

## Trees Woods and Literature—7

*A well-kempt forest begs Our Lady's grace;  
Someone is not disgusted, or at least  
Is laying bets upon the human race  
Retaining enough decency to last;  
The trees encountered on a country stroll  
Reveal a lot about a country's soul.*

*A small grove massacred to the last ash,  
An oak with heart-rot, give away the show;  
This great society is going smash;  
They cannot fool us with how fast they go,  
How much they cost each other and the gods.  
A culture is no better than its woods.*

The closing stanzas of *Woods*, from *Collected Shorter Poems 1927-1957* by W. H. Auden. Reprinted by permission of Faber and Faber Ltd.

Wystan Hugh Auden was born in York in 1907, and, apart from a short spell of teaching after he left Oxford, and a period as an ambulance driver for the Republican side during the Spanish Civil War, he has spent his entire working life as a full-time poet. At the outbreak of the second world war he emigrated to the United States, and subsequently became an American citizen. He was Professor of Poetry at Oxford, a five-year appointment, from 1956 to 1961.

Auden has said that he began writing poetry because at the age of fifteen a friend suggested that he should: the thought had never occurred to him. His first collection of poems was published in 1930 and he has since published over 30 books, most of them his own verse, but including a number of anthologies and some criticism.

He became widely known as the assumed leader of a group of left wing poets in England in the 1930s and has been consistently regarded as one of the most important and interesting poets of his time. Cecil Day-Lewis, the Irish-born Poet-Laureate, who died recently, has been recorded as saying: "In 100 years' time Eliot may be a literary footnote, but Auden will be a giant."