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## C.L. Wrenn Letter

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259a Woodstock Road,

Oxford.

17th June 1968.

Dear Mr. Boyer,

I write in reply to your letter putting questions about the poet Auden.

Taking your points in order, I offer the following.

I was Auden's tutor in his last year as an undergraduate at Christ Church here. His special emphasis in taking the English Honour School was, or course, on later literature. Only a very thin amount of Anglo-Saxon and Middle English was required by such people, since there was a more serious course for those emphasising medieval literature. I did not, so far as I remember, require translations from Anglo-Saxon from my pupils, but I do remember that the Middle English poem "Pearl" particularly interested Auden at that time, and for this reason, he did submit to me his ideas of translation for several passages.

The book on Old English meter by Jakob Schipper which I mention in my book is not suitable for anyone attempting a thorough literary study, though it is suitable for those not specialising in that field. I have no evidence that Auden made any serious study of Old English metrics nor was I aware that he had seriously attempted to imitate Anglo-Saxon metre, though, or course, its general influence can be discerned here and there. At Oxford, when Auden was an undergraduate, I did not recommend specifically any text of Beowulf. I think that most commonly used by undergraduates was that by R. W. Chambers, in his revision of Wyatt's edition. Some used alternatively the edition of Sedgefield and others that by Klaeber, which was then not so well-known and was too detailed for normal use, except among specialists in medieval literature.

I should not have thought that there was any very great influence from Anglo-Saxon or Middle English in Auden's work. One point of detail, however, which does show the influence of late 12th century text: you will remember the line "Doom that is deeper than any sea-dingle" and will, of course, realise that the expression "sea-dingle" occurred in the prose homily "Soul's Ward" written about 1200. I like to imagine that this could be related to my teaching of Auden. You must, of course, have seen the poem "A Short Ode to a Philologist" written in honour of

Professor J. R. Tolkien prefixed to the volume of essays of English and Medieval Studies presented to J. R. R. Tolkien on the occasion of his 70th birthday, edited by Norman Davis and myself. This, and specially his first lecture at Oxford as Professor of Poetry, clearly show a consciousness of real indebtedness to such medieval studies as he did. I suppose the lectures of Tolkien, himself a poet, left a permanent mark on Auden's mind.

Yours sincerely,



C. L. Wrenn.

Mr. Robert H. Boyer,  
6501 Wayne Avenue,  
Philadelphia, Pa. 19119.