The Cambridge Companion to W. H. Auden

This volume brings together specially commissioned essays by some of the world's leading experts on the life and work of W. H. Auden, one of the major English-speaking poets of the twentieth century. The volume's contributors include a prize-winning poet, Auden's literary executor and editor, and his most recent, widely acclaimed biographer. It offers fresh perspectives on his work from new and established Auden critics, alongside the views of specialists from such diverse fields as drama, ecological and travel studies. It provides scholars, students and general readers with a comprehensive and authoritative account of Auden's life and works in clear and accessible English. Besides providing authoritative accounts of the key moments and dominant themes of his poetic development, the Companion examines his language, style and formal innovation, his prose and critical writing and his ideas about sexuality, religion, psychoanalysis, politics, landscape, ecology and globalisation. It also contains a comprehensive bibliography of writings about Auden.
THE CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO

W. H. AUDEN

EDITED BY

STAN SMITH
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CONTRIBUTORS

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RICHARD R. BOZORTH is Associate Professor of English at Southern Methodist University, Dallas, Texas, and the author of Auden’s Games of Knowledge: Poetry and the Meanings of Homosexuality (2001).

NADIA HERMAN COLBURN, a recipient of both Mellon and Javits Fellowships, recently completed a PhD from Columbia University, The Surface of What’s There: The Paradox of Authority, which examines the work of Auden, John Ashbery and James Merrill. She was editor of the Auden Society Newsletter from 1999–2003. Her poetry has appeared in numerous publications, including The New Yorker, American Poetry Review, The Harvard Review and Boston Review.

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Christopher Innes is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada, a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts (UK), and Distinguished Research Professor at York University, where he holds the Canada Research Chair in Performance and Culture. His most recent books are: Avant Garde Theatre (1993); The Theatre of Gordon Craig (1997); Sourcebooks on Naturalist Theatre (2000) and on Hedda Gabler (2003); and Modern British Drama: the Twentieth Century (1992). He is editor of The Cambridge Companion to Bernard Shaw (1998), as well as the General Editor for the Cambridge ‘Directors in Perspective’ series, and has been co-editor of the quarterly journal Modern Drama. For more information see www.moderndrama.com

Nicholas Jenkins teaches English at Stanford University. He has contributed essays and reviews to the London Review of Books; New Republic; TLS; The New Yorker; New York Times Book Review; and Yale Review. He is co-editor, with Katherine Bucknell, of Auden Studies, and editor of Alan Ansen, The Table-Talk of W. H. Auden. He is currently completing a book entitled The Island: W. H. Auden and the Making of a Post-National Poetry, and a critical edition of Auden’s The Double Man. He is General Editor of the Princeton University Press translation series Facing Pages, and literary executor of one of Auden’s closest friends, the ballet impresario Lincoln Kirstein.

John Lucas, Emeritus Professor of English at the Universities of Loughborough and Nottingham Trent, is the author and editor of many books of criticism, including England and Englishness: Ideas of Nationhood in English Poetry (1990) and Dickens: The Major Novels (1992), and of six collections of poetry. Recent books include The Radical Twenties: Writing, Politics and Culture (1999); Ivor Gurney (2001); Starting to Explain: Essays on Twentieth-Century British and Irish Poetry (2003); and A World Perhaps: New and Selected Poems (2002). Since 1994 he has been the publisher of The Shoestring Press, Nottingham.
Paola Marchetti teaches at the Università Cattolica in Milan, Italy. She is the author of *Landscapes of Meaning: From Auden to Hughes* (2001), a study of the twentieth-century short story, *Fiction and Reality: Percorsi del Racconto Contemporaneo in Lingua Inglese* (1999) and articles on Auden, Dylan Thomas and Thom Gunn. She is currently completing a study of Auden’s libretti.

Edward Mendelson is the literary executor of the estate of W. H. Auden and Professor of English and Comparative Literature at Columbia University, New York. His books include *Early Auden* (1981) and *Later Auden* (1999). In addition to the *Collected Poems, Forewords and Afterwords, The English Auden* and many other collections and selections of Auden’s writings, he is the editor of the Faber/Princeton *Complete Works of W. H. Auden*. He has recently completed a book tentatively titled *The Thing That Mattered: Birth, Childhood, Growth, Marriage, Parenthood, and the Future in Seven English Novels*.

Rod Mengham is Reader in Modern English Literature at the University of Cambridge, where he is also Curator of Works of Art at Jesus College. He is the author of books on Charles Dickens, Emily Brontë and Henry Green, as well as of *The Descent of Language* (1993). He has edited collections of essays on contemporary fiction, violence and avant-garde art, and the fiction of the 1940s. He is also the editor of the Equipage series of poetry pamphlets and co-editor and co-translator of *Altered State: The New Polish Poetry* (2003). His own poems have been published under the title *Unsung: New and Selected Poems* (1996; 2nd edition, 2001).

Peter Porter was born in Brisbane, Australia in 1929. He is the author of many volumes of poetry and the two volumes of his *Collected Poems* were published by Oxford University Press in 1999. He won the Duff Cooper Prize in 1983 and the Whitbread Poetry Award in 1988, was awarded the Gold Medal for Australian Literature in 1990, and in 2002 the Queen’s Gold Medal for Poetry and the Forward Prize for Best Poetry Collection of the Year for his volume *Max is Missing*. He is a prolific reviewer and broadcaster on both literature and classical music. He is a Visiting Professor of Poetry at The Nottingham Trent University and his collection of literary essays, *Saving from the Wreck*, was published by Trent Books in 2001.

Gareth Reeves is Reader in English at the University of Durham. He is the author of *T. S. Eliot: A Virgilian Poet* (1989); *T. S. Eliot’s ‘The Waste Land’* (1994); two volumes of poetry; and with Michael O’Neill, of *Auden, MacNeice, Spender: The Thirties Poetry* (1992). He has also published essays...
on more recent poets, including Donald Davie, Thom Gunn, Seamus Heaney, Robert Lowell and Charles Tomlinson.

Ian Sansom is a freelance journalist, reviewer and critic whose Oxford DPhil examined Auden’s influence on a range of British and American poets. His essay on Randall Jarrell and Auden appeared in Auden Studies iii. He is the author of The Truth About Babies (2002) and Ring Road (2004).

Tony Sharpe teaches at Lancaster University, where he specialises in modern and American literature and formerly headed the Department of English. His published books include studies of Vladimir Nabokov, T. S. Eliot and Wallace Stevens, and he is currently writing the Complete Critical Guide to W. H. Auden. Alongside this he is working on a project exploring Auden’s references to locations in the North of England and his lead-mining interests.

Stan Smith is Research Professor in Literary Studies at Nottingham Trent University, previously held the Established Chair of English at Dundee University and has been Visiting Professor at Florence and Zaragoza Universities. He has published two books and many essays on Auden. Other work includes Inviolable Voice: History and Twentieth-Century Poetry (1982); Edward Thomas (1986); W. B. Yeats: A Critical Introduction (1990); The Origins of Modernism: Eliot, Pound, Yeats and the Rhetorics of Renewal (1994); an edition of Storm Jameson’s In The Second Year (2004); and numerous essays on modern and contemporary literature. Ireland Between Fantasy and History: Irish Poetry and the Construction of Modern Identity will be published in 2005. He is currently preparing a variorum edition of The Orators; a book on The Descent of Modernism; a survey of modernist poetry; and various collections.

Tim Youngs is Professor of English and Travel Studies at The Nottingham Trent University. He is the author of Travellers in Africa (1994) and has co-edited with Peter Hulme The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing (2002) and with Glenn Hooper Perspectives on Travel Writing (2004). He is founder editor of the journal Studies in Travel Writing.
ABBREVIATIONS AND TEXTUAL NOTE


Ansen


ASN

The *W. H. Auden Society Newsletter*; currently published from Department of English, Columbia University, New York, N.Y. 10027, USA.

ASI, ASII, ASIII


AT

W. H. Auden, *Another Time* (London: Faber and Faber, 1940)

Berg

The Henry W. and Albert A. Berg Collection, New York Public Library (Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations)

Bodleian

The Department of Western Manuscripts, Bodleian Library, Oxford

Carpenter


CW


DH

<table>
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<th>Abbreviation</th>
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<td><strong>Dogskin</strong></td>
<td>W. H. Auden and Christopher Isherwood, <em>The Dog Beneath the Skin or Where is Francis?</em> (London: Faber and Faber, 1935)</td>
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<td><strong>EF</strong></td>
<td>W. H. Auden, <em>The Enchafèd Flood</em> (London: Faber and Faber, 1951)</td>
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<td><strong>F6</strong></td>
<td>W. H. Auden and Christopher Isherwood, <em>The Ascent of F6</em> (London: Faber and Faber, 1936)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Fuller 1970</strong></td>
<td>John Fuller, <em>A Reader’s Guide to W. H. Auden</em> (London: Faber and Faber, 1970); revised and extended as</td>
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<td><strong>JTW</strong></td>
<td>W. H. Auden and Christopher Isherwood, <em>Journey to a War</em> (London: Faber and Faber, 1939)</td>
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<td><strong>New Verse</strong></td>
<td><em>New Verse Auden Double Number</em>, nos. 26–7, November 1937, ed. Geoffrey Grigson</td>
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<td><strong>NYL</strong></td>
<td>W. H. Auden, <em>New Year Letter</em> (London: Faber and Faber, 1941)</td>
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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND TEXTUAL NOTE

Plays

Prose I

Prose II

Poet’s Tongue

RD-H

Smith

Spain
W. H. Auden, Spain (London: Faber and Faber, 1937); published in a revised version as ‘Spain 1937’ in Another Time (1940)

SW
W. H. Auden, Secondary Worlds (London: Faber and Faber, 1968)

The Orators
W. H. Auden, The Orators: An English Study (London: Faber and Faber, 1932; revised editions 1934, 1966)

Tribute
CHRONOLOGY OF AUDEN’S LIFE AND WORKS

1907  Wystan Hugh Auden born, 21 February, in York, third son of George Augustus Auden (1872–1957) and Constance Rosalie Bicknell (1870–1941). His older brothers were Bernard, in later life a farmer, and John, who became a geologist.

1908  When he was six months old, the family moved to Birmingham, where his father became Chief Medical Officer for Schools and Professor of Public Health at Birmingham University.

1914–18  The ‘Great War’. War declared, 4 August 1914. Dr Auden served in the Royal Army Medical Corps, in Gallipoli, Egypt and France.

1915–20  Boarder at St Edmund’s Preparatory School, Hindhead, Surrey. Met Christopher Isherwood, a fellow pupil who became a lifelong friend and, in the 1930s, a regular if occasional lover.

1917  October  Revolution in Russia.

1918  Great War ended, November 11. Father returned from the Army (‘Father and butter to the table came’). World-wide epidemic of ‘Spanish Influenza’ killed more people than the whole war.

1920–5  Boarder at Gresham’s School, Holt, described in his essay ‘Honour’. First read Freud and in 1922 fell in love with a fellow pupil, Robert Medley, at whose suggestion he began to write poetry. (Medley contributed a memoir of their school days to the Tribute edited by Stephen Spender in 1974.) First poem published in the school magazine, attributed to ‘W. H. Arden’.
Chronology

1925

Brief, obscure engagement to a nurse in Birmingham. Accompanied his father to Europe, staying in Kitzbühel, Austria, with his father’s wartime friend Frau Hedwig Petzold.

1925–8

Exhibitioner at Christ Church, Oxford, studying Natural Sciences, then PPE (Politics, Philosophy, Economics) under Roy Harrod, and finally English, tutored by Nevill Coghill, graduating with a Third Class degree. Among undergraduates he met there were Stephen Spender, Cecil Day Lewis, Louis MacNeice and Bill McElwee, for whom he developed an unrequited passion.

1926

Revisited Austria. First heterosexual experience (probably with paternal encouragement) with the considerably older Frau Petzold. During the General Strike, unlike most undergraduates, supported the TUC, driving a vehicle for the strikers. Fellow undergraduate and Strike supporter, Tom Driberg, introduced him to modernist writing, particularly Eliot’s Waste Land, and to Edith Sitwell, Laura Riding, Virginia Woolf and Gertrude Stein, whom Driberg brought up to speak in Oxford. In later years Driberg was a society gossip columnist on the Daily Express (as ‘William Hickey’), a war correspondent, Labour MP and peer, and Chairman of the Labour Party, posthumously exposed as a Soviet double agent. In 1926 and 1927 Auden co-edited the undergraduate annual Oxford Poetry, first with Charles Plumb and then with C. Day Lewis.

1928

Auden’s Poems published privately on a small hand-press by Stephen Spender. August: began a year in Berlin, in company with Isherwood, where he encountered for the first time serious left-wing politics, in the strife-ridden last days of the Weimar Republic. Brief affairs with working-class youths, most of them male prostitutes, including Kurt Groote and Gerhart Meyer, named in the poem later called ‘1929’.
<table>
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<th>Year</th>
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<td>1929</td>
<td>In Berlin, John Layard tried to involve him in his bungled suicide attempt. Returned from Germany to teach in London. October: the Wall Street Crash inaugurated the Depression years. ‘1929’, begun in Germany, ended in October with auguries of economic and social collapse and the ‘death of the Old Gang’.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1930</td>
<td>T. S. Eliot arranged publication of ‘Paid on Both Sides’ in the <em>Criterion</em>, and of <em>Poems</em> (1930) with Faber and Faber. While teaching (1930–2) at the Larchfield School, Helensburgh (later Larchfield Academy) wrote <em>The Orators: An English Study</em>, drawing on many local figures and places. The <em>Helensburgh and Gareloch Times</em> records that at the annual Prize Day in 1932 pupils performed a play specially written for them by Auden, <em>Sherlock Holmes Chez Duhamel</em> (now lost). Had an intense and ill-starred affair with the son of a Clydebank iron-founder, the prototype of ‘Derek my chum’ in <em>The Orators</em>, with whom he visited the Shetland Islands.</td>
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<td>1931</td>
<td>January</td>
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<td>1932–5</td>
<td>Taught at the Downs School, Colwall, Malvern. Hitler elected German <em>Reichskanzler</em>. <em>The Dance of Death</em> published, to be performed a year later by the avant-garde experimental Group Theatre under the direction of Rupert Doone.</td>
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<td>1933</td>
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| 1934 | A summer vacation motoring in Germany and Central Europe, penetrating as far as the Carpathians, accompanied by two former pupils of the Downs School, Peter Roger and Michael Yates, with whom Auden was in love, celebrated in the poem ‘A Bride in the Thirties’. (A lifelong
friend, Yates contributed a moving memoir to Spender’s *Tribute* volume.) Auden’s camp narrative of the expedition published as ‘In Search of Dracula’ in the Downs school magazine, the Badger.

1935

Married Erika Mann, the anti-Nazi, lesbian daughter of the Nobel Prize-winning novelist Thomas Mann, to provide her with a passport to leave Germany. Worked with John Grierson and the GPO Film Unit, writing ‘Night Mail’ for the documentary film of that name. *The Dog Beneath the Skin*, written jointly with Christopher Isherwood, performed by the Group Theatre.

1936

January


1937

Published *Letters from Iceland*, written jointly with MacNeice. Spent January–March in Valencia, Spain, where he broadcast for the embattled Republic. Published the pamphlet poem *Spain*, all proceeds to Medical Aid for Spain (later reprinted in *Another Time* in revised form as ‘Spain 1937’). On his return to Britain, met the writer and theological scholar Charles Williams, who was soon to have an enormous influence on his thought. Taught at the Downs School.

1938

With Isherwood visited a war-torn China, recently invaded by the Japanese Imperial Army, returning via Japan and USA. March:
**Chronology**

Anschluss, incorporating Austria into Hitler’s Third Reich. September: the Munich Agreement. On behalf of Britain, Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain agreed to the cession of Czech Sudetenland to Hitler. November: the play *On the Frontier*, written jointly with Isherwood, performed by Group Theatre in Cambridge.

1939

The travelogue *Journey to a War*, jointly written with Isherwood. January: Spanish Civil War ended with victory for the right-wing Falangist rebels and a nationwide massacre of supporters of the Republic. Auden and Isherwood left Britain for the United States, where Auden lived in Brooklyn Heights, New York, from 1939 to 1941. Isherwood moved to Hollywood, to work as script-writer for Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. March: taking advantage of the Munich Agreement and the mood of ‘Appeasement’, Hitler occupied Prague, the Czech capital. April: in New York, Auden met the eighteen-year-old student Chester Kallman, an aggressively ‘out’ and promiscuous homosexual who, though Jewish, had the stereotypical ‘Aryan’ good looks Auden favoured. They were to remain partners, with several turbulent interruptions, for the rest of their lives.

24 August

The Nazi-Soviet Pact between Germany and the Soviet Union agreed the partition of Poland. 1 September: Hitler invaded Poland, followed shortly by Stalin. 3 September: Britain and France declared war on Germany. Widespread disillusion on the Left led to divisions both within and outside the Communist movement, reflected in the poems of *Another Time*.

1940

*Another Time*, technically his first American volume, but with poems primarily written in Europe. Taught at the New School for Social Research, New York. Met Reinhold and Ursula Niebuhr, Christian Socialist Americans of German extraction, who were to have a profound influence on his later thinking. Under their
guidance, he came to reject the pacifism towards which he had been drifting, and rediscovered a politically and socially committed Christianity.

1941

His first real American book, The Double Man (published in Britain as New Year Letter). Benjamin Britten’s operetta Paul Bunyan, for which Auden wrote the libretto, performed at Columbia University. Taught at Olivet College, Michigan, and Michigan University, Ann Arbor.

1942–5

Taught at Swarthmore and Bryn Mawr Colleges.

1944

For the Time Being published in the USA. Met Rhoda Jaffe, with whom he was to have an intermittent and intense sexual relationship between 1945 and 1948.

1945

The Second World War ended with the fall of Berlin, followed by the atom-bombing of Japan. Labour Government elected in Britain. Death of Roosevelt. Auden returned to Europe (via the UK) as a major in the US Airforce Strategic Bombing Survey, charged to monitor the effects of civilian bombing and to contact anti-Nazis known before the war. Moved to 7 Middagh Street, in Brooklyn Heights, New York. Collected Poetry published in USA.

1946


1947

Taught religion at Barnard College. The Age of Anxiety published.

1949

Gave the Page-Barbour Lectures at University of Virginia, published as The Enchafed Flood (1950). Communists under Mao Tse Tung seized power in China.

1949–57

Rented each spring and summer a villa on Ischia, a small island off Naples, Italy.

1950

Collected Shorter Poems 1939–1944 published in UK. Taught at Mount Holyoke College. Korean War began, focusing the new
chronology

Cold War with the Soviet Union which succeeded the wartime alliance against Hitler.

1951
Labour Government ousted in Britain. Auden’s old friend and possible former lover, Guy Burgess, for many years undetected as a Soviet spy in the Foreign Office, sought to use Auden’s Ischian villa as a staging-post on his flight to Russia. Nones published in the USA. Stravinsky’s The Rake’s Progress, for which Auden and Kallman wrote the libretto, performed in Venice.

1953
Death of Stalin. Berlin Uprising brutally suppressed. Lives (until 1972) at 77 St Mark’s Place, Greenwich Village; Research Professor, Smith College.

1955
The Shield of Achilles published.

1956
Khrushchev’s denunciation of Stalin’s ‘cult of personality’ at 20th Congress of CPSU. Hungarian Uprising and Suez Crisis. Succeeded Day Lewis as Professor of Poetry at Oxford University, an honorary elective appointment (until 1961).

1958
With the proceeds of an Italian literary prize, bought a farmhouse in the village of Kirchstetten, Lower Austria, shared with Kallman until his death. In later years Kallman spent much of his time in Athens, where he had short-lived affairs with a series of young Greek men.

1960
Homage to Clio published.

1961
Hans Werner Henze’s Elegy for Young Lovers, libretto by Auden and Kallman, performed in Stuttgart.

1962
The Dyer’s Hand published in USA. October: a casual boyfriend, Hugerl, a young Viennese rent-boy and petty criminal, sentenced to fifteen months’ gaol for a robbery in which he used Auden’s Volkswagen as a getaway car, leaving it with a bullet-hole in the bonnet (see the poem ‘Glad’).

1963
Chronology

1964
Revisited Iceland. Six months Ford Foundation artists-in-residence programme, Berlin. October: Labour Government elected in Britain, Khrushchev ousted, China’s first atom bomb tested, all on the same day.

1965
About the House published.

1966
Henze’s The Bassarids, with libretto by Auden and Kallman, performed in Salzburg. Collected Shorter Poems published.

1968

1969
City Without Walls published.

1970

1971
Academic Graffiti published.

1972
While at All Souls, Oxford, robbed by a young labourer he had befriended. Lived in a cottage in the grounds of his old college, Christ Church. Published Epistle to a Godson, dedicated to Spender’s nephew Philip.

1973
Nicholas Nabokov’s Love’s Labours Lost, with libretto by Auden and Kallman, performed in Brussels. Forewords and Afterwords, edited by Edward Mendelson.

29 September
After delivering a talk in Vienna, died of heart attack in a small hotel in the Walfischgasse, close to the Staatsoper. Buried in the Kirchstetten churchyard.

1974

1975
January
Kallman died in Athens, aged fifty-four.