

Swarthmore

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AUDEN

on
opera,
detective
writers,
wit,
politics,
the camera,
drugs,
poets,
and
poetry

I hear it's terrible now, that honors seminars meet in the evening and go on forever. When I was here I had one from half past one in the afternoon until six. There was coffee rationing and so one had to serve beer at four o'clock.

We had a group of Chinese students here who were going on to MIT and wanted to brush up their English. They were awfully difficult because if you ask a Chinese, "Have you understood?" he has to say "yes" because it is considered rude to say "no." So how you discover whether they have understood is complicated.

Funny thing, in 1952 I was teaching at the University of Texas and I gave a lecture on Tolkien. People thought I was pulling their leg or they thought I made him up. We know what happened later so it is rather amusing.

When I was an undergraduate, you could still see Dr. Spooner around the streets. He didn't make many Spoonerisms, but his conversation could be very odd indeed. "I want you to come to tea next Monday to meet Mr. Castin." "But I am Mr. Castin." "Come all the same!"

You once said that you thought Dante, Langland, and Pope were the three major influences and most important poetic figures for you. Would you please comment on that?

They vary at different times. Pope has always been, but at the moment I would say that my two chief models are Horace and the classical Goethe of

the middle period—"Metamorphosis of Plants" and that sort of thing. I have always loved Horace, but when I was young, I knew I couldn't use him yet. Now I can. This is a funny thing that happens with writing: You can get an idea for a poem that you have to turn down for one or two reasons: I am sorry, no longer; or I am sorry, not yet.

What about free verse?

There are a few people like D. H. Lawrence, who have to write in free verse. I think they are a minority. Anyone who has played a game, whether it is bridge or baseball, knows you can't play games without rules. You can make the rules what you like, but your whole fun and freedom come from working within these. Why should poetry be any different? One of the things you so often notice when looking at a lot of poems in free verse

is that you can't tell one author from another, far from thinking one more original. With rules it is so much more fun because they impose some kind of metrical quality, and they often suggest all kinds of things you haven't thought of before. It does free one a bit from the fetters of oneself.

Don't you think one has to work harder to make good free verse?

No, there are very few people who do it. You have got to have a marvelous sense of line endings. So often I can see no reason why the thing isn't printed as a prose poem. This you do feel with Lawrence; the lines end exactly right.

What makes something a prose poem?

It is written out in prose. An obvious example is the *Illuminations* of Rimbaud, a very clear example of a prose poem which is written out as prose and separated by paragraphs but is undoubtedly poetry.

Is there any one French poet of that period you like a lot?

Rimbaud I like. Mallarmé I am not very fond of. But then I am rather a Francophile. I think it is the only language which the sixteenth century humanists managed to ruin. They tried with English and failed; they tried with Italian and failed; but I think they did succeed with French.

How has your conception of what a poet is and what he can do changed?

This excerpt was taken from a tape recording made last November, when W. H. Auden visited the classroom of Professor Brendan Kennelly

I think what Dr. Johnson said about writing is true of all the arts: "The aim of writing is to enable readers a little better to enjoy life or a little better to endure it." The other thing that the arts can do is that they are the chief method of communicating with the dead. After all, Homer is dead, his society completely gone, and yet one can appreciate it. Without communication with the dead, a fully human life is not possible.

Does that represent a change for you from writing in the thirties?

No, not a bit. If you are talking about the *engagé* thing, it's fine. Write a poem if you feel moved to because of circumstances. But what you must not imagine is that you can change the course of history by doing so. I wrote several things about Hitler in the thirties, but nothing that I wrote prevented one Jew being gassed or shortened the war by five seconds. I think that you would have to say that the political and social history of Europe would be what it has been if Dante, Shakespeare, Goethe, Mozart, Beethoven, Michelangelo—whom you will—had never lived. We should have missed a lot of fun, but the political and social history would have been the same. Because when it comes to social and political evils, only two things are effective: One is political action, of course, and the other is straight journalistic reportage of the facts. You must know exactly what happened. This has nothing to do with poetry.

It is a journalist's job which, of course, is very important.

Is there any good political poetry that you know of?

Directly political? I rather doubt it. I may be wrong, but at any rate if there had been, all the issues have evaporated. If you take some of Dryden's poems which certainly deal with political figures, it is enormous fun to read, but, of course, you have to look up who the people are in the notes.

What about twentieth century poetry?

I can't think of much. For example, Brecht is a very good lyrical poet. I don't think the plays will do quite, and the reason is that his natural sensibility was deeply pessimistic and even Christian, and he harnesses on to an optimistic philosophy of Marxism, and I feel it doesn't work. For example, you take *Mother Courage*. Apparently we are supposed to think that is what life is like under capitalism—what life is like, period. Brecht apparently wanted you not to like *Mother Courage*, but, in fact, when you see the play, you do.

Do you have favorite poems that you have written?

No, one has unfavorites. The thing one gets tired of—they may be quite good—is the old war horses, things you find in anthologies and refuse to read. Anthologists are frightfully lazy people; they all copy each other.

When you look back at some of the old war horses, say the thirties' poems, do you still feel intimately in touch with them?

Yes, they seem all right, I think, but you are naturally much more interested in what you are doing at the moment than in what you have done.

How do you decide what you are going to do?

Two things happen. At any given moment, I have two things on my mind: one, a subject or subjects that interest me and, two, certain formal problems—they may be metrical, they may be diction, or whatever. The formal interest looks for the right subject to incorporate; the subject looks for the right form. When these things come together, then you are able to write something.

The ideal reaction one hopes to get from a reader is, "Oh, I knew that all the time but never realized it before." The thing that poetry certainly is not is self-expression. All you can say is that you think each of us as a person has a unique perspective on the work. One thinks one is saying something about reality common to all of us and sufficiently interesting to want to share with other people.

Do you think you can have a good poem which expresses something to the poet but which fails to communicate to the reader?

If it fails to communicate, there is something wrong with it. If somebody

asks what a poem means, I say it is no good asking me. What a poem means is the result of a dialogue between the words on the page and the particular reader who happens to be reading it. We all have different experiences. The poet is out of the picture altogether.

Do you ever find yourself going back and correcting?

Oh, yes, because I agree very much with Paul Valéry, who said: "A poem is never finished; it's only abandoned." It isn't that one revises ideas, but one is aware that the language isn't right. It is too vague or is unmusical. You feel "I want to tighten it up." One can never tell how good or bad something one writes is, but what one can tell—not always at once but sooner or later—is whether a poem is authentic, that is, really written in one's handwriting or forgery. There are poems of mine which I regard as forgeries. For all I know the poem may be quite good, but I shouldn't have written it.

Name one.

Oh, "September 1, 1939." The rhetoric is far too inflated.

I have been reading some of the things you wrote in collaboration. Like Delia.

Chester Kallman and I have done four libretti: one for Stravinsky, three for Henze, and now we have just done one based on *Love's Labour's Lost* for Nicolas Nabokov. I think the premiere is going to be in Spoleto next year. That's enormous fun. What people don't realize is that in collaboration, if it works, you form a single writer who is different from either writer alone.

Because sometimes I wonder if I am copying something out and attributing it to you that. . . .

Often the critics get it wrong, which is exactly what we want. The interesting thing about libretti, Chester Kallman and I have found, is that if you have to write an aria or an ensemble, you naturally have an embryonic idea of a tune in your mind. Naturally you don't say a word about this. Every time Stravinsky or Henze gave us the

kind of thing we had in mind, which is interesting because it shows that somehow or another words can suggest musical things.

What kind of approach do you think should be taken toward teaching poetry?

I don't know how much you can teach at all. You can get people to read and tell them something about the technique. In the end, most people do two things: First of all, they find models when they are young. My first model was Thomas Hardy. And the other thing is that with your fellow students who are writing you can look at each other's work. You really want it to be better and are willing to give it the

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attention grown up people are willing to give only their own work.

I very much doubt whether the thing can be taught. There was a time, of course, if you take Welsh bards, when this was a profession like being a doctor where you served an apprenticeship. Here you have to serve your apprenticeship privately.

What do you think should go on in English classes?

Academic courses. I have always refused to have anything to do with contemporary literature. I just gave a course in eighteenth century literature. One thing that puzzles me is that students now want courses in contemporary literature. When I was a student contemporary literature was something we looked at for ourselves and I think we were reasonably informed. We wouldn't have dreamt of going to a teacher and saying, "We want to have a course."

Did you ever regret becoming a poet, particularly in your early years?

No, not when I started, I must say. I started in rather an odd way. Psychologically I think I can understand it now. In March, 1922, I was walking across a field—I was in boarding

school—with a friend of mine (a fellow who turned out to be a painter later), and he asked me if I ever wrote poetry. I said no, that thought had never occurred to me, and he said why don't you.

I can still remember the last line of the first poem I ever wrote, about a town in the Lake District. The last line ran: "And in the quiet oblivion of thy waters let them stay." I can't remember who "they" were.

Has anyone ever suggested that you translate Wagner?

No, the thought has occurred to me but on the whole late libretti are very difficult to do. You can do Mozart and that period, but from middle Verdi on it is very difficult to do. Because by that time the voice line and the words are very closely connected in a way that earlier they weren't. Of course, with TV they may have to do it, but I have always said to people, "Look here, if you are going to the opera, take a libretto with an English text to find out what is happening. After all, in any case whatever the language is you are only going to hear about half the words."

If you had a chance to be born again and to be able to write in any language as a native . . .

I would choose English. I am fascinated with other languages, such as German, for there are certain things that you can do in German which you can't do in English. I think we are frightfully lucky because being a mongrel language, we have this enormous vocabulary. And then because it is an uninflected language, you can turn nouns into verbs and verbs into nouns in a very nice way: the line of Shakespeare's "The hearts that spaniel'd me at heels," which you couldn't do with an inflected language.

And then we have this lovely, rich vocabulary. I couldn't live without two copies of the thirteen volumes of the OED, one here and one in Austria. By far the best one-volume dictionary is Chambers. Obviously, if you are going to be a poet, one of the first requirements must be a passionate love for your mother tongue.

Is German the language of other poets that has affected you most?

Probably, I should think. I know German and Italian very well. Icelandic has influenced me, and Anglo-Saxon.

Can a vision obtained in the arts be applied to more concrete kinds of . . .

If you mean that it would change your course of conduct, this I don't believe.

Does that go for all art, all poetry?

All art. It was only the Romantics who started this ridiculous idea. When Shelley said, "Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world," it isn't true. It is the secret police.

Do you think that is life?

Just say you want to help people enjoy life a little better than without it. Any great art certainly fills you with joy. There are certain things it would be quite impossible to write about because reality is too awful. I don't think you could write a decent poem or play about Auschwitz. The facts are far too awful. Any more than I think you can write a good poem about Good Friday. People have tried. None of them work.

What do you think is the source of that joy?

Search me. I don't know. When you are listening to Mozart, you are filled with joy. Why, I haven't the faintest idea. I don't think anybody knows. It is just a common-sense experience.

What are your thoughts on the function of poetry to the masses?

I would say none. Because first of all you always think of yourself as addressing one person, and masses is a meaningless term really, as it is normally used. I would say the majority of people don't read poetry at all if you are going to talk in purely numerical terms. But you certainly don't think of yourself—I don't think anyone does—as addressing a mass.

You don't write for a certain audience?

No. How can you know? You write for whoever happens to enjoy what you write. If they enjoy it, you say, "I write for you." If they don't, "I don't

write for you," quite clearly. After all, you don't know them. The only people you can consciously think of are the dead. People you admire. Would they approve? Because you also hope to write for people who are not yet born. What one aims at is trying to make a verbal object which will be on hand in the world and is, therefore, free from the cycle of birth and death. The word poetry comes from the Greek word and means to make and in the medieval period they didn't call themselves poets; they called themselves makers.

Have you ever been tempted to write a novel?

Never. I wouldn't know how to write a novel. I have thought of doing a detective story.

***"When you listen to Mozart,
you are filled with joy. Why,
I haven't the faintest idea."***

Do you like novels?

Some. I am very fond of Dickens, and I'm fond of Trollope, and Jane Austen. And people like Rollo Fairbanks I am particularly fond of. And P. G. Wodehouse. I like novels, on the whole, to be rather short and funny. There are exceptions, of course. Proust, you know, has to be long. And Collette I enjoy very much. She is very odd because she is one of the very few Mediterranean writers who have a feeling for what we in England or America would call nature. She is marvelous on cats and flowers and things.

Have you taken much, if any, direction from Robert Frost?

Oh, I have learned a lot from Frost. I got on to him quite early. Because when I was in school I got interested in an English poet who was killed in the First World War called Edward Thomas. I discovered that Thomas had been persuaded to start writing poetry late in life by Frost, so then I thought that I must get Frost. I bought him when he was really not very well known and I have always admired his work enormously.

Is there anyone writing poetry today that you particularly admire?

I never will talk about contemporary writers who are alive for two reasons: First of all, because people always secretly hope you will say something malicious, and, secondly, it suggests that poetry were a horse race where you could put people 1, 2, 3, 4. You can't. If anyone is any good, he is unique and not replaceable by anybody else. You can say there is a difference between a major poet and a minor poet. This is not an aesthetic judgment. This doesn't mean that the poems of a minor poet are any worse. I think I would say the difference is—Housman would be an obvious example of this. You take two poems of his written at different periods and without outside information you are asked to say which was written first, and you can't tell. While with a major poet, you do see consistent development and change; they do move on. Say Eliot, for example, where you can see the changes that happen. It has nothing to do with the actual quality of the work.

What do you think of the war poetry of Wilfred Owen?

Not very much. Of course, he was a great hero of my boyhood.

What I mean to ask more directly is can one write about war well?

I think he managed. Just as I think David Jones's book *In Parenthesis* is a marvelous book about war. When it came out in 1937 it was hardly noticed. Surprisingly little poetry came directly out of the last war. Very little. Partly because of new things like the use of the airplane; probably the pilots didn't have the literary capacity to describe what these new experiences were. One would love to have known, but I can't think of one that could tell you something about aerial warfare and you'd say, "Oh, my God, I hadn't realized that!"

What makes it possible to write good war poetry and not to write good political poetry?

Search me. Just on the evidence it would seem to be so.

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Do you think something like Catch 22 or The Naked and the Dead captured the war?

I wouldn't know. They didn't interest me very much. I may be wrong. I am not very good on novels unless they are funny.

Have there been times you thought that an allusion or reference in your poetry was too contemporary and therefore you wrote it out?

Not too contemporary, no. Of course, it is a terrible problem for any modern writer now. If you take the early epic poets, one half their work was done for them because everyone knew the proper names that they used. I remember—I think in 1934—I wrote a poem in which I mentioned Greta Garbo, thinking she was a household name. After the war when Richard Hogarth in England did a selection of stuff of mine, he gassed her name. I think probably TV has brought her back again. Even Milton could assume that his readers would know any reference to the Bible or classical mythology. Now there is awfully little you can count on in the way of people knowing proper names.

In the same vein, what do you think about the use of vast erudition in poetry like The Wasteland?

That is perfectly all right. There isn't that much. Actually I think he should have had no notes or more extensive ones. He said himself he only put them in because they needed a few more pages for printing—that was his own story.

Talking about Eliot, I had a ghoulish experience. I think he died on January 4, 1965. I was spending that winter in Berlin. At the beginning of December, 1964, the BBC came to me and I had to tape an obituary. It is bad enough to have to write one but to have to talk about somebody who happens also to be a personal friend in the past when you know he is alive is rather ghoulish.

Have you been at all interested in Emily Dickinson's poetry?

Oh, yes. I remember I was at Oxford when they published her first volume,

and we were all very impressed. The other thing that came out then was Bridges' selections from Gerard Manley Hopkins.

What kind of advice would you give to somebody beginning to write poetry?

It would be different for every case because you would have to see what their interests were, what poets they were interested in as models and so on and then you could go on from there. I don't think there is any general advice you could give which would apply to every person, except love the language.

***"It is always easier to
translate a poet
who is a little crazy."***

Would you suggest imitating different styles?

Choose your model. I wouldn't say imitate so and so. I would say find out whom you want to model yourself by. The thing is that some people — I would say Eliot is one and Gerard Manley Hopkins is another—you cannot imitate without just producing pastiche, Eliot water or something. It is very interesting with Eliot when you think of his position. It is very rare when looking at the poetry written by younger people that you say, "Oh, he has been reading Eliot." You say people have been reading Yeats or Rilke. He is a very idiosyncratic poet and very idiosyncratic poets usually are not people to take as models because it won't be as good as the original and you won't get anything of your own out of it. You want people who are near enough to you in spirit and at the same time different.

Eliot, I think, said that a bad or minor poet imitates and a great poet . . .

Steals. Of course, Eliot was deliberately being a little shocking. He had that side of him. He loved explosive cigars and cushions that made noises when you sat on them and so on, which made him say things like Milton is no good.

Have you read Groucho Marx's collected letters?

My favorite crack of Groucho's is in *A Day at the Races* when he is feeling a girl's pulse and he says, "Either she is dead or my watch has stopped."

Do you think wit is an important part of the poet?

It is a quality I value. Not all poets have it but some have, and when it is there, I think it is very nice to have.

Are there any poets you regard as particularly witty?

I think you would have to say Pope is witty. Swift is quite witty too.

Do you think Eliot is witty?

Not particularly. There are witty things there but I wouldn't call him, as a poet, a wit. You get comic poets like Ogden Nash, who are obviously very witty and good.

When did you first get interested in Goethe?

I have been interested in Goethe for a long time but it is fairly late that I felt I could get something from him. His poetry is extremely difficult to translate; Hölderlin is much easier, partly because Hölderlin was half crazy. It is always easier to translate a poet who is a little crazy because half of the effect depends not on the language but on the curious association of ideas, and this, of course, can come across in another language. I think you would have great fun translating Christopher Smart, James Joyce, and Lamb into German.

What has happened to the generation of the thirties?

All this business of talking about writers of the thirties, the forties, or fifties, is a journalistic lie. First of all, it suggests that people conveniently stop writing at the end of the decade. All right, it is quite obvious that a group of people of about the same age, exposed to the same experiences, are going to have certain things in common, but that is the least interesting thing about them. What is interesting is the way they differ. But to lump the writers of the thirties together as if we all wrote in the same way is nonsense.

But it seems to me that the political consciousness among those people—there was a feeling at that time that something could really be done for the better.

No. There were two things one was bound to be concerned with: Hitler and the depression. Obviously, one could not help but notice these things. We may have hoped for political change of various kinds but I don't think we thought we could do them ourselves.

You don't think there was some great disappointment with World War II, some breakdown of some kind of feeling toward the world?

No. What I would say is, for example, in the thirties we didn't know exactly how awful things were in Russia, but we knew they were not very nice. What we said to ourselves was, "Oh, the poorer Russians; they are barbarians. They never had a Renaissance, or they never had a Reformation. You can't expect much of them, but communism will be different elsewhere." We now know that not to be true. Depressing as our own parties are, anything is better than the one-party system whether right or left. The only place where it works is in Yugoslavia because although officially there is only one party, in fact, there are four: Slovenes, Croatians, Serbians, and Macedonians, all completely different with different interests. As a result the country is free.

James Agee said that all artists are, politically, anarchists.

Basically I think this is true. It depends on what you mean by anarchism. Obviously, as a political doctrine anarchism won't work because you are always going to have some kind of regime. The idea you can have a state with no regime at all is obviously nonsense. I think we are all anarchists to this extent. We know some regime is going to be and none of them is going to be very nice and at any given point you feel one is the lesser of two evils. The other meaning is embodied in a certain technique which I learned at school which was how to do what you wanted without getting into trouble with the authorities.

Do you remember the piece you wrote here that was published in the Phoenix called "Student Government or Bombs"?

I believe so.

Which made the same kind of suggestion that students should not have anything to do with student government but should go underground?

I am very puzzled when they ask for student participation because later in life when one sins one has to sit on committees. If they knew what it is like to sit on committees, how very boring it is . . . Thank God when I was a student nobody ever asked me to be on a committee! The other difficulty about committees is, unfortu-

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nately, there is usually one person on the committee who likes being on it and that means that business that should take a half hour takes one hour. What you want are people who hate it but who are conscientious and want to do the job but want to get away from it as soon as they possibly can.

I want to go back to the political thing for just a moment. Does this feeling about there are always going to be regimes and one has to try to take the lesser of two evils, does this grow out of a disappointment?

I have never believed Marx's anarchist idea that the state would wither away.

You never at any time believed that?

No, because it is clearly nonsense. Particularly in a technological society you have got to have some organization. One can have syndicalism, workers' councils. This you can do. But to imagine you can have no regime at all, no. I am a little inclined to think, although I know it won't happen, that we wouldn't do worse and we might do better if all members of Congress and all members of Parliament were

elected like jurors by lot. It would smash the party machines. People could vote according to their consciences because there would be no question of reelection. Computers could work out proper representation of minorities. I think we might do better.

Do you still see a lot of your colleagues of the thirties?

Oh, yes. We are still friends. I have just been staying with Stephen Spender in London, and I have seen C. S. Lewis several times.

Do you know Robert Graves?

I know him slightly. He is an incredibly conceited man. I question whether he or Vladimir Nabokov is the most conceited.

Have you ever translated Goethe?

I have translated the *Italienische Reise* with a German because translators must always work with somebody whose mother tongue it is because no matter how well you think you know the language, one can very easily make mistakes. When translating I always like to work with somebody else. With the Icelandic things I was working with a scholar, and with *Markings* I worked with a Swede, and so on.

Who are your favorite detective writers?

A number of people. Michael Innes. Freeman Wills Croft. I like very much Nicholas Blake. Oh, there are lots of people I like. I am enjoying—I can't remember his name—instead of having a Father Brown you have a rabbi . . . *Friday the Rabbi Slept Late!*

Why do you think so many people of literary bent read detective stories?

It is a kind of escape reading which they can take where they couldn't take romances out of *The Saturday Evening Post*. I have written an essay about it called "The Guilty Vicarage."

What about movies?

Yes, I hate the movies. I think the two most wicked inventions are the internal combustion engine and the camera. I've got a poem in my new book called "I Am Not a Camera."

"I a little disapprove of pot, though I think they should legalize it. My objection is that pot smokers think they are the cat's whiskers. LSD was a complete frost."

Why do you think the camera is an evil?

It turns all fact into fiction to begin with. People see movies of people being burned up in Vietnam. It is just like a movie. They don't react any more. The camera is all right with comic subjects, but sorrow and suffering and grief it must degrade. In ordinary life, suppose you see somebody who is suffering or grieving. Either you try to help, if you can do something, or you look the other way. Automatically with a photograph you can't do anything because you are not there and it just becomes an object of voyeurism. TV is good for games because you probably can see a tennis match better than if you are there, but for reality I think it is awful and I think it corrupts you.

Have you ever liked sports?

No, I am no good at them.

Not even as a spectator?

No.

Do you have any poems which you at one time started and got half way through and decided they wouldn't work out and just left them?

I can't remember any actually.

There is something in the Auden collection in the library . . .

Oh, yes, there was something I did start, one long thing which I did scrap.

Actually, I can't read your writing.

I am delighted. I object very much to manuscript books because what you want people to read are the final results and when they see all those mistakes you made, they think, "Oh, I could have done that as well." For example, they had to do it but I am sorry they had to bring out that thing on *The Wasteland* because there isn't one line in what was cut that you could have said, "I wish Eliot had kept it." Not one.

It is a credit to Pound though.

It wasn't Pound's doing entirely. I am sure there are a lot of things Eliot would have cut anyway, quite apart from Pound. But why people should have to see all of this—it is a terribly expensive book anyway. The one thing I do want to see are his improper limericks, of which there are quite a number, I gather.

In writing your poetry, do you consider that it could be read aloud?

Yes, because it is essentially spoken. Even when you are reading poetry to yourself out of a book, you should always hear the thing. It is essentially a spoken language.

Do you still think Freud was right?

About what? He wrote an awful lot of nonsense, but then there are some extraordinary things there. And he could make such nice remarks, like when somebody consulted him about whether he should be psychoanalyzed or not. "Well, I don't suppose we can do much for you, but perhaps we can turn your hysterical misery into ordinary human unhappiness." Very, very wise remark. And then I think it was also nice, when you think his psychology is a little male-oriented, that he once said to Marie Bonaparte, "The great question which after thirty years of research into feminine psyche I find myself completely unable to answer is 'what does a woman want?'" And then he could be dotty. He was absolutely sold on the Earl of Oxford's theory for writing Shakespeare. You couldn't shake him.

The essential thing that he did from a medical point of view was to see, which was entirely contrary to the way he had been brought up, that the life of the mind is an historical life. Therefore, causation means something different. In physics, if A is the cause of B, if A, then B must occur. While in history A provides B with a

motive for occurring, which is a different thing.

Has anyone superseded that?

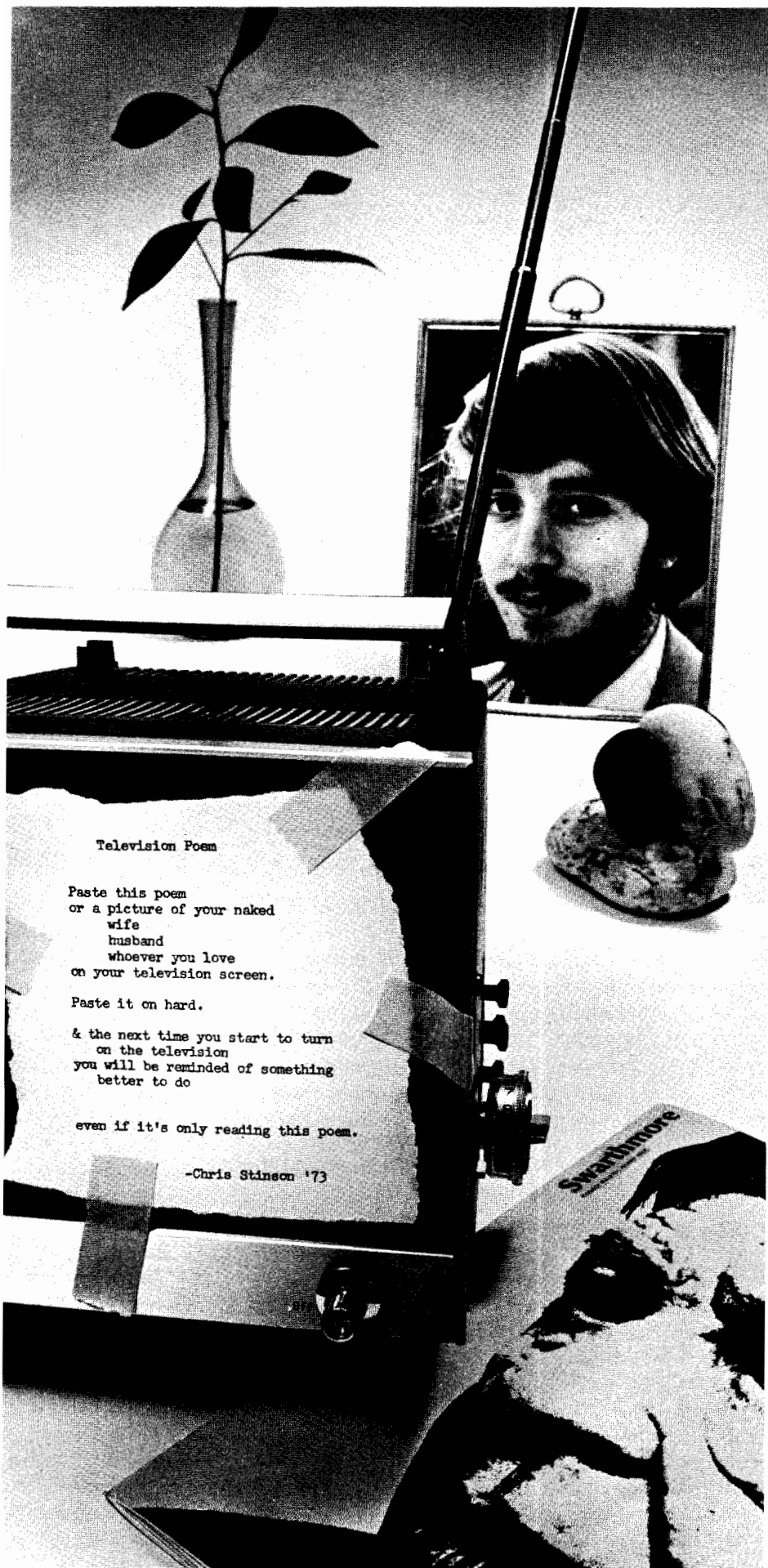
There are people who have gone on from that, of course. A contemporary mind, marvelous on psychosomatic things, is George Groddeck and his book, *Exploring the Unconscious*.

How do you feel about wide experimentation with drugs?

I a little disapprove of it, though I personally think they should legalize pot because as long as it isn't, people have to move in illegal circles and people are on harder things and want to push them. The objection that I have seen is the great inflation of ego that takes place with pot. Pot smokers think they are the cat's whiskers. I don't think it is very good for them. That is my own objection. Physically I don't think it does as much harm as what I am doing now [smoking a cigarette]. It is very strange how this has turned up because when I was a student it didn't exist at all. The fact that it has spread to middle-class families—obviously you can see why people in the ghettos take this just to forget what is around, and this is very understandable. I think Huxley without meaning to did an awful lot of harm. Because here was Huxley at sixty, absolutely sure of who he was; well, then, maybe taking trips was an interesting thing for him. The whole problem for the young is finding out who they are and this is what I think drugs prevent.

My own experience with pot I didn't like was I found the distortion of time was the exact opposite of alcohol. If you are drunk, you think you have been there for ten minutes and you have been there two hours. With pot I would start a sentence and I couldn't remember how I began it.

LSD was a complete frost. I would only take it under medical supervision. All right, the doctor came at 7:30 in the morning and gave me a dose. I sat there and I sat there and I sat there, waiting for something to happen. Nothing would happen. A slight sort of schizoid association in one's body. At 10:30 when the effect was supposed to be maximum, we



Television Poem

Paste this poem
or a picture of your naked
wife
husband
whoever you love
on your television screen.

Paste it on hard.

& the next time you start to turn
on the television
you will be reminded of something
better to do

even if it's only reading this poem.

-Chris Stinson '73

went around the corner to Second Avenue to have some ham and eggs. I was staring out of the window and I thought, "Ah, now something has begun to happen." I thought I saw my mailman making signals. I came back. The bell rang and my mailman said, "I waved to you but you didn't see me." What it does seem to destroy is the power of communication. I have listened to tapes done by highly articulate people under LSD, for example, and they talk absolute drivel. They may have seen something interesting, but they certainly lose either the power or the wish to communicate.

Could you say that that was transmuted into a nonverbal kind of communication?

It is not transmutable from one person to another. It doesn't make them do good paintings or good music.

What about the effect after the influence of the drugs wears off? I have known musicians who have listened to a piece of music under drugs and who claim that as a result they understood that piece of music much better. I am suspicious, because apparently what happens is that you hear individual sounds very vividly but the logic goes. This is from talking to people and asking them about their experiences. Certain things are very vivid but the real structure you lose the sense of.

Would you say it has nothing to contribute to poetry?

Nothing, as far as I know. The only exception I can think of is that Cocteau may have got something out of opium.

Or Coleridge?

Of course, they were all doped to the gills then. But I doubt if he got much out of the drugs themselves as far as his work is concerned. I was amused when I had to review the Browning correspondence to discover what it was that Elizabeth Browning took, which is a mixture of morphine and ether, which cost her more than her clothes. And when Wilkie Collins died, by his bedside was a sort of daily dose of laudanum. His valet took it and dropped dead.