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**Stan Smith,**  
***W.H. Auden***  
(Writers and Their Work).

Plymouth: Northcote House in Association with the British Council, 1997.  
xiii + 107 pp.

This new title of the series *Writers and Their Work* aims to introduce W. H. Auden and his context to a wide academic reading public. The book takes into consideration some interesting biographical material, and includes a detailed list of biographical, bibliographical and critical studies on the poet. Furthermore, it offers a concise, thorough, and distinctly personal reappraisal of Auden's major literary production, while making constant references to his main literary and ideological influences—the Icelandic sagas, Old English poetry, the Bible, Shakespeare, T. S. Eliot, W. B. Yeats, Karl Marx, Sigmund Freud and Bertolt Brecht, to mention but some of the most relevant—and brings to the fore the influence he exerted upon other important literary intellectuals such as Christopher Isherwood, with whom he wrote plays in collaboration, and his three colleagues at Christ Church (Oxford), who eventually came to be labelled as the "Auden group": C. Day Lewis (named Poet Laureate in 1968), Louis MacNeice and Stephen Spender, who printed by hand the first collection of Auden's poems in 1928.

Stan Smith's book strives, on the whole, to offer a chronological scrutiny of Auden's literary and personal evolution. Accordingly, Smith divides the outline of his literary life of Auden into five chronological phases, respectively entitled "We are Lived by Powers," "On the Frontier," "Truth is Elsewhere," "The Inconstant Ones" and "Going Home," which are in turn subdivided into smaller sections, whose headings have the merit of highlighting the most important aspects or circumstances of the particular period under analysis. However, and in spite of Smith's efforts to stick to a strict chronological criterion, his strong familiarity with the poet's work occasionally makes him move backwards and forwards, which, no doubt, allows him to establish illuminating associations and relate apparently different or disconnected aspects of Auden's production. Yet, what may be of great interest for readers who are already familiarized with Auden's writings might conversely contribute to puzzling newcomers to his work, who might at times find it difficult to make sense of these connections.

Finally, although the book may at first sight seem a merely introductory study, this is not quite so. Smith's awareness of modern critical approaches, together with his extensive knowledge of Auden's work, leads him to corroborate his continuous assessments of the literary, social, and cultural climate in which Auden lived and wrote by quoting at ease from most of his poems, thus assuming that the reader is minimally acquainted with the poet's life and writings. Yet, however difficult it may sometimes be for newcomers to Auden's work to follow, they will nonetheless easily manage to understand the reasons why he has been, and still is, regarded as a crucial and controversial twentieth-century critic, man of letters and poet. Not only was he politically committed—he tried to interpret the times and deal with intellectual and moral problems of public concern—but also succeeded in expressing his own inner world of fantasy and dream. As can be deduced after reading Smith's book, although Auden's poems, when taken individually, are often obscure, they create, when taken together, a meaningful poetic unity crammed with symbolic landscapes and mythical characters and situations, which undoubtedly manage to encapsulate and illustrate the worries and meditations of a left-wing writer and thinker whose lifetime was as intense as to span two world wars, the Russian and Chinese revolutions, the rise and fall of fascism, and three decades of cold war.

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## Colección "Taller de Estudios Norteamericanos".

Secretariado de Publicaciones de la Universidad de León, 1992-

Esta singular colección de textos norteamericanos merece ser destacada, entre otras muchas cosas, porque su interés primordial reside en presentar textos que han podido caer en el olvido de editoriales comerciales por su falta de ganancia económica a corto plazo. Se pretende sacar textos claves, algunos antiguos, no confundir con anticuados, textos con aspectos que a veces sorprenden por su actualidad.

Se presentan textos en edición bilingüe, cosa rara de encontrar en el mercado de hoy en día, ya que compromete de manera especial a los traductores: no pueden saltarse ni una sola coma, ni traducir según les convenga o parezca, ya que el texto original está impreso al lado de su traducción. Por todo el mundo es sabido que existen muchas formas de traducir correctamente un mismo texto, y esto precisamente hace a esta colección interesante para estudiantes, o aficionados a la traducción, pudiendo de esta manera ejercitar y practicar este difícil arte. Otra ventaja de la presentación de la obra en edición bilingüe es la de que se pueden acercar textos a quienes no saben o no dominan la lengua inglesa, teniendo así la colección un carácter interdisciplinar tanto a nivel universitario como de secundaria.

La colección, que empezó a publicarse en 1992, consta de cuatro secciones reflejadas en cuatro diferentes colores: azul, rosa, verde y salmón, que corresponden a su carácter literario, histórico, socio-político, y textos misceláneos respectivamente.

Dentro del grupo azul, es decir, dentro del grupo literario de textos publicados encontramos a Whitman: *Una mirada retrospectiva a los caminos recorridos*; Sinclair Lewis: *El miedo americano a la literatura*; Henry James: *El arte de la ficción*; Philip Rahv: *Rostro pálido y piel roja* y Michael A. Rockland: *Redescubriendo América*; Melville: *Bartleby, el escribiente*; Dean Howells: *La crítica y la ficción*; Charlotte Perkins Gilman: *El empapelado amarillo. La wisteria gigante*; Maxwell Anderson: *Textos sobre el teatro norteamericano I*; O'Neill y Thornton Wilder: *Textos sobre el teatro norteamericano II*; Raymond Chandler: *El simple arte de matar* y Henry Adams: *La di-namo y la virgen*. Textos acompañados por introducciones de Derrick, López Gavilán, González de la Aleja, Rodríguez Celada, Rosado Castillo, González Groba, Díaz Sánchez, y Coy Ferrer.

En el grupo de textos históricos podemos encontrar textos como *La declaración de la independencia* y *La declaración de Seneca Falls*; William Bradford: *De la plantación de Plymouth (una selección)*; Varios Presidentes: *Discursos inaugurales*; Margaret Fuller: *El gran proceso judicial*; o Sui Sin Far: *Páginas del archivo mental de una euro-asiática*. Estos textos vienen con introducciones realizadas por Hernández Sánchez-Barba, Beltrán Llavador, Fernández Rabadán, Muñoz-Torrero, Baena y G. Davis.

Dentro del grupo de textos socio-políticos están: Lincoln Steffens: *La vergüenza de las ciudades*; Olaudah Equiano: *Autobiografía, (Selección)*; Zora Neale Hurston: *¡Mi gente! ¡Mi gente!*; Thomas Nelson Page: *Los sureños durante la reconstrucción*; W. E. B. Du Bois: *Las almas del pueblo negro*; George Washington Cable: *El sur silencioso*; Gerald Vizenor: *Literatura india nativa americana*; y Jarana Lee: *La vida y experiencia religiosa de Jarana Lee*. Con introducciones que corren a cargo de Rodríguez Celada, Polo Benito, Manuel Cuenca, Benito Sánchez, Manzanar, Fraile Marcos y Sabán Godoy.

El último bloque, o grupo, corresponde a los textos misceláneos: Emerson: *El intelectual americano*; *Discurso a la Facultad de Teología*; Nathaniel Hawthorne: *Prefacios*; John Kouwenhoven: *Qué tiene América de 'Americano'*; Thoreau: *Una vida sin principios*. Van introducidos por Derrick, López Gavilán, Montes Mozo, Rockland, Coy Ferrer.

También están en preparación entre muchos interesantísimos títulos: Robert Brustein: *Si un artista quiere ser rico, famoso y popular, y la vez serio y respetado, sufre de esquizofrenia cultural*; William Kennedy: *Una entrevista*; M. L. King: *Sermones y discursos*; L. Hughes: *Oscuridad en España*; John Smith: *Historia general de Virginia*; Sacco y Vanzetti: *Discurso final*; Booker T. Washington: *Ascenso desde la esclavitud*; Harriet Jacobs: *Incidentes en la vida de una esclava*; o Mrs Mary Rowlandson: *Narración del cautiverio indio*.

Se intenta englobar bajo la etiqueta, tan general y al tiempo específica como es la de "American Studies", (sin excluir a Canadá), las raíces ocultas de lo contemporáneo en la historia del pensamiento social, cultural, literario o político de Norteamérica. Cada obra tiene una introducción y notas realizadas por un especialista, poniendo la obra en su contexto con matices políticos, sociológicos, económicos, ideológicos, literarios, etc. Pero el traductor o el introductor no es lo esencial de esta Colección, no existe la intención de vender ningún ejemplar por él o ellos, lo que aquí tiene importancia primaria es el texto, que luego ha sido traducido e introducido como ayuda para el lector. Como prueba de ello no aparece en portada ni el nombre del introductor ni del traductor; para averiguarlo hay que adentrarse en las primeras páginas del libro. No hay que olvidar que el crítico no ofrece más que una

opinión más a la lectura de un determinado texto, es una herramienta más que podemos utilizar si nos convencen sus argumentos. Así estos textos pueden provocar interesantes debates, polémicas, y discrepancias, que demasiadas veces brillan por su ausencia en las aulas.

Resumiendo, es una colección interesante por su variado contenido, por su aparición en edición bilingüe, y por qué engañarnos, por su precio, ya que hoy en día, y más para los estudiantes, puede resultar un lujo el comprarse un libro. La colección del "Taller de Estudios Norteamericanos" es de algún modo utópica al no seguir recomendaciones económicas, ideológicas o de ningún otro tipo a la hora de seleccionar los textos que van a ser publicados. El único criterio seguido es de su importancia en la cultura norteamericana, y por ello son interesantes para cualquiera que quiera acercarse a esta cultura.

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**Alice Thompson**  
*Justine*

Edinburgh: Virago Press, 1997. 137 p.

In 1996 Alice Thompson became the first female Scottish writer to win the James Tait Black Memorial Prize for Fiction with her first novel, *Justine*. In 1991, when she was a student at Oxford University, *Killing Times*, a novella, was published by Penguin. After completing her PhD on Henry James, she moved to the Shetland Isles where she wrote *Justine*. Nowadays, she is a novelist in residence for St. Andrew's University.

*Justine* investigates the world in which fiction works, a fiction which needs the help of the reader to interpret its full meaning—and which also needs the reader to open the uncut pages of the novel with the paper knife supplied with it; a fiction printed with gaps and spaces (blank pages, ellipses, flashbacks and -forwards) in an attempt to create a written account of the narrator's unconscious mind.

In this new way of writing "what to express" and "how to express it" are blended in the same framework. Alice Thompson approaches closer and

closer the way in which the human mind works, trying to find a new way of expression for the psychological novel. This new way is as hermetic as the human mind can be to us, and as elliptical as the human mind is. The novel is therefore an attempt to create a unified meaning which can no longer be achieved within its fiction, because only the reader can supply the ultimate meaning: "That's for you to find out" (*J* 136). And though her narrative style is very descriptive and profusely decorated with over-adorned gothic adjectives, the whole story goes round a certain unknown truth one is never able to discover, round the unknown which is hidden in the darkness of one's mind. Therefore, to a certain extent, the reader is caught in "the black art of manipulation and the casting of spell" (*J* 1), in the manipulation of the author's prose, in the dichotomy of the prose which allows readers to know everything and the prose which makes them ignore the main facts:

The style in which my flat [novel] is decorated gives everything away about me. A gift to you which includes the fact that there is something about me that will never be given away. (*J* 1)

*Justine* is a dream, a two-faced woman, a painting, but above all an object of desire, especially a projection of male desire. *Justine* is the story of a man in a continuous search for Beauty, both spiritual and physical, pleasant and hurtful, not ethereal but sexual, a beauty which transgresses every aesthetic theory because of its masochism.

It is in his continuous search for Beauty, in his role of collector, that he creates his own hallucinations. This collector must be collected or possessed by someone else; he is a man who wants to possess the last object of his desires: *Justine* or *Juliette*? Or both?

For *Justine* pretends to have a twin sister, *Juliette*, and step by step, as the story begins, the opium-dazed narrator becomes more and more insecure, not only about the identity of the woman he is chasing (*Justine* or *Juliette*), but about his own feelings and desires. Besides his life in London, he lives his "Midsummer Night's Dream," as the prologue to the novel reads:

Lovers and madmen have such seething brains,  
Such shaping fantasies, that apprehend  
More than cool reason ever comprehends (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*, V.1.4-6)

Everything is a dream, a fantasy created by a madman or a lover whose self has dissolved and merged into new characters, in the Gothic house he is living, a decadent scene in which characters and events are exaggerated beyond