

Michael Alexander

To W.H. Auden in Heaven, with Apologies

'Excuse me! (Americans must pardon
This audenary beginning: with Englishmen
It is safer to prithee at the outset of a parley
And, when interrupting, correct.)

I would imagine you smoking there
As at a solitary table in the Cadena Café,
Cornmarket Street, Oxford –
 Benson & Hedges, I remember.
You were wearing a crumpled old sports jacket,
You crumpled old sport, and finishing off
The *Daily Telegraph* crossword.
Thus the Professor of Poetry.

Yet even in truth-seeking and –frequenting youth,
Expecting oracles from all, I could see
That this making yourself available,
Even to undergraduates, was awfully decent.

You had lectured on the Hero in Modern Poetry
(Eliot, Lawrence and Graves).
'What about Ezra Pound?' I demanded, sitting down.
'One can't fit everyone in,' you observed,
spoke of 'the House', meaning Christchurch,
and commended David Jones's *Anthemata*.

The Cadena had the best coffee,
The *Telegraph* the best crossword,
You reasonably explained, but
Could this be a poet? Where were his flowing
– And floating – eye and tie and hair?
His roses and poses? I had not read much
Of his verse, and did not know
That for him the poet's quest
Was an unrequested profession.