, Kavafis, der griechische Dichter.

BIENEK. Kann man das sagen, oder möchten Sie das sagen, ich habe einen Dichter, den liebe ich über alles, den kann ich immer lesen?

AUDEN Oh, nein nein. Natürlich kann man sagen, die Dichter, die man nicht lesen kann, das ist etwas anderes. Aber wenn man einen Dichter gern hat, kann man ihn immer lesen. Und natürlich ich glaube, dass jeder hat seine liebste Dichter, die manchmal sind nicht sehr große Leute. Zum Beispiel für mich, ich hat immer so gern Campion lesen oder William Barnes, das war ein Dichter von dem 19. Jahrhundert. Aber natürlich manchmal man kann sehr begeistert in ein Dichter sein und dann nachher kann man ihm nicht mehr lesen. Zum Beispiel das ist der Fall mit mir bei Rilke.

BIENEK. Hat die deutsche Literatur auch Einfluss auf Sie gehabt? Sie haben ja schon sehr früh deutsche Lyrik übersetzt?

AUDEN. Ich habe nicht sehr früh übersetzt, ich glaube das erste Gedicht, das ich übersetzt habe, das war in den vierziger Jahren. Aber, au ja, ich bin von Dichtern, ich weiß, dass ich von Brecht und Hölderlin und Rilke beeinflusst bin. Und in meine Gedanken es gibt eine Reihe von, was soll man sagen, Lichtenberg, Nietzsche, Freud, Kafka, Karl Kraus.

BIENEK. Ich dachte, Sie wären in der Zeit, Ende der 20er Jahre, als Sie in Berlin waren, schon zum Übersetzen gekommen. Das haben Sie damals nicht getan.

AUDEN. Nein, nein nein nein, ich habe sehr wenig Deutsch in diese Zeit gehabt, nicht.

BIENEK. Was hat Sie überhaupt damals nach Deutschland gezogen? Da gab es doch einen Kreis, mit Auden und Spender und Isherwood? Da weiß man eigentlich sehr wenig in Deutschland darüber. Könnten Sie mir darüber etwas sagen?

AUDEN. Das war ein bisschen komisch. Meine Eltern haben mir ein Jahr in Europa gesprochen [*viz. versprochen*] nach Oxford, nicht? Also, ich habe gedacht, wohin soll ich gehen. Also, der intellektuellen Generation vor mir, für diese Generation alles war französische Literatur. Ich war ein bisschen satt davon. Ich kannte kein Deutsch, keine deutsche Literatur. Aber ich dachte: 'Nein, ich will nicht nach Paris gehen. Wo soll ich gehen. Ich soll nach Berlin kommen'. Also bin ich nach Berlin gekommen. Und ich bin sehr froh, dass ich diese gemacht habe. Es war sehr zufällig.

BIENEK. Aber Isherwood war ja auch da, und Stephen Spender war da...

AUDEN. Sie sind später gekommen. Eigentlich ich bin Ende August '28 gekommen, dann Isherwood. Das erste Mal er war ein Gast bei mir in Berlin im März '29, dann später ich musste zurück gehen eine Stellung zu kriegen und Isherwood ist hier geblieben. Dann bin ich immer in meinem Ferienzeit wieder nach Berlin gekommen, bis '33.

BIENEK. Waren da bestimmte, auch literarische Beziehungen in dieser Zeit da?

AUDEN. Ja, natürlich man ärgert sich immer, wenn man so von eine Gruppe spricht, weil es scheint als wie eine Apparat, nicht, und natürlich wir waren persönlich befreundet, und wir waren ungefähr das gleiche Alter. Doch jeder war ganz anders, eigenartig [*viz. einzigartig*], nicht. Natürlich aber die Journalisten haben sehr gerne von eine Schule oder eine Gruppe zu sprechen. Wir waren sehr gut befreundet. Wir sind noch befreundet.

BIENEK. Herr Auden, jetzt darf ich etwas an Ihre eigene dichterische Arbeit gehen. Was war für Sie und was ist wohl für Sie der entscheidende Antrieb zum Schreiben von Gedichten?

AUDEN. Für mich es gibt zwei Dinge, die nötig sind. Ich habe ein Problem, ein Thema, und auch ich habe ein technisches, ein stilistisches Problem zu lösen. Ich glaube, dass ein Gedicht ist ein Objekt, das gemacht ist. Auch muss es etwas sagen, das wahr ist. Es kann eine nicht wichtige Wahrheit sein. Aber was man schreibt, muss wahr sein. Das ist alles, was ich weiß.

BIENEK. Aber haben Sie mit Ihrer Dichtung nicht immer auch ein bestimmtes Ziel verfolgt, sei es im politischen, im sozialen, im religiösen Engagement?

AUDEN. Nein, natürlich, wenn man lebt in eine gewisse Zeit, in eine gewisse Gesellschaft, in diesem Sinn natürlich ist man engagiert. Aber zu sagen, dass man schreibt mit so eine Ziel, politische oder religiöse, das glaube ich nicht. Nur man versucht, zu sagen etwas, das man glaubt ist wahr.

BIENEK. Ja aber Ihre, wenn ich so sagen darf, politischen Gedichte der späten 30er Jahre, waren doch, im Gegensatz etwa zu Robert Frost, eigentlich politisch engagiert.

AUDEN. Ja, ich glaube nicht, dass ich so engagiert war, es war nur, dass wir haben in eine Zeit gelebt, mit Depression, nicht, und Hitler und diese Sachen, und man muss davon [*viz. daran*] denken. Natürlich gibt es immer für Dichter eine Gefahr. Weil er kann so leicht glauben, dass er kann eine politische Lage beenden mit einem Gedicht. Und das glaube ich nicht. Dass von großer politischer oder sozialischer Übel entweder man muss in politischer Weise tätig sein, oder andere Dinge vielleicht ist reine journalistische Reportage, fotografische Bilder, satiristisch zu schreiben... aber ein Gedicht zu schreiben über, was soll man sagen, ein KZ oder Rassenvernichtung, das hat keinen Zweck.

BIENEK. Das ist kein Thema für die Dichtung. Aber wenn ich an Ihr Spaniengedicht erinnern darf, das ist ja für mein Gefühl ein sehr gutes Gedicht... großartiges Gedicht

AUDEN. [*fällt Bienek ins Wort*] Ah, das kann ich nicht leiden. Ich kann es nicht ertragen, es ist furchtbar, es ist unehrlich!

BIENEK. ...und es ist ein politisch engagiertes.

AUDEN. Aber unehrlich. Es ist falsch.

BIENEK. Ich möchte nämlich darauf hinkommen, ich habe nämlich das Gefühl, wenn ich Ihre Lyrik verfolge, dass die Ereignisse der dreißiger Jahre – ich weiß nicht ob der deutsche Nationalsozialismus oder der Spanische Bürgerkrieg oder die stalinistischen Säuberungen in Moskau daran Schuld waren – dass diese Ereignisse Ihr politisches Engagement in der Dichtung verändert haben. Die Entwicklung Ihrer Gedichte geht von da aus dem politischen Bereich später ja beinahe in einen religiösen. Kann man das so sagen?

AUDEN. Ja, ich habe gesehen zum Anfang, dass es war eitel zu denken, dass man kann das politische Lage verändern mit Dichtung, nicht? Das war natürlich – in der ganzen Geschichte war ich natürlich auch ein bisschen verzweifelt. Aber, wenn man von Religion spricht, ich muss sagen, dass mein Eltern waren fromm und ich bin als Christ erzogen. Und gut, dann natürlich, wie viele junge Leute, ich habe gedacht, dass alle diese Sache quatsch war. Und, langsam langsam, bin ich zurückgekommen. Für das ich bin sehr froh, weil ich weiß viel besser, was es meint ein Christ zu sein, nach dass ich, was soll ich sagen, Marx und Freud gelesen habe, wie früher, nicht. Und es gibt immer diese Frage, wie Lichtenstein gesagt hat, nicht, Lichtenberg, dass es gibt ein großen Unterschied between was man noch glaubt, und was man wieder glaubt.

BIENEK. Aber gab es nicht in dieser Zeit – darauf möchte ich nämlich ein wenig hinaus – eine wichtige politische Enttäuschung, die direkt etwas in Ihnen...?

AUDEN. [*unterbricht Bienek*] Oh vielleicht, natürlich man hat die Spanische Bürgerkrieg gesehen, und es war nicht so sauber, nicht, [*Bienek: Jaja*] und dann natürlich, es war eine Ding von denen wir alle schockiert, das war der Nazi-Soviet Pakt, natürlich.

BIENEK. Bei einem Ihrer Interpreten, oder sagen wir Exegeten, habe ich gelesen, Herr Auden, dass Sie in Ihrem Schreibtisch früher einen faulen Apfel aufbewahrt haben. Sie werden sich an dieses Zitat erinnern...

AUDEN. ...aber das hat man von Schiller gesagt! Nicht über mich!

BIENEK. [*lacht*] Nein, nein, aber man hat dann gesagt, damit Sie immer an den faulen Zustand unserer Welt erinnert werden.

AUDEN. Ach, nein, nein, das war nicht so.

BIENEK. Das ist mehr Legende...

AUDEN. Das ist Legende, ja.

BIENEK. Aber nachdem Sie ja in der Thematik Ihrer Dichtung in den dreißiger Jahren vom Politischen bis zum Religiösen gewisse Wandlungen

durchgemacht haben, haben Sie in dieser Zeit auch Wandlungen in formaler Hinsicht in ihren Gedichten durchgemacht?

AUDEN. Ah, ja, wahrscheinlich, natürlich, man sucht immer etwas Neues zu machen, und sofort, dass man etwas gemacht hat, muss man wie ein neugeborenes Kind wieder anfangen. Natürlich das ist in formeller Sache und auch in thematischer Sache.

BIENEK. Wenn Sie erlauben, darf ich Ihnen nun ein paar konkrete Fragen zu Ihrem Arbeitsprozess stellen. Wann schreiben Sie ein Gedicht? Brauchen Sie dazu eine Art von Trance, ein in sich Hineinversenken, oder ist es ein ganz nüchterner Vorgang?

AUDEN. Du lieber Gott, keine Frage von Trance, nein, das natürlich nicht, nein, man muss schwer arbeiten. Natürlich, man muss warten. Ich finde persönlich, ich kümmere mich um ein technisches Problem auf die eine Seite, und die andere Seite eine Thema, und langsam langsam kommen die zwei zusammen. Und dann kann ich anfangen zu schreiben.

BIENEK. Brauchen Sie bestimmte Auslösungen, sagen wir mal Erlebnisse oder Erfahrungen?

AUDEN. Nein, natürlich man schreibt aus Erfahrung, aber, etwas muss passieren, von dem man schreibt, aber sonst man schreibt aus Erlebnis, das man gehabt hat, nicht.

BIENEK. Ich meine, brauchen Sie denn wenn Sie schreiben, sagen wir mal, bestimmte Stimulanzien, Kaffee, oder...?

AUDEN. Nach, oh nein, nein, nah, Kaffee natürlich ich trinke immer beim Frühstück. Ich trinke Alkohol nach dem Arbeiten; ich arbeite nie am Abend. Ich arbeite am besten in der Früh und dann zwischen vier und Cocktail-Zeit, nicht. Dann ist aus, Schluss.

BIENEK. Also früh morgens schon, um vier Uhr fangen Sie an?

AUDEN. Ja...

BIENEK. Jetzt noch ein paar Fragen zu Ihren Poetikvorlesungen in Oxford. Waren Sie der erste auf diesem Lehrstuhl, der erste Dichter?

AUDEN. Oh nein nein, das Stuhl war gegründet in 1704, der erste famöse Dichter war Matthew Arnold. Und er war eigentlich der erste, der hat seinen Auftrag [*viz. Vortrag*] in Englisch nicht in Lateinisch gegeben.

BIENEK. Und welche Themen haben Sie da behandelt?

AUDEN. Ich habe verschiedene Aufträge [*viz. Vorträge*] über Shakespeare und dann andere Dichter und so was gemacht, das ist für mich zu wählen.

BIENEK. Die erste Vorlesung ist ja jetzt auch in Deutsch erschienen, in ihrem Essaybuch *Des Färbers Hand*. Welchen Sinn haben diese Vorlesungen in England? In Deutschland, das wissen Sie, gibt es die ja jetzt auch jetzt, nach dem Vorbild eigentlich von Oxford, in Frankfurt, da sind es eigentlich mehr zusätzliche Vorlesungen in Literatur.

AUDEN. Ja. Es ist nicht so wie in Amerika, beispielsweise, es ist nicht so eine Art Werkstatt, der ‚Artists in Residence‘ und so was. Nein, es ist eine ganz akademische Stellung, nicht. Man spricht über eine oder andere Aspekt von Dichtung.

BIENEK. Für Studenten, die Anglistik studieren.

AUDEN. Jaja. Oder jemand [*viz. jeder*] kann hinein kommen, natürlich.

BIENEK. Herr Auden, in einem Ihrer Aufsätze, ‚Der Dichter und die Stadt‘, schreiben Sie, wie Sie sich eine Traumakademie für Dichter vorstellen. Ich darf Sie da vielleicht zitieren. Punkt eins schreiben Sie: ‚Neben Englisch wäre mindestens eine alte Sprache, vermutlich Griechisch oder Hebräisch, und zwei moderne Sprachen Pflichtfach‘. Punkt zwei heißt es: ‚In diesen Sprachen müssten tausende von Versen auswendig gelernt werden‘. Punkt drei: ‚Die Bibliothek enthielte keine Werke der Literaturkritik und die einzige kritische Übung, die von Studenten verlangt würde, wäre das Verfassen von Parodien‘. Hier zögere ich etwas. Ist Literaturkritik nicht doch auch wichtig, grade bei Studenten, für das Erfassen kritischer Maßstäbe?

BIENEK. Ich bin sehr dagegen bei Studenten. Später, es kann sehr wichtig sein. Es ist so: Zuerst muss der Student die Literatur selbst lesen. Und sonst, er liest das nicht, er geht und sieht, was hat so ein Kritiker gesagt. Und das ist fatal, meiner Meinung nach, nicht. Zuerst, soll er das... wenn er das Text richtig kennt, dann kann er andere Kritiker lesen.

BIENEK. Ich darf noch weitergehen. Punkt vier schreiben Sie, jeder Student müsste an Kursen in Verslehre, Rhetorik und Vergleichender Sprachwissenschaft teilnehmen, und von den Kursen in Mathematik, Naturgeschichte, Geologie, Meteorologie, Archeologie, Mythologie, Liturgie und Kochen müsste er mindestens drei belegen. Das sind, wie ich sehe, alles Naturwissenschaften, außer den drei letzten Disziplinen.

AUDEN. Ja, weil er muss etwas von der andere Art von Denken, das ist das wissenschaftliche Denken, verstehen, wenn er das Welt verstehen will.

BIENEK. Also die Geisteswissenschaften allein sind dann zu wenig.

AUDEN. Die sind zu wenig.

BIENEK. Und das Kochen, ist eine...

AUDEN. Das Kochen ist, so ein Verhältnis zu der Substanz zu haben, nicht.

BIENEK. Zum Leben, ja, das ist dasselbe, was Sie dann in Punkt fünf sagen, jeder Student hätte für ein Haustier zu sorgen und ein Gartenstück zu bestellen.

AUDEN. Ja, weil ich glaube, dass man kann natürliche Leben nur verstehen, durch ein persönliches Verhältnis damit. Und wenn man nicht der natürlichen Leben versteht, richtig versteht, dann kann man das menschliche Leben nicht verstehen.

BIENEK. Aber dann kann man natürlich auch noch nicht dichten...

AUDEN. Natürlich man kann nicht ein Dichter machen, aber es gibt viele Dichter, die nicht gut erzogen sind. Natürlich das war nur ein Traum, was war eine gute Erziehung für jemanden, der eigentlich ein Talent hat.

BIENEK. Herr Auden, wie ist selbst Ihr Verhältnis zur Kritik? Sie haben ja auch oft genug Literaturkritik geübt und geschrieben.

AUDEN. Ah, ich muss mein Leben verdienen [*lacht*].

BIENEK. Ja, Sie machen das nur um zu verdienen?

AUDEN. Natürlich, ich versuche etwas zu sagen, was ich glaube, ist wichtig zu sagen, aber ich kann nur hoffen.

BIENEK. Sie haben sich, wie ich sehe, außer mit Robert Frost und Eliot, mit Zeitgenossen wenig beschäftigt.

AUDEN. Nein, ich schreibe sehr wenig über meine Zeitgenossen, weil man ist zu nah, und auch natürlich man ist zu beschäftigt, in diese Zeit, mit was man möchte selbst schreiben, dass man kennt diese moderne Literatur nicht gut genug. Literatur von der Vergangenheit, das kenne ich ziemlich gut, und kann davon sprechen.

BIENEK. In den dreißiger Jahren haben Sie übrigens zusammen mit Christopher Isherwood auch Theaterstücke geschrieben.

AUDEN. Ja, wir haben zusammen, glaube ich, drei Theaterstücke geschrieben.

BIENEK. Warum haben Sie das gemeinsam mit ihm geschrieben?

AUDEN. Oh, ich habe sehr gerne, mit ein Andere mitzuarbeiten. Zum Beispiel ich habe mit Isherwood dieses Theaterstück mitgearbeitet, dann ich habe ein Reisebuch mit MacNeice mitgearbeitet, und jetzt, wenn ich Libretti schreibe, ich arbeite immer mit Chester Kallman zusammen. Das habe ich sehr gerne, weil es ist sehr interessant: Wenn so eine Kollaboration klappt, es gibt ein dritter Person, der ist nicht der Eine oder der Andere, ist etwas Neues. Und es macht viel Spaß das zu machen.

BIENEK. Hätten Sie nicht Lust, wieder ein Stück zu schreiben, oder vielleicht ein Hörspiel? Sie wissen ja, jetzt in Deutschland schreiben alle Lyriker Hörspiele, denn die leben ja zumeist davon.

AUDEN. So, bei dem Radio?

BIENEK. Ja.

AUDEN. Oh ja, ich habe ein Radiostück geschrieben, aber das ist so, dass in Amerika das ist nicht sehr gut bezahlt. Das ganze Radio ist kommerziell sehr schwer.

BIENEK. Aber in Deutschland ist das sehr lohnenswert, und vielleicht sollte man das übersetzen?

AUDEN. Ja, eine Übersetzung war von der Hamburg Radio herausgegeben

BIENEK. Ah ja, *For the Time Being* ist ja auch in Deutschland.

AUDEN. Ja, aber das ein Hörstück, ein Monolog... ein Schauspiel.

BIENEK. Aber es reizt Sie nicht, wieder ein Hörstück zu schreiben?

AUDEN. Nah, in diesem Moment ich habe ein Interesse von Libretti, Opern. Das ist auch die Gelegenheit.

BIENEK. Weil Sie zur Musik kommen, Sie sagten vorhin, Sie seien mehr zufällig zur Dichtung gekommen. Jetzt wollte ich Sie eben fragen, wie kamen Sie zur Musik, zu der Sie ja eine besonders enge Beziehung haben, als Librettist, als Übersetzer und als Verfasser von sehr gescheiterten Essays über Musik?

AUDEN. Ich war immer in Musik sehr interessiert. Aber, wenn ich jung war, Oper war, man hat gedacht das war nicht ein guter Geschmack, nicht. Mozart vielleicht war möglich, dieses Gesamtwerk, nicht. Aber als ich nach Amerika gegangen, dann habe ich angefangen in die Oper zu gehen. Und ich bin fasziniert geworden, und auch durch Herrn Kallman, der war immer sehr interessiert in Opern, war ein guter Lehrer für mich... Also ich bin so nach Oper gekommen. Ich merke, dass wenn ich über diese Theaterstück, das ich mit Isherwood geschrieben habe, ich merke dass manchmal, ich kann jetzt sehen, dass ich habe versucht wirklich ein Oper zu schreiben.

BIENEK. Damals schon...

AUDEN. Das habe ich nicht gewusst in diese Zeit.

BIENEK. Wie kamen Sie aber dann, als Sie in Amerika waren, zur Zusammenarbeit mit Stravinsky? Und wie ging die Arbeit an *The Rake's Progress* vor sich?

AUDEN. Er hat ein Librettist versucht [*viz. gesucht*] und Aldous Huxley hat mir empfohlen. Dann haben Chester Kallman und ich angefangen es zu schreiben, nicht, und es hat gut gegangen, Herr Stravinsky hat keine Veränderung gewünscht. Es ist sehr nett geklappt.

BIENEK. Wann ist es gewesen, in welcher Zeit?

AUDEN. Wir haben das Libretto Ende '47 Anfang '48 geschrieben und die erste Aufführung war '51.

BIENEK. Haben Sie noch anderes mit Stravinsky zusammen gemacht?

AUDEN. Nein, das ist der einzige Oper, der Stravinsky geschrieben hat. Dann natürlich wir haben zwei mit Henze geschrieben, eins ist rausgekommen, *Elegie für junge Liebende*, und dann haben wir die *Bassariden* geschrieben, und da soll die Aufführung in Salzburg in '66 sein.

BIENEK. Ah. Was ist das für ein Thema, die *Bassariden*?

AUDEN. Das ist die *Bacchae* von Euripides.

BIENEK. Das ist dann nur eine Bearbeitung?

AUDEN. Ja, natürlich man muss viel verändern, aber das ist der Thema.

BIENEK. Das ist sozusagen die zweite gemeinsame Arbeit mit Henze, nach der *Elegie für junge Liebende*. Könnten Sie ein paar Sätze dazu sagen, wie Sie mit Henze zusammengearbeitet haben?

AUDEN. Wir haben Henze zum ersten Mal '51 getroffen, in Italien, und wir sind Freunde geworden, nicht, und dann endlich hat er uns gefragt, könnten wir ein Libretto für ihn schreiben. Und das haben wir gemacht.

BIENEK. Das waren die *Elegien* [*sic*]. Mit Chester Kallman zusammen. Aber die *Bassariden* machen Sie alleine.

AUDEN. Nein, nein...

BIENEK. Das ist auch mit Chester Kallman zusammen. War der in Berlin hier, oder waren Sie da...?

AUDEN. Wir haben diese Libretto eigentlich in Österreich geschrieben.

BIENEK. Herr Auden, woran arbeiten Sie jetzt? Sie haben ja hier in Berlin viele Vorträge gehalten. Kamen Sie da auch noch zur eigenen literarischen Arbeit?

AUDEN. Ja, aber darüber bin ich sehr abergläubig. Von was ich schreibe jetzt, ich spreche nie, weil ich denke, wenn man spricht zu viel davon, dann schreibt man nicht. Natürlich ich schreibe verschiedene Sachen.

BIENEK. Ja das ist klar. Kann man aber vielleicht so fragen: Wird in der nächsten Zeit ein neues Buch von Ihnen erscheinen?

AUDEN. Ein neues Buch kommt raus im Amerika, und dann kurz nachher im England.

BIENEK. Das sind Gedichte?

AUDEN. Ja, das sind Gedichte.

BIENEK. Neue Gedichte. Haben Sie schon den Titel?

AUDEN. Ja, *About the House*.

BIENEK. *About the House!* Was sind das für Gedichte?

AUDEN. Ein Teil von dieses es sind eine Reihe von Gedichte, über was bedeutet ein Haus, und jedes Zimmer in einem Haus. Es hat angefangen beim Herbst '57, ich habe dieses Haus im Österreich gekauft.

BIENEK. Also eigentlich ein ganz konkreter Anlass...

AUDEN. Dann ich habe angefangen ein Gedicht über der Küche zu schreiben, und dann plötzlich habe ich gesehen, das war ein Idee, von alle die Zimmer zu schreiben: Arbeitszimmer, Badezimmer, Klo, Schlafzimmer, Wohnzimmer, und so weiter, nicht.

BIENEK. Daraus besteht der ganze Band.

AUDEN. Ja. Nein! Das ist eine Hälfte von der Band, dies Teil heißt ‚Thanksgiving for a Habitat‘, und dann kommt verschiedene andere Gedichte.

BIENEK. Herr Auden, was war das überhaupt für ein Gefühl für Sie, nach so vielen Jahren wieder in Berlin zu sein und hier eine Weile zu leben mit der Ford Foundation? Es ist ja doch ein anderes Berlin, als das der zwanziger Jahre, natürlich?

AUDEN. Aber natürlich, Sie wissen alle das alte wilhelmische Stadt ist weg und es ist kein Hauptstadt mehr, aber natürlich es war ein großer Erlebnis für mir, mit alle meine Erinnerungen von Berlin wieder hier zu sein und auch, für der Arbeit! Das Klima ist so herrlich. Und ich habe der Berliner so gerne, er ist nicht verendet [*viz: verändert*], diese Kessheit, der Humor, das hatt ich sehr gerne.

BIENEK. Das haben Sie wiedergefunden. Können Sie vielleicht in einem Satz sagen, was Sie als stärksten Eindruck, als stärksten Moment Ihres Berliner halben Jahres, solange waren Sie hier, empfunden haben?

AUDEN. Das ist zu früh zu sagen. Ich meine, man muss warten, bis man weiß, was wirklich war, nicht. Ich bedaure mich, dass es gibt keine gute Zeitung hier jetzt, weil früher es gab viele gute Zeitung.

BIENEK. Werden Sie wieder nach Berlin, nach Deutschland kommen?

AUDEN. Oh, sicher!

BIENEK. Und wann?

AUDEN. Das weiß ich noch nicht, ich glaube, dass nächstes Jahr ich muss hier kommen, weil die *Bassariden* sollen in der Berlin Oper präpariert werden, nicht und natürlich ich muss da sein.

BIENEK. Aber wollen Sie wieder mal hier bleiben, eine Zeit lang, und hier arbeiten?

AUDEN. Das würde ich sehr gerne, wenn das möglich war, aber das ist eine Frage von Geld und viele andere Sachen nicht.

BIENEK. Herr Auden, ich danke Ihnen für das Gespräch.

[ENGLISH VERSION:

HORST BIENEK. Mr. Auden, first things first, as they say, and so I would like to ask you: what sparked your interest in literature? Why did you start writing; why did you start writing poetry? In your first lecture as Professor of Poetry at Oxford you claim it was a coincidence; that a friend advised you to do so one afternoon in March 1922. I am sorry, but I do not believe in such a coincidence. Additionally you were only fifteen at the time, and when one is of that kind of age, friends, aunts, seem to advise one to take up the most peculiar professions and occupations.

W. H. AUDEN. No, I have to say, it is entirely true. Well, at that time, I mean, I had a private, sacred world which had to do with lead mines and geology and machinery, and I had read nearly no poems and the idea would never have entered my head. Of course, later I do see that I always had a big interest in language. But it was, at that time, pure coincidence. I do not know what would have happened to me if my friend has not asked that.

BIENEK. And when did you then start writing, to write your first poems?

AUDEN. Oh, then of course I started to write poems immediately. The first, I remember, was about a small lake in the Lake District in England. And then, I believe, the first piece by me to be published, that was in *Public School Verse* in '23, that was a pastiche of an English poet, W. H. Davis.

BIENEK. How old were you then?

AUDEN. Sixteen.

BIENEK. Sixteen years. And when was your first volume of poems published; and what was it called?

AUDEN. That was in 1930. And it was very simply called *Poems*.

BIENEK. And that volume made you famous very quickly then.

AUDEN. Yes, it went well, I have to say.

BIENEK. I want to ask you, what was it about literature that impressed and moved you most strongly at the time? Did you already have preferences for certain authors, certain poets?

AUDEN. Oh, certainly. At first, when I was at school, I was very influenced by Thomas Hardy, by Edward Thomas, by Robert Frost. Then as a student at university, there was Wilfred Owen, there was Eliot, there was Yeats. It was very simple, yes.

BIENEK. But if we talk about your main body of work – beginning, let's say, around 1930 – which poet would you name as your greatest influence up to the present?

AUDEN. Naturally, there is a long line of poets by whom one has been influenced. The basic direction, I think, from the beginning and still, was Anglo-Saxon poems and also medieval ones. Then later, what should I say, Horace, Hölderlin, Cavafi, the Greek poet.

BIENEK. Can one say, or would you like to say, I have a poet whom I love more than anything, whom I can always read?

AUDEN. Oh, no, no. Of course one can name the poets whose poetry one cannot read, that is something different. But if one likes a poet, one can read him all the time. And of course I think that everyone has his favourite poets; sometimes these are not very big names. I, for instance, have always liked to read Champion, or William Barnes, who was a poet of the 19th century. But of course, sometimes one can be very enthusiastic about a poet and then later one cannot read him anymore. This, for instance, is the case with me and Rilke.

BIENEK. Has German literature also had an influence on you? You were translating German poetry very early on.

AUDEN. I did not translate very early on, I think the first poem I translated, that was in the forties. But, oh yes, I have been influenced by poets; I know that I have been influenced by Brecht and Hölderlin and Rilke. And in my mind, there is a line of, how should I say, Lichtenberg, Nietzsche, Freud, Kafka, Karl Kraus.

BIENEK. I thought you had already started translating then, at the end of the twenties, when you were in Berlin. You did not, at the time?

AUDEN. No, no no no, I had very little German then, you see.

BIENEK. What drew you to Germany back then in the first place? Wasn't there a circle, with Auden and Spender and Isherwood? Very little is known about that in Germany. Could you tell me something about that?

AUDEN. It was a bit odd. My parents promised me a year in Europe after Oxford, you see. So, I was thinking, where should I go. Well, the intellectual generation before me, for that generation French literature was everything. I was a bit fed up with it. I did not know any German, no German literature. But I thought: 'No, I don't want to go to Paris. Where should I go? I should go to Berlin.' So I came to Berlin. And I am very glad I did. It was pure coincidence.

BIENEK. But Isherwood was also there, and Stephen Spender was there...

AUDEN. They came later. Actually I arrived at the end of August '28, then Isherwood. The first time he was my guest in Berlin in March '29, then later I had to go back to find work and Isherwood stayed here. After that I always went back to Berlin during my holidays, until '33.

BIENEK. Were there certain relationships at the time, literary ones as well?

AUDEN. Yes, of course one is always annoyed if people speak about such a group because it seems like a machine, you see, and of course we were friends, and were about the same age. But each of us was very different, individual, you see. But of course journalists like to speak of a school, or a group. We were very good friends. We are still friends.

BIENEK. Mr. Auden, now I should like to turn to your poetic work. What was and what is for you the most important incentive for writing poetry?

AUDEN. For me, there are two things which are necessary. I have a problem, a topic, and also a technical, stylistic problem to solve. I believe that a poem is an object which is made. Also, it has to express something which is true. It can be an unimportant truth. But what one writes has to be true. That is all I know.

BIENEK. But haven't you always pursued a certain aim in your poetry as well, whether it be political or social or religious engagement?

AUDEN. No. Of course, if one lives during a certain period, in a certain society, in that sense one is engaged, of course. But to say, one writes with such an aim in mind, political or religious, I don't believe that. Only one tries to say something which one believes to be true.

BIENEK. Yes, but your, if I may say so, political poems of the late 30's were, unlike those of Robert Frost, politically engaged?

AUDEN. Yes, well, I don't believe that I was really politically engaged, it was just that we lived during a time, with depression, and Hitler and so on, and one was forced to think about them. Of course there is always a danger for poets. Because he can so easily believe that he can end a political situation with a poem. And I don't believe that. Great political or social problems have to be met with political action, or similar things, maybe a purely journalistic reportage, photographs, or writing satirically...but there is no point in writing a poem about, how shall I say, a concentration camp or genocide.

BIENEK. These are no topics for poetry. But if I may remind you of your poem about Spain, which in my estimation is a very good poem... a great poem...

AUDEN. [*interrupts Bienek, agitatedly*] Ah, I cannot stand it. I cannot bear it. It is frightful, it is dishonest!

BIENEK. ...and one which is politically engaged.

AUDEN. But dishonest. It is untrue.

BIENEK. What I want to get at is my impression, reading your poetry, that the events of the '30s – I don't know whether this was due to German national socialism or the Spanish Civil War or Stalin's ethnic cleansing in Moscow – that these events changed the extent of your political engagement in your poetry. From this point onwards, your poetry becomes less political and later nearly religious. Is this fair to say?

AUDEN. Yes, I saw that it was vain to think that one could change political circumstances with poetry, you see? It was of course – I was of course also a bit desperate about the whole situation. But, speaking of religion I have to say that my parents were devout and I was brought up as a Christian. And well, at the time, of course, like many young people, I thought that all these things were nonsense. And, slowly slowly, I came back. I am very grateful for that, because I know much better than before what it means to be Christian, after, how shall I put it, I had read Marx and Freud, you see. And there is always this question, as Lichtenstein said, no, Lichtenberg, that there is a great difference between what one still believes and what one believes again.

BIENEK. But wasn't there at the time – and this is what I am aiming at – an important political disappointment, which directly...?

AUDEN. [*interrupts Bienek*] Oh maybe, of course one saw the Spanish Civil war, and it was not a exactly nice, no, [*Binek: Yes, yes*] and then of course what shocked us all was the Nazi-Soviet pact, of course.

BIENEK. I read in the book of one of your critics, or let's say exegetes, Mr. Auden, that you used to keep a mouldy apple in your desk. You will remember this quotation...

AUDEN. ...but they said this about Schiller! Not about me.

BIENEK. [*laughs*] No, no, they claimed this was supposed to remind you of the rotten state of the world.

AUDEN. Ah, no, no, that was not the case.

BIENEK. It is more of a legend...

AUDEN. It is a legend, yes.

BIENEK. But after you went through certain changes in the themes of your poetry during the thirties, from the political to the religious, did you also undergo formal changes in your poetry during this period?

AUDEN. Well, yes, probably, of course, one always tries to do something new, and as soon as one has done something one has to start again, like a new-born child. Of course this is true in formal matters as much as in thematic ones.

BIENEK. If I may, I would like to ask you a few concrete questions about how you work. When do you write a poem? Do you require a sort of trance in order to do so, a complete immersion into oneself, or is it a completely sober process?

AUDEN. Good Lord, no question of trance, no, that of course not. No, one has to work very hard. Of course one has to wait as well. Personally, I find that I have a technical problem to deal with on the one hand, and a topic on the other hand. And slowly slowly, the two converge. And then I can start writing.

BIENEK. Do you need certain triggers, let's say, events or experiences?

AUDEN. No, of course one writes out of experience, but, something has to happen that one can write about, but otherwise one writes about events one has witnessed, you see.

BIENEK. I mean, when you write, do you need, let's say, certain stimulants, coffee, or...?

AUDEN. Nah, oh no, no, nah, coffee of course I always have with breakfast. I drink alcohol after work, I never work in the evening. I work best early in the morning and then between four and cocktail-time. That's it, period.

BIENEK. So you already start very early in the morning, as early as four o'clock? [*Bienek misunderstands Auden.*]

AUDEN. Yes...

BIENEK. Now a few questions about your lectures as Professor of Poetry in Oxford. Were you the first holder of this academic chair, the first poet?

AUDEN. Oh no, the chair was founded in 1704, the first famous poet was Matthew Arnold. And he was actually the first to give his lecture in English, not Latin.

BIENEK. And which topics did you deal with?

AUDEN. I gave several lectures on Shakespeare, and then other poets and similar topics. It was up to me.

BIENEK. The first lecture has now also been published in German, in your collection of essays *The Dyer's Hand*. What is the purpose of these lectures in England? In Germany, as you know, we introduced them as well, with Oxford as a model actually, in Frankfurt. They are really just additional lectures on literature.

AUDEN. Yes. It is not like in America, for instance, it is not a sort of workshop, an 'artists in residence' scheme or similar. No, it is simply an academic position, you see. One talks about one aspect of poetry or another.

BIENEK. For students who are studying English literature?

AUDEN. Yes yes. Or anyone can attend, of course.

BIENEK. Mr. Auden, in one of your essays, 'The Poet and the City', you describe how you imagine a dream academy for poets. Let me quote you perhaps. Point one, you write: 'In addition to English, at least one ancient language, probably Greek or Hebrew, and two modern languages would be required'. Point two says: 'Thousands of lines of poetry in these languages would be learned by heart'. Point three: 'The library would contain no books of literary criticism, and the only critical exercise required of all students would be the writing of parodies'. Here, I hesitate a little. Is literary criticism not important after all, especially for students, in order for them to determine what the critical standards are?

AUDEN. I am very much against it for students. Later it can be very important. This is the case. First, the student has to read the literature itself. Otherwise he will not read it, he will go and see what some critic has said. And this is fatal, in my opinion, you see. First, he should know the text properly. Then he can read other critics.

BIENEK. I will go on, if I may. Point four, you say that every student would have to take classes in metrics, rhetoric, and comparative linguistics, and at least three of the following: mathematics, natural history, geology, meteorology, archaeology, mythology, liturgy and cooking. All of these are sciences, as I see, except for the last three disciplines.

AUDEN. Yes, because he has to know something about the other way of thinking, the scientific way that is, if he wants to understand the world.

BIENEK. So the arts alone are not enough.

AUDEN. They are not enough.

BIENEK. And cooking, that is a...

AUDEN. Cooking requires one to engage with matter.

BIENEK. In order to live, yes, similarly you say at point five that every student should have to look after a pet and a bit of garden.

AUDEN. Yes, because I believe that one cannot understand natural life unless one can relate to it personally. And if one does not understand natural life, understands it properly, one cannot understand human life.

BIENEK. But then of course one still cannot write poetry...

AUDEN. Of course one cannot forge a poet, but there are many poets who are badly educated. Of course all this was only a vision of what would be a good education for someone who does actually have talent.

BIENEK. Mr. Auden, what is your personal attitude towards criticism? You have often published literary criticism.

AUDEN. Ah, I need to make a living [*laughs*].

BIENEK. Really, you only write it in order to make money?

AUDEN. Of course I try to say something which I believe is important. But I can only hope...

BIENEK. As I see you have not engaged much with contemporaries, except for Robert Frost, and Eliot.

AUDEN. No, I write very little about my contemporaries, because one is too close, and also of course one is too busy, at the time, thinking about what one wants to write oneself, so that one does not know modern literature well enough. Literature from the past, that I know pretty well and thus I can talk about it.

BIENEK. In the thirties you wrote plays, too. Together with Christopher Isherwood.

AUDEN. Yes, we wrote, I think, three plays together.

BIENEK. Why did you write them together with him?

AUDEN. Oh, I very much enjoy working together with another person. For example, I collaborated with Isherwood on this play, then with MacNeice on a travel book, and now, when I write libretti, I always work together with Chester Kallman. I like that very much because it is very interesting: if this

kind of collaboration works, there is a third person who is not one or the other, but something new. And it is a lot of fun.

BIENEK. Would you not like to write another play some time? Or maybe a radio play? You know, all the German poets write radio plays nowadays, they mostly make their money that way.

AUDEN. On the radio?

BIENEK. Yes.

AUDEN. Oh yes, I have written a radio play, but the thing is that in America this is not very well-paid. Generally, radio is difficult, commercially.

BIENEK. But in Germany, it is very lucrative, and maybe your play should be translated?

AUDEN. Yes, a translation was broadcast on Hamburg Radio.

BIENEK. *For the Time Being* is in Germany now, too.

AUDEN. Yes, but that is a radio play, a monologue... a drama.

BIENEK. So you are not tempted to write another audio drama?

AUDEN. Nah, at the moment I am interested in libretti, operas. It is a matter of opportunity, too.

BIENEK. Since you are talking about music, you said earlier that you got into poetry through chance. Now I want to ask you how you got interested in music then? You have an especially close relationship with music, being a librettist, as translator and the author of very clever essays on music itself?

AUDEN. I was always interested in music. But when I was very young, opera was, one did not consider it very good taste, you know. Mozart was perhaps possible, this oeuvre, you see. But when I moved to America, I started going to the opera. And I became fascinated, and also through Mr. Kallman, who had always been very interested in opera and was a very good teacher for me... this is how I got interested in opera. I realise now, looking at those plays I wrote with Isherwood, I realise that sometimes I was really trying to write an opera.

BIENEK. Already then...

AUDEN. I did not know that at the time.

BIENEK. How did you come to collaborate with Stravinsky after you had moved to America? And how did your work on *The Rake's Progress* go?

AUDEN. He was looking for a librettist and Aldous Huxley recommended me. Then Chester Kallman and I began to write it, you see, and it went well. Mr. Stravinsky did not request any changes, it worked very nicely.

BIENEK. When was that, in which period?

AUDEN. We wrote the libretto at the end of '47, beginning of '48, and the first performance was in '51.

BIENEK. Did you do other things together with Stravinsky?

AUDEN. No, this is the only opera Stravinsky wrote. Then, of course, we wrote two with Henze, one has appeared, *Elegy for Young Lovers*, and then we wrote the *Bassarids*, which is supposed to be staged in Salzburg in '66.

BIENEK. Ah. What topic is that, the *Bassarids*?

AUDEN. It's Euripides' *Bacchae*.

BIENEK. It is only a version then?

AUDEN. Yes, of course one has to change much, but that is the topic.

BIENEK. This is the second collaboration with Henze, after *Elegy for Young Lovers*. Could you say a few sentences about how you collaborated with Henze?

AUDEN. We first met Henze in '51, in Italy, and we became friends, you know, and then finally he asked us if we could write a libretto for him. And we did.

BIENEK. That was the *Elegies* [*sic*]. Together with Chester Kallman. But the *Bassarids* you did on your own.

AUDEN. No, no...

BIENEK. That was also together with Chester Kallman. Was he here in Berlin, or were you there...?

AUDEN. We actually wrote this libretto in Austria.

BIENEK. Mr. Auden, what are you currently working on? You gave so many talks while you were here in Berlin. Did you even find time for your own literary work?

AUDEN. Yes, but I am very superstitious in that respect. I never talk about what I am writing at the moment because I think that if one talks too much of it, one does not write. Of course I am writing several things.

BIENEK. Yes, of course. Could I maybe put the question this way: is a new book of yours going to appear in the near future?

AUDEN. A new book is going to appear in America, and soon afterwards in England.

BIENEK. Poems?

AUDEN. Yes, poems.

BIENEK. New poems. Have you got a title yet?

AUDEN. Yes, *About the House*.

BIENEK. *About the House!* What kind of poems are they?

AUDEN. A part of it is a sequence of poems about what a house signifies, and every room in the house. It started in the autumn of '57; I bought this house in Austria.

BIENEK. So a rather specific occasion...

AUDEN. I started writing a poem about the kitchen, and then suddenly I realised it was an idea, to write about all the rooms: study, bathroom, loo, bedroom, living room, and so on, you see.

BIENEK. That makes up the entire volume.

AUDEN. Yes. No! It is one half of the volume, this part is called 'Thanksgiving for a Habitat', and then there are various other poems.

BIENEK. Mr. Auden, can you describe how it feels for you to be back in Berlin after so many years, and to live here for a while, with the Ford Foundation? It is a very different Berlin than that of the twenties, naturally enough?

AUDEN. Oh yes, of course, you know, the old Wilhelmine part of the city is gone, and it is not a capital any longer, but of course it is a great experience for me, to have returned here with all my memories of Berlin, and for the work, too. The climate is so wonderful. And I like the 'Berliner' so much, he has not changed, the pertness, the humour, I liked that very much.

BIENEK. You have found that again. Could you maybe express in a sentence what your strongest impression was, your strongest moment in that half-year which you spent in Berlin?

AUDEN. It is too early to say that. I mean, one has to wait until one knows what really happened, no. I regret that there are no good newspapers here anymore now, because there used to be many good newspapers.

BIENEK. Will you return to Berlin, to Germany soon?

AUDEN. Oh, sure!

BIENEK. And when?

AUDEN. I don't know yet, I think I will have to come back next year because the *Bassarids* are meant to be staged at the Berlin opera, and of course I will have to be there.

BIENEK. But would you like to stay here again some time, for an extended period, to work here?

AUDEN. I would like that very much, if it were possible, but it depends on money and many other factors, you know.

BIENEK. Mr. Auden, thank you for talking to us.]

H) CORRESPONDENCE FILE W.H. AUDEN AND HANNAH ARENDT
(THE HANNAH ARENDT PAPERS AT THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS)

1

February 14, 1960

Dear Wystan Auden –

I just read the Falstaff piece – had some trouble getting the old issue of *Encounter* –, think it is quite wonderful, have a number of points I'd like to raise, especially about Greek tragedy; but am writing now because of 'forgiving.'

If we are to trust in what 'the Gospels assure us' of, then the 'command to forgive is not unconditional'. Jesus said: 'If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him.' Furthermore: the offences which Jesus predicts are clearly beyond the power to forgive: 'woe unto him through whom they come. It were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck and he cast into the sea' – it were better for him that he never were born.

You invoke Christian charity, but don't you think Christian charity is curiously absent from these passages? You convinced me that a line should be drawn between forgiveness and judicial pardon. But the more I think about it, the more it seems to me that Christian charity has more in common with judicial pardon than with forgiving. The Law, like charity, has no regard for the person, and may pardon even if he does not repent. Judicial pardon shares with forgiving that it pardons crime for the sake of the person who did it. (It will hardly pardon Bluebeard who is a murderer, but it may pardon a crime passionel because murder was committed by somebody who was not a murderer.) You talk about charity as though it were love, and it is true that love will forgive everything because of its utter commitment to the beloved person. But even love violates the integrity of the wrongdoer if it forgives without having been asked to. Is not forgiving without being asked to really impertinent, or at least conceited – as though one said: Much as you tried, you could not wrong me; charity has made me invulnerable? The trouble with charity as with the law is that it levels out distinction. And judicial pardon, from this viewpoint, seems to be the point

where the law breaks down; the man who receives it is no longer judged solely according to law.

Of course I am prejudiced, namely against charity. But let me at least make a stand for my prejudices. I was wrong when I said that we forgive what was done for the sake of who did it. I may forgive somebody who betrayed me but I am not going to condone betrayal ueberhaupt. I can give forgive somebody without forgiving anything; if I forgive a 'thing' then only that I was wronged. But charity indeed forgives ueberhaupt, it forgives betrayal in the person who betrayed – on the ground, to be sure, of human sinfulness and our solidarity with the sinner. I would admit that there is a great temptation to forgive in the spirit of Who am I to judge?, but I'd rather resist it. Humility and conceit are but two sides of the same matter, both wrong because the result of self-reflection. Pride, on the other hand, which means here to insist that the power of judgment remains unimpaired, is not undermined by the gnawing doubt of self-reflection about my own potential or actual sins, cannot be destroyed in the act of forgiving because loss of pride and loss of 'personality' somehow coincide and forgiveness does not aim at the destruction but on the contrary at the restoration of the persons involved and of the relationship between them.

You equate the command of forgiveness with the commands of not resisting evil, of giving, of not thinking of the morrow, etc., that is, of doing good as an activity. I grant you all you say about this – you say it very beautifully –, but does forgiving belong into the same category? I do not know what is more difficult. To demand a cost or to give the cloak also, but I am quite sure that it is more difficult to ask for forgiveness. This side of the matter, that is, the mutuality of the whole business, remains outside all consideration in 'doing good', but it is essential for the act of forgiving.

You are entirely right (and I was entirely wrong) in that punishment is a necessary alternative only to judicial pardon. I was thinking of the absurd position of the judges during the Nuremberg trials who were confronted with crimes of such a magnitude that they transcended all possible punishment. But this surely is another matter.

I better stop. I hope you don't think I am being quarrelsome and, worse, tiresome. But if you do, you will, please, be kind, and forget it.

Thanks ever so much for birthday invitation. I accept with pleasure. I'll be a bit late (have a dinner engagement before) but long before 'carriage time'.

2

28 March 1964

Dear Sir:

While reading your essay 'The Poet and the City', published in The Dyer's Hand, I noticed how strikingly it resembled in subject, approach, vocabulary, and conclusions Hannah Arendt's book The Human Condition. While I readily allow that occasional similarities in any of these respects between works of speculation on the dilemmas of modern civilization will occur, I feel the correspondence in this case approaches identity – as though your observations were a paraphrase or extension to the particular viewpoint of the poet of Miss Arendt's thought.

I will not attempt to exhaust the points of correspondence, but merely indicate the identical theme of contrasting the attitude prevalent in Ancient Greece and in contemporary society toward the 'Public Realm' and the 'Private Realm', toward homo laborans and homo faber, and your remarks on the difficulties and likely political viewpoint of the poet which, it seems to me, could only have been suggested by the arguments presented in the chapter of Miss Arendt's book entitled 'work'.

As an admirer of this woman's thought, and as a reader who has greatly enjoyed your writing, I feel obliged to call to your attention what I believe must be either extraordinary coincidence or a reprehensible omission on your part in failing to acknowledge a source which may have inspired this essay. Miss Arendt's profound and original work assures her a wide audience and a shining reputation. Your own work has assured yours as well. I am, therefore, at a loss to reconcile your estimable reputation with, what appears to be, an act of willful negligence toward a fellow author. If I am mistaken, I sincerely invite your admonition.

Very truly yours,
Christopher L. Bowen

3

St Mark's place
Monday [?]

Dear Hannah:

Many thanks for your letter, the mss of Mahagonny, and your comments.

I am particularly glad you like the translation of the Crane Duet because it is by Chester Kallman, not by me, and people are always apt to underestimate his part in our collaborations.

The deepest craving of man is
Not to suffer but do as he pleases.

I agree men would be better but then we should lose a syllable with pleases. Jimmy is accused of murdering Alaska Wolf Joe by encouraging him to fight Trinity Moses.

We will fix up the passage about the sheriffs and Lady Begbick.

Have been invited by the Kennedy's to attend the Inauguration Ceremonies. Do you [think] this is Der Untergang des Westens?

Love,
Wystan

4

June 7th, [?], Kirchstetten

Dear Hannah:

Many thanks for your letter. It's a shame we just missed each other in München. As regards the New School Conference, I'm not returning to N.Y. till Nov 1st, so [*definitely?*] must be counted out: Austria is wonderfully backward, no [*students?*] and little drug-problem. This year long-hair has arrived in the village for the first time.

At the moment the elders are in blossom, so we are having elderberry tea every night.

Love, Wystan

5

Feb 27th, [?]. Texas

Dearest Hannah:

Touched and delighted to get your birthday telegram, and now immensely grateful for your Reflections, which I read on the plane yesterday and am about to re-read.

[...]

6

June 15, 1971

Dear Wystan

Thanks ever so much for your kind, prompt answer. We shall miss you, and I'm very much looking forward to November when you will be back.

I'm writing because I forgot the following: I've been lecturing last winter at a Benedictine monastery, St. John's Abbey, in the neighborhood of Minneapolis. I was invited by Father Chrysostom Kim, a Korean monk and priest who studied with us in Chicago and of whom we all were extraordinarily fond. The monastery runs a college, coed, on a fairly high level, in complete freedom. They paid me only \$500, but they probably would be willing to pay more. I couldn't have said no under any circumstances because of Kim. I enjoyed the whole business far more than I expected, was very well taken care of, and I was in sympathy with the atmosphere of the place. Kim is running his special honors program, and he will probably ask you to come and spend perhaps a week or so with them. If you get that invitation, remember, it's a good place to be from every viewpoint, except weather in the winter.

Love,

Yours,

Hannah

7

Kirchstetten, [?]

Dear Hannah:

Delighted to get your letter. Am flying to N.Y on the 19 to pack up and leave on the 30th. I do trust you will be there. So glad you like my poem.

Love

Wystan

8

Christ Church, Oxford

April 3rd 1973

Dearest Hannah.

Hope you enjoyed Forewords and Afterwords.

All well here. The colleges are nice but Oxford City is sheer hell.

Compared with N.Y., it is four times as crowded, and the traffic noise is at least six times louder.

I have a day-dream of you being invited to lecture here. Do you have any contacts?

Much love

Wystan

9

Christ Church, Oxford

May 10th [?]

Dear Hannah:

Many thanks for your letter. Alas, I have to go to Ilkley in Yorkshire on the 19th for five days and then leave for Austria on the 27th, so we shall miss each other. What a shame!

Love, Wystan

10

July 5th [note in pencil: 7/18/73]

Kirchstetten

Dear Hannah:

Delighted to get your letter. I, too, miss you very much. I'm sorry you have a 'thing' about Oxford. I should so love to see you as a visiting Fellow of All Souls, even though that would mean enduring A.L. Rowse's lunatic conversation. After all, you are one of the most intelligent persons now living.

Thank you for recommending a German translator, whom I shall certainly keep in mind, in case any German publisher should show an interest in the book.

I'm fine. At 66 1/2, I get tired more quickly than I used to, but, as far as I can judge, my brain still seems to be in working [?]. If you are going to be in Europe until the end of August, would there be any possible chance of you visiting me before returning to the U.S. We would love to have you. I'm coming to the states in Feb for a reading tour, and plan to stay a week first in N.Y. seeing friends. Hope the poem overleaf will amuse you. Last Christmas was the first I've spent in England since 1937.

Love,

Wystan

('Thank you, Fog' attached)

I) LETTERS BY W.H. AUDEN SENT FROM GERMANY IN 1945
(BERG COLLECTION, NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY, W.H. AUDEN COLLECTION OF PAPERS)

1

May 7th [1945], Somewhere in Germany

Dearest Chester,

At last a moment to drop you a line. What can I say about Army Life? Well, it's like a nunnery where one's better fed than the outside world, but is sealed off all the same. Even in London when I saw friends, I felt it was somehow irregular. And the objects I have to look after. Steel Helmet,

leggings, belt etc etc. As always they conspire against me but the enlisted men are very kind about helping me.

We are very fortunate in our billets, a large house on the outskirts of a town with real beds and quite a large library. Unfortunately my predecessors on this job liberated all the pornographic books. I expect to be here for the rest of the month before going on somewhere else.

I saw Eliot who was nicer than ever. Cyril who is much fatter but nice and wanted to hear about you. Tony Baver [?] just the same. I even condescended to see John Lehmann who was quite dreadful. The Audrey Smith line does not suit him. Benjy and Peter asked after you. The opera rehearsals are just beginning.

Now that VE day has come, I hope you and Willy will soon be reunited, and that the gods will be favourable.

God bless you and let me know how you are if you can. It will be weeks before I get any mail.

Much love

Wystan

P.S love to Dave and everyone else. Jimmy has still not arrived.

2

May 9th 1945, Somewhere in Germany

Dearest Elizabeth [*Mayer*],

Just a line to let you know I arrived some days ago on the outskirts of a town which I expect you know though I've never heard you speak of it. I should say where there once was a town. We are very fortunate in our billets, the house of the leading local Nazi who committed suicide. There are real beds, atrocious pictures, a dull library, hot water, and very nice lot of people. I keep wishing you were with us to help and then I think perhaps not, for as I write this sentence I find myself crying.

I had a little time in London and got up to see my father who is ageing quickly now. He asked after you. I saw Eliot who is a [?] of strength and then I saw Ben and Peter just before they went off to S Wells for rehearsals. Ben looks older but pretty well and Peter was blooming. I gave them such news as I had.

I hope you have heard from Christopher, and that if he goes it all, Michael will come this way. I don't see why he shouldn't apply for an airport as we have a number of enlisted men working with us.

I hope to be back in the fall and will give you news then.

Much love to all of you

Wystan

3

May 18th [1945], Somewhere in Germany

Dearest Cherster,

O how I keep wishing you were here. Without you to share them my experiences and only half what they might be.

The town where I am was 92% destroyed in 30 minutes. You simply cannot imagine what it looks like, and the stories I hear.

[*Wolf Stolper?*] has been and gone. We went one day in search of Gestapo documents which had been kept in the schoolhouse of a small village. I liberated a report on Juvenile Delinquency, especially of one kind, which I shall bring you back as a souvenir. We are an odd collection of people, one or two, I suspect, *comme ça*, but not very nice. The chief exception is a major who has evidently seen too many war movies starring James Cagney.

I've been to Heidelberg and had some extremely interesting talks with people who have been living for years in small rooms behind closed shutters. The kind of group life we live is extremely a-sexual, but as I flash by in my jeep I sometimes see sights which make me wish the world hurry up with changing the non-fraternisation rule. Next Sunday at a baroque church not far off they are doing a Mozart Mass. I hope to go. Still no mail. All my love, I miss you
Wystan.

4

June 4th 1945 München, Germany

Dearest Elizabeth and William,

Last night I got my first lot of mail since I left the States including one from you. I hope you have had my Darmstadt letter by now saying I saw Frau Jaffe. We four teams of which I am Research Chief [...] arrived here last Wednesday. Viele Grüsse from Frau von [?]. You never gave J your exact address. We went up to the corner of Deutscher Freiheit [?] and Ungarer Strasse and tried to decide which corner was yours. Most of the houses are still standing, but the city, as a whole, is gone. The towers of the Frauenkirche remain and half the nave, but why go on. I'm writing this sitting in my jeep outside Planettastrasse I where we interview, waiting to go and see Counter Intelligence about crime and undergoing movements during the war. On Sunday I had tea with a Dr Schmorell whose son was one of the 4 beheaded in 1943. [...] The intelligentsia seems to be reading Hölderlin and Christian Morgenstern. Last week I went to a hospital at [*Unterschöndorf ?*] (was a school) where they have brought Jews from concentration camps. I was prepared for their appearance but not for their voices. They whisper like gnomes.

We have no newspapers and no radio so know nothing about the world. Gauleiter Giessler committed suicide.

Heartbreaking as it would be for you, I still wish very much you were here: Washington is going, I know, to say that the people we've interviewed have pulled the wool over our eyes, but it is not so.

Friday we go to Kempten, then to Nürnberg, Erlangen, and back here at the beginning of July. I hope you have more news of Christopher and Michael [...].

5

June 5th 1945 5.30 am, Steinbergsee [?] N. Munich, Germany

Dearest Chester

Last night, my first batch of mail arrived. I had had a faint hope that there might be one from you and lo and behold there were FOUR, lovely long ones dated April 26th, May 12th, May 15th, and May 24th. You are an angel

to have written like that, and I know how scrappy my letters have been. Reasons for that are a) I am a bad letter writer anyway b) I am worked hard, ie I get up at 6.0 leave this house at 7 (no time even to shit) and don't finish work till about 9.0 in the evening c) Army life does stupefy the mind. One is never alone and it is the worst possible mixture of Prep school discipline and Bohemian disorder.

First about your job. Is there anything I can do? Do go and see Walter Pistole at Reynal and Hitchcock. Jim [?] might be helpful too. Have you thought any more about The Gauntlet or Musical Criticism. I'm longing to hear a few notes myself which I don't. Think of being in Germany and unable to hear a sound.

The poem I will leave till next letter when I've had time to read it carefully. It seems lovely on first reading but a few – to me – questionable grammatical inversions. (a note last night from Curtis Brown to say that my collected had already (May 21st) sold over six thousand copies and that [?] is longing to lick my arse)

I do hope W will get back soon. The chances are for once quite high, I should think that he will. Has he collected any battle stars? They and children seem what counts.

Hope David is being easier. There is nothing to be done about your father, I fear, except not live so near, and the housing shortage makes that a problem.

Two days ago Jimmy and I sat at a tea table listening to a father and mother describe how their son was beheaded for high treason – then I think I told you how I went to a hospital where they have brought Jews from concentration camps – the faces you have probably seen – what I was unprepared for were the voices, they whisper like gnomes and have only one interest – to let their relatives know they are alive. One poor thing gave me his brothers address but all he could remember was Weiss – Brooklyn – NY and when I told him that was not sufficient he started to cry.

This morning I have to see an old historian (American) at C.I.C. for [?] about juvenile delinquency and underground movements in Munich during the war.

Must stop as it is breakfast time.

All my love, dear, and thanks ever so for writing like that.

Wystan

6

July 24th, [1945], Nuremberg

Dearest Chester,

I have been a long time in writing to you but then I haven't heard a line from you since May. I heard from Tania via Jimmy that she had another nice meal with you, but in my silly [?] way I worry about you, your job, etc.

Now I suppose I shant hear till I see you and we have only three, then a few days in Bad Nauheim then London then N.Y. It will be swell to see you again and I count the days.

I've just completed my various reports on 3 cities with statistics (so anal, my dear, you'd love it) + a [?] report on July 20th to a very high-brow

report on Christianity and N.S. (If Stimson will read it, he will be much improved).

Have been reported by the M.Ps twice for leaving a jeep unattended, and have spooned a little with the cook, otherwise an uneventful life. Will be glad to get out of uniform though it's nice to get cigarettes.

All my love and Auf Wiedersehn.

Wystan

J) MISCELLANEOUS

1

June 7th 1971

Dear M Täubert

Thank you for your letter. I saw quite a lot of Klaus Mann during the war-years.

Between ourselves, I think his parents are partly to blame for what happened, because they did not insist in seeing that he got a good education. He could only enter the literary world where he could not hope to compete with Papa. In contrast, his brother, Golo, was well educated and could find his own line as a historian.

Yours sincerely,

Wystan Auden

(MONACENSIA. LITERATURARCHIV UND BIBLIOTHEK MÜNCHEN)

2

May 14th 1950
Via Santa Lucia 22
Forio d'Ischia

Dear Mr Paeschke,

Thank you very much for your letter of April 24th which I was waiting to answer until the arrival of Merkur which came to-day. I congratulate you on your magazine and the kind of thing you are doing. Would you please convey to Herr Hansen my thanks for his translations from The Age of Anxiety which seem to me to have been done with great skill and sensibility. (You might tell him, however, that his description of the original metre is incorrect).

You are, of course, welcome to use The [*Quest?*] Hero in Merkur if you care to and, if you want any x prose, I have some notes on Nature, History, and Poetry which I could let you have.

As to something for German readers as such, I wouldn't know what to say. In these times the persons one wants to speak to and to hear from are pretty much the same kind of person in all countries and subjected to pretty much the same kind of pressures to resist. P.T.O.

I shall always feel a great gratitude to German for so much that I have learnt from from [*sic*] some German writers such as (to leave the poets out) Nietzsche, Groddeck and Rudolf Kassner.

With best wishes and many thanks,

Yours sincerely
W.H. Auden

(DEUTSCHES LITERATURARCHIV MARBACH)

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