

PLATE XVII



ROBERT AUTY

S. S. Praver

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1914–1978

ROBERT AUTY, who was elected Fellow of the Academy in 1976, was born on 10 October 1916 in Rotherham as the son of a schoolmaster and educated at Rotherham Grammar School and Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge. He took Firsts in both parts of the Modern and Medieval Languages Tripos and was awarded the coveted Tiarks German Scholarship which enabled him to study at the University of Münster. He made very good use of this opportunity and in the short space of two years he completed the work for a doctoral dissertation on the later Minnesang under Günther Müller.¹ He returned to Cambridge in 1937 as Faculty Assistant Lecturer in German with special responsibility for medieval and philological studies. On the outbreak of war in 1939 he joined the Czechoslovak government in exile as an interpreter and transferred to HM Foreign Office in 1943. In 1945 he went back to Cambridge and soon became University Lecturer in German. His interest in Slavonic studies began to outweigh that in German and in 1948 his lectureship was redefined as one in German and Czech; in 1957 he became a full-time Slavist.

His own college had no opening for a fellow in German, for the subject was in the care of E. K. Bennett, whose pupil Auty was. He spent some years in the wilderness as a University Teaching Officer without a college home, and when Selwyn College made him a fellow and lecturer in 1950 it was a happy day for him and for the college. He stayed there until 1962, when he left for the chair of Comparative Philology of the Slavonic Languages in the University of London in succession to Grigore Nandriș, which, however, he did not occupy long. In 1965 he went to Oxford as successor to Boris Unbegaun in the chair of Comparative Slavonic Philology, held with a fellowship at Brasenose College.

¹ *Studien zum späten Minnesang mit besonderer Berücksichtigung Steinmars und Hadlaubs*. The *rigorosum* was on 30 June 1937. The dissertation was never printed; the times were not propitious, and in the meantime Auty's interests had shifted. Auty's own typescript copy is now in the Slavonic section of the library of the Taylorian at Oxford. He expressed his thanks to Günther Müller at the end of the curriculum vitae in much warmer terms than are usual on this highly formal occasion ('Zu ganz besonderem Dank bin ich Herrn Professor Günther Müller verpflichtet, ohne dessen anregende und bereitwillige Hilfe mir diese Arbeit nie gelungen wäre') and he retained a lifelong respect and affection for him.

Here he remained until his death on 17 August 1978. He maintained his contact with the School of Slavonic and East European Studies in London and served it faithfully for years on its Council, latterly as chairman. After his death the Academy established a named lecture in his memory; the lecture was given in March 1981 by Hugh Seton-Watson, an old friend, on 'Language and National Consciousness' (a subject very dear to Auty's heart) with a generous tribute to him. (This lecture appears in the present volume of the *Proceedings* (1981).)

Many aspects of his career have been dealt with in previous notices; a select list will be found on pages 354–5 below. The intention of the present memoir is to complement them, not to replace them. There are many testimonies to his personal qualities, his genius for friendship, his loyalty, his courage and his generosity, his humane good sense, his sense of humour, and his quiet authority; there is no need to dwell on them here, though illustrations of some of them will be found in the pages which follow. In particular, as a non-Slavist I cannot carry out the duty of 'historical research and evaluation' to which Sir Kenneth Dover referred in his Presidential Address in 1979. Fortunately this task has been ably discharged by Gerald Stone in his assessment of Auty's contribution to Slavonic studies as a whole in *Oxford Slavonic Papers*, ns xii (1979). Only one point need be made here. West European Slavists tend to be Russian-based and Russian-centred. The fact that Auty's approach was different was part of his strength as a Slavist and it enabled him to make a quite individual contribution to Slavonic studies.

One of his outstanding characteristics was his remarkable facility in the acquisition and use of languages, the feeling for structure and idiom which enabled him to speak them correctly, and the phonetic and rhythmic sense which enabled him to speak them without accent. The atmosphere in his undergraduate days was favourable to this accomplishment. Among students of German at Cambridge in his generation there were half a dozen (all of them his friends) who already had a command of spoken German such that they could keep Germans guessing about their nationality for an appreciable time. This was partly due to the inspiration of a young don, Trevor Jones (then of Trinity Hall), who had just returned to Cambridge after a period of research as Tiarks Scholar in Germany and who believed that gifted students could and should aspire to the near-native mastery of foreign languages which he had himself achieved.¹ Later there came the

¹ Trevor Jones: see *German Life and Letters*, Special Number for Trevor Jones (October 1975), introductory notice by Leonard Forster and Siegbert Praver.

excitement of the example of N. B. Jopson, a dazzling practitioner in many languages, especially Slavonic. Years later Auty wrote his obituary; it is remarkable how much of what he said about Jopson is applicable to himself, e.g.

As a practical linguist, with a brilliant command of the main Western European and Slavonic languages and of several others besides, he was unrivalled. [. . .] Regarding languages, of whatever period, as living organisms whose spoken form was as important as the written, he succeeded in showing his pupils that philology need not be a dry-as-dust study but something related to the real life and activity of human beings, with a profound fascination for those prepared to find it.¹

Auty's ability was no mere parrot-like flair but was backed by formidable philological knowledge, as was Jopson's. I remember in the week before sitting examinations in 1934 comparing notes with Auty about the revision work we were each doing, I for Part II of the Modern Languages Tripos, he for the Preliminary to Part II. He told me that he had spent the previous night dreaming vividly that he was following the etymology of various German and English words through all the intermediate stages back to Primitive Indo-European. Here, I realized, was someone in quite a different street from the rest of us run-of-the-mill philologists.

Jopson's great gift was inspiring to his pupils, but it was academically unproductive. He rejoiced in his remarkable powers and enjoyed exercising them, but his output of research was minimal. Auty went beyond this, and the list of his publications shows that the example of Jopson's limitations was not lost on him; he was not only a superb practitioner but a productive scholar. Though language for him always came first, an important factor in this development was his concern with literature. His dissertation had been on a literary subject and he retained his interest in literature and literary scholarship throughout his life, reading widely and discriminatingly in several languages. In this way he covered a quite extraordinarily broad spectrum, so broad indeed that he could step easily from one specialized field into another and bring some significant contribution to it.

A decisive event was his shift from Germanic studies to Slavonic. Here too Jopson was important in helping him, as he said in his London inaugural lecture, 'to transform a marginal

¹ *Slavonic and East European Review*, xlvii (1969), 304. Auty's obituary of Unbegaun in *Oxford Slavonic Papers*, NS vii (1974) also contains observations equally applicable to himself.

interest in Slavonic languages into the main preoccupation of my academic life'.¹ In the increasingly specialized world of academe such shifts are unusual; it is worth sketching the background to this one and attempting to determine how this 'marginal interest' arose.

The study of German in the 1930s in Britain was still largely determined by the first holders of chairs and headships of department who, with few (but important) exceptions, were all Germans or Austrians. They had spent the difficult years of World War I in this country and were Anglophile to a man, but their education had been in the German nationalist tradition of the early years of this century, which had concentrated on certain aspects of German literature and culture to the exclusion of certain others. The moving force in German history was seen to be Prussia; we learned German history at school from J. A. R. Marriott and C. G. Robertson's *Evolution of Prussia*; there was no German history but Prussian history. The Teutonic component in medieval civilization was firmly stressed, in accordance with contemporary research in Germany itself. The literature of Austria and Switzerland was neglected as such, though of course Grillparzer and Stifter, Keller and Meyer took their place as figures in *German* literature. This state of affairs led several young Germanists to try to fill this gap for themselves by visiting Austria and even Hungary. The Austro-Hungarian cultural complex attracted interest. Auty was affected by this atmosphere, and so it is not perhaps surprising that he should have devoted much of his life to the study of the languages of the Habsburg Empire, and fitting that the Austrian Academy of Sciences should have made him a corresponding member in 1975. Another important feature of German studies at that time was the lack of any reference to one of the formative events in German cultural history, the great movement of colonization of Eastern Europe in the Middle Ages (largely because it was not directly reflected in German vernacular literature of high quality). So we were ill-equipped to understand what we read in the press about German irredentism in Eastern Europe and, for instance, the Polish Corridor; we had been brought up to believe that all that sort of thing had been settled by President Wilson, and official Germanistics avoided the subject. We were thus mostly unaware of the large Slavonic component in the German population and the role of the Slavs in German history, both of which were carefully played down, despite their decisive importance in the history of Prussia. (The

¹ *Slavonic and East European Review*, xlii (1964), 257.

World War I propaganda about Huns was quite rightly discounted.) When, for instance, I went to Leipzig in 1934 all this burst upon me as a new and exciting experience. On my way there I had bought in Bonn a volume of polemical essays *Der ostdeutsche Volksboden* (Breslau, 1926) edited by Wilhelm Volz. Their object was to emphasize the German element in the development and culture of the regions east of the Elbe and to play down the Slavonic. To the unprejudiced—because ignorant and unprepared—young English reader this had the opposite effect and inspired him to find out as much as he could about the Slavs and their relations with Germans. I seized the first opportunity and visited Prague from Leipzig at Christmas 1934. When I became English Lektor at Königsberg in 1935 I began to study Polish in the expectation of being able to explore the Slavonic world from there, but things turned out differently. Until then I had been moving in the same general direction as Auty was to move, and for much the same reasons, though I never had his commitment and strength of purpose; my interest in Slavonic things remained marginal and dilettante.

If I have spoken of myself here it is in order to illustrate the situation in which members of our generation of young Germanists found themselves and what the factors were which turned the interest of some of us towards the Slavonic world. Auty's studies on the later Middle Ages in Münster would have made him aware of the German colonization of the regions east of the Elbe (in which Westphalians played a major part) and the importance of the Slavs; this may well have been one of the reasons why he decided to visit Prague in 1937. His sister Phyllis¹ was already interested in Slavonic history (a subject to which she has devoted her life). Emlyn Garner Evans, a friend of both Autys, had been approached (when President of the Cambridge Union) by the Slovak politician Alexander Kunoši to participate in what became a series of International Youth Conferences on Czechoslovak and Eastern European problems in general held at Tatranská Lomnica in Slovakia. It was in this connection that Garner Evans led an all-party British youth delegation which visited Czechoslovakia on a fact-finding mission in April of that year.² Robert Auty joined this group; it was a turning-point in his life.

¹ Phyllis Auty: Lecturer and from 1970 Reader in Southeast European History at the School of Slavonic and East European Studies; Professor of Modern History at Simon Fraser University, British Columbia, 1974–8.

² Emlyn Garner Evans was at Caius with Auty. He had just founded the World Youth Congress Movement in 1936. See *Who was Who*, vi. On its

His love for the country was instantaneous. James Mark,¹ a Cambridge friend also studying in Münster, wrote: 'He came back to Münster like Moses having seen the promised land.' He had gone on the delegation as an interpreter, using German as a vehicular language, and so his first contacts with that polyglot Republic were necessarily through the German cultural component. He was met at the station in Prague by a young student of German at the Charles University, Vilém Fried,² who was to act as his guide. Their first common ground was the poetry of Rilke (a sort of *genius loci*), but of course they soon discussed other things as well. To foreigners studying in the constricting atmosphere of Nazi Germany German politics looked different seen from Prague; the atmosphere of free political discussion was stimulating and exciting; the threat posed by Konrad Henlein and his party was clear to anyone coming from Germany, and to such a person the ideology of Masaryk was naturally more attractive than that of Hitler. Auty's time in Münster had shown him where Nazism was leading. Prague impressed him therefore as a centre of free and enlightened German culture in an era, as Hugh Seton-Watson has written, 'of political freedom and of immensely fertile intellectual and cultural activity, which could not fail to impress any sensitive visitor in those years'. Others felt like him, especially after the German annexation of Austria in 1938. One of the representative figures there was Hubert Ripka, with whom Auty became friendly.³ A further factor was the phenomenon of the symbiosis of Germans and Czechs; but more important still was the impact of a new world, a Slavonic world, its sheer strangeness an attraction and a challenge; all these were subsumed in the professional challenge presented to a keen young philologist by the Czech language itself. He completed his doctorate at Münster in June of that year and took up his duties as Faculty Assistant Lecturer in

return the delegation published a brochure, *We saw Czechoslovakia*, with a preface by Wickham Steed. There seems to be no copy in this country, though the New York Public Library has one; I am grateful to Leo Miller of New York for getting me a photostat of it. Auty appears in the list of delegates as of 'Caius College, Cambridge and Union of University Liberal Societies'.

¹ James Mark: see *Who's Who*.

² Vilém Fried, now Professor of English at the Gesamthochschule Duisburg: see *Kürschners deutscher Gelehrtenkalender* and the notice by Helmut Schrey in the *Festschrift* for him, *Forms and Functions*, eds. Jürgen Esser and Axel Hübler (Tübingen 1981), pp. 5f.

³ See Hubert Ripka, *Eastern Europe in the Post-War World* (London 1961), with a memoir of the author by Hugh Seton-Watson, from which the above quotation is taken.

German at Cambridge in October. Alongside his teaching in German he devoted himself intensively to the Slavonic languages, Czech in the first instance but also Russian and for a trained philologist and medievalist, of course, Church Slavonic. He and I attended the classes in Church Slavonic given by N. B. Jopson, which Auty recalled with pleasure in his obituary of Jopson as 'a rewarding and unforgettable experience'. He learned enough Russian to take part in two Russian plays and later in life had a good command of the language.¹ Nearly every vacation was spent in Czechoslovakia, usually in the flat belonging to Fried's parents in Prague but occasionally in summer schools elsewhere. In this way he acquired a good knowledge of the country not only through its language and literature but also, as his Czech and Slovak friends recall with pleasure, through its folk-song and its gypsy music, its food and its drink. At a summer school of Central European studies at Tatranská Lomnica he had a traumatic experience which he recounted afterwards with amusement. The participants had gone on a mountain excursion in warm summer weather and gathered at a restaurant where lunch had been arranged for the whole party. Dispersed at intervals down the long tables were carafes of a clear colourless liquid which Auty assumed to be water. Thirsty after his exertions he poured himself out a tumblerful and drank it off, only to discover that it was slivovitz. . . .

Thanks to these frequent contacts his progress in the Czech language was rapid and he made a large number of friends in the country, many of them young people active in political life, but some, like Hubert Ripka, more senior. An important friendship, which left its mark upon his life, was that with Hana Škobisová, a twenty-year-old student of English. He met her through Fried, who remembers her as 'a real beauty'. Auty was very attached to her, and his friends assumed that his sudden precipitate visits to the Continent in 1938 and 1939, of which more below, were connected with her. She was half-Jewish, so that in the event of a German take-over, which was generally considered imminent, she would undoubtedly be in danger. When in March 1939 the Germans occupied the rump of Czechoslovakia Auty telephoned her from Cambridge and asked her to marry him; quite apart from his feelings for her this seemed the simplest and quickest way of ensuring her safety and her freedom; it was offered by a number of idealistic young Englishmen to Jewish girls in those days, and Auty's case is not an isolated one. It was an unforgettable night of

¹ Information from Professor Alexander Myl'nikov of Leningrad.

15 March 1939, when some of Auty's friends called on him in his lodgings at 17 Portugal Place to express sympathy and concern and stayed with him until the small hours, drinking horse's neck to keep their spirits up, while he repeatedly tried to telephone Hana. Communications with Prague were understandably disrupted, but he succeeded eventually and made his proposal, which was refused. The following day he went to Prague to see her and got there on the last international train before the frontier was closed. It seems that Hana despite everything could not contemplate marrying an Englishman. He made a final attempt in July 1939, after his political activities on behalf of Jews and anti-Nazis had made it impossible for him to enter what was by then called the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia (he had been expelled by the Gestapo on 8 April). He went to Leitmeritz/Litoměřice, by that time in the Reich, which was as near as possible to where she then lived, and, at a point where the Elbe formed the new frontier between the Reich and the Protectorate, Auty on one side of the river saw Hana and Fried on the other side waving to him. He could not swim, so they swam across, under the noses of the frontier guards on both sides. This was the last he saw of Hana; she and Fried swam back and she, with her mother and one of her brothers, later died in Theresienstadt. Fried managed to escape to Britain and joined Auty in London in 1940. I have a postcard from Auty dated Leitmeritz 20 July 1939: 'It being impossible for me to enter Bohemia I have come to the nearest possible point—the frontier in fact. It is very unlikely that I shall be a married man next year.' The final sentence suggests something of his despair: 'Fortunately they still have slivovice here.' It was not until I had collected the material for this memoir that I realized the full significance of this card, for Auty never mentioned the episode to me.

He had at an early stage made acquaintance with the Slovak component in the Republic. He was particularly attached to his Slovak friends; they seemed to him more relaxed and less complex than the Czechs, and their easy companionship appealed to him. Characteristically he devoted himself seriously to the study of the Slovak language as distinct from Czech (Slovaks noted that he was the first West European philologist to do so) and rapidly acquired a mastery of it which became legendary. His first contacts with the Republic had been made through the Slovak, Alexander Kunoši, who also escaped to England and joined Auty in London. (He later became Czechoslovak ambassador in South America, returned to political life in Slovakia, and died after a period in

prison). Many of Auty's scholarly publications were devoted to the Slovak language; during the war he broadcast from London both in Czech and Slovak, and his listeners, both Czech and Slovak, would not believe that he was not a native speaker.

His Slavonic interests, intense though they were, did not impair his concern with Germans and German things, especially Jews and other endangered persons. After the *Anschluss* it became particularly acute and together with Richard Samuel he helped a number of refugees to leave Austria. Samuel was an older man with a good record in World War I and already a scholar of distinction, who had escaped from Hitler to become German Lektor in Cambridge, a man whose mild and gentle exterior concealed great courage and determination.¹ He visited Prague with Auty in March 1938 and was concerned with him in helping Czech Social Democrats to leave the country before the German take-over. One of those whom they got out was Wenzel Jaksch, the leader of the German Social Democratic Party (*Deutsche Sozialdemokratische Arbeiterpartei*) in the Czechoslovak parliament, a fierce opponent of Konrad Henlein. Jaksch came to England and addressed an undergraduate society in Cambridge in the autumn of that year; he spent the war years in London and went to West Germany after the war, having vainly tried to prevent the expulsion of Sudeten Germans from Czechoslovakia when the war was over.²

This activity seems to have been the start of Auty's courageous and determined rescue work for Jews in Nazi-controlled lands. An anonymous but well-informed obituary in *The Jewish Chronicle* (15 September 1978) describes how, at the time of the *Kristallnacht* pogrom he was woken in the early morning of 10 November 1938 and asked to go to Munich to find persons on a list given him and to arrange for their release.

By the time Auty reached Munich [the account continues] some of the people he was seeking had already been taken to Dachau. He set about finding them and negotiating for their release. But it did not stop there. With a list of names provided by the Cambridge Refugee Committee, but also in answer to the many personal appeals on the spot, he set about tracing innumerable Jews right across Germany, and negotiating with the German authorities for their release and their departure from the country. He was deeply moved by the suffering he saw in those first few weeks. Eventually a system was evolved whereby people in England could guarantee individual Jews to secure their release. One such person

¹ Richard Samuel, later Professor of German in the University of Melbourne: see *Kürschners deutscher Gelehrtenkalender* and *Who's Who in Australia*.

² Wenzel Jaksch: see *Neue deutsche Biographie*, x.

has described how she guaranteed a whole family: Robert Auty had secured the release from concentration camp of the father, who was joined in England by his wife, his two daughters and his mother-in-law. There were many such cases. I have heard that the number of people whom he helped in this way must have run to hundreds. He was known to such people as 'the modern Pimpernel'.

Among those whom he helped to escape was the philosopher Werner Brock,¹ who became a familiar figure to Cambridge modern linguists until he returned to Freiburg after the war.

He never spoke of this activity to those not immediately concerned with it, and many of his close friends were quite unaware of it until after his death, as the author of his obituary in *The Times* evidently was. As one of his friends wrote: 'I did not know he was the modern Pimpernel and always thought he visited Czechoslovakia to see a young woman.' His friends among themselves used to make fun of the way he would turn up suddenly on the doorstep, with a taxi waiting, borrow £50 (a lot of money then), and disappear; they thought he was just chronically improvident, for they knew nothing of the Samaritan background. It was characteristic of the man to keep his own counsel on such a matter for over forty years. Many young Englishmen of his generation (the present writer included) were in possession of the same or similar information and exposed to the same stimuli but had not the compassion and the resolution to take the practical measures he took.

At the outbreak of war it was natural that he should make contact with the Czech government in exile. He worked as a translator for the Czech Ministry for Foreign Affairs in London until

President Beneš and other members of the Czech government in exile on official occasions. He remembered with a smile the occasion when he accompanied Beneš on an official visit to Cambridge. The party was conducted round King's College by the Provost, J. T. Sheppard. Auty gave a running translation of his remarks, but he was puzzled by continual references to 'our young king', which he obediently put into Czech, somewhat to the bewilderment of his audience, for in 1941-2 George VI was no longer young. It was not for some time that he realized that Sheppard was talking about Henry VI. . . . In the course of these duties he became personally acquainted with the leading Czech political figures, especially Beneš and Jan Masaryk; Ripka he already knew from Prague. Some of his Czech friends thought that he got rather tired of the personal and political intrigues which flourish in closed groups of highly strung people working under constant strain; though he never said anything to this effect he was evidently relieved when he was asked to join the Foreign Office.

It was there that he met Kay Milnes-Smith whom he married shortly before the end of the war. They had one son and adopted a daughter. The union was later dissolved, and it may be that Auty was one of those sociable people who did not find fulfilment in marriage. No doubt this circumstance played some part in his decision to leave London for Oxford in 1965; shortly after this the marriage was finally terminated.

On his return to Cambridge he resumed his German teaching and in August 1947 he took part in an international summer school at his old university of Münster. He gave a lecture on 'Das Studium des europäischen Mittelalters und sein Wert für die heutige Zeit'.¹ The city of Münster was largely in ruins, modern and strictly local problems were pressing, and it seemed paradoxical to point to the study of the Middle Ages in Europe at large. But Auty was able to show convincingly that the past was still relevant. His peroration summed up his plea for a new, European, non-nationalistic, study of the Middle Ages of the sort that at that very time was being advocated by Ernst Robert Curtius:² 'das, was uns verbindet, kann man sehr oft bis in das Mittelalter zurückverfolgen; das, was uns trennt, ist oft neuerer Herkunft'. From this point the way could lead to Germanistics or Slavistics,

¹ The papers delivered at this course were published in *Das Auditorium* (1947) nos. 11-12 under the title *Weltprobleme vom Ausland her gesehen*.

² Auty was already aware of Curtius's work at this early stage and quoted from one of his recent articles; his great work, *Europäische Literatur und lateinisches Mittelalter*, had not yet appeared.

and in the event the pull of Slavistics was stronger. Apart from this lecture (his dissertation was never printed) his only publications in German studies were two book reviews in 1948 and 1950; even while he was officially a lecturer in German he had begun to publish in the Slavonic field. It was a natural and a welcome development when he went to a chair of Slavonic philology, first in London and then in Oxford. His contribution to Germanistics had, however, been far from negligible. It did not take the form of print but of inspiration to younger scholars; among them were D. H. Green, Marianne Wynn, H. D. Sacker, D. M. Blamires, and R. A. Wisbey, all of whom have achieved prominence in medieval German studies. He himself never lost touch with German things.

His Oxford years were surely the happiest of his life. The easy though not undemanding social life in Brasenose as a 'bachelor' fellow was the right environment for him, and the generous provisions of the Oxford chair left him free to pursue his own bent to an extent which would have been barely possible elsewhere. One immediate result was frequent travel in Slavonic lands and a stream of publication, mainly short pregnant articles and authoritative reviews over a wide field, written in eight languages besides English. His interest was now increasingly focused on the languages of the Austro-Hungarian Empire as vehicles of culture, on their development under the impact of the ideas of Herder and the nationalisms of the nineteenth century and, not least, of the demands of government and administration in the succession states. This work led him to study questions of linguistic resources — what languages can do, what writers can make them do. This interest led him outside the Indo-European field, first to Hungarian, of central concern for any study of the languages of the Habsburg Empire. He developed a great affection for the Hungarian language, for Hungarian literature, and Hungarian music. He was concerned with a translation by Ninon Leader of the works of the Hungarian poet Endre Ady, whom he greatly admired, and he translated a number of the poems himself. He took up Estonian in his later years and made several prolonged visits to Tallinn. His interest in Estonian language and culture was increasing and had he lived he would certainly have done some work in the Finno-Ugrian field. This interest did not go unappreciated both in Estonia itself and among Estonian communities in exile. When he was the de Carle Lecturer at the University of Otago he learned Maori. It was in these lectures in New Zealand that he summed up a lifetime of research on

'Language and Nationality in East Central Europe 1750-1950' (published in *Oxford Slavonic Papers*, NS xii).

Among the Slavonic languages to which he devoted particular attention were those of Yugoslavia. His relations with that country were greatly facilitated by his sister Phyllis, an authority on Yugoslav history and a biographer of Tito, but they went back to contacts made initially at the conferences at Tatranská Lomnica (at which Southern Slavs were well represented) and later through friends of N. B. Jopson's. He visited Yugoslavia in the late summer of 1939 with English friends; as the political situation worsened they made a dramatic dash for home by car from Belgrade with the frontiers closing behind them as they drove from country to country. He went back again repeatedly after the war. Year by year, from 1953 to 1961, he contributed the section on Serbo-Croat language and literature to *The Year's Work in Modern Language Studies* in collaboration with Rudolf Filipović, professor of English at Zagreb, who became a close friend (he wrote an obituary of him for the Yugoslav Academy of Sciences). At the time of his death a proposal was going forward for his election to the Yugoslav Academy as a corresponding member. He worked on Slovene and Macedonian as well as on Serbian and Croatian, again in the context of the emergence of literary languages, but he also devoted attention to medieval Serbian and glagolitic texts. His interests were diachronic as well as synchronic.

It was, however, Czech and Slovak which absorbed him from start to finish, and the list of his publications in this field is a long one. In 1968 the Czechoslovak Academy awarded him the Josef Dobrovský gold medal for distinguished work in Slavonic studies. He was friendly with members of the Cercle Linguistique de Prague and derived great stimulus from their ideas, though he was not a structuralist and maintained his independent position. It was a great satisfaction to him that our Academy on his initial recommendation elected Bohuslav Havránek a Corresponding Fellow in 1977. He kept up his contacts with the country and maintained good relations with the official bodies, despite divergent political views. This was not a case of sitting on the fence, for his views were known. It was another instance of his ability to command respect while maintaining his own position. He was almost unique in the world of international Slavistics, riven in all directions by political allegiances, personal enmities, and warring ideologies, in that he was trusted by East and West alike. For this reason he played an important part in international Slavistic

conferences as one of the few who could talk to everybody and who retained the respect of everybody. 'The dignified white-headed figure on the podium seemed to be an essential part of international Slavists' meetings' wrote Dimitri Obolensky and Anne Pennington, and they went on to tell how 'at the eighth International Slavists' Conference at Zagreb, just a fortnight after his death, there was an unprecedented number of public tributes; he was commemorated at every session in which he should have participated and there were innumerable private tributes also'.¹ The list of the functions he discharged on international academic bodies (it may be found in his entry in *Who's Who*) is a long one; here too his linguistic facility was a great asset. So was the skill he had developed over the years in university administration. It seemed at one time as though he would have no time left for scholarship but would develop into a mere member of the academic establishment. The list of his publications shows that what some of his friends feared did not in fact come about.

It was characteristic of his involvement with Czechoslovakia that he should have chanced to be in that country at the two climactic moments, September 1938 and August 1968. In September 1938 he was in Prague with his sister and a small group of English friends; they followed with mounting embarrassment and shame the policies of the Chamberlain government, somewhat heartened by the stand made by Kingsley Martin in the *New Statesman*; when even he began to waver they wrote a letter to the journal from Prague in protest, which, however, was not printed (the editor was flooded with letters on this subject). In August 1968 Auty observed the Soviet invasion from close to and was escorted to the frontier by the Austrian consul, who was also responsible for seeing that some other visitors emerged safely. On arrival in Vienna Auty telephoned a letter to *The Times* which appeared on 24 August. Besides description of what he had seen and a call to HM government to 'initiate and persist in the strongest action' it contained a statement which represented his own deep conviction: 'Since September 1938 this country has owed a heavy debt to Czechoslovakia.' Much of his life was devoted to making that debt good.

¹ *Slavonic and East European Review*, lvii (1979), p. 93. It is probably significant that no mention is made of these remarkable tributes in the very full account of this conference in the Czech journal *Slovo a slovestnost*, xl (1979), pp. 333-44, which had, however, published a—short—notice of Auty's death earlier that year (p. 75).

It was with some diffidence that I agreed to write this memoir. Though we had been close friends for more than forty years, when it came to the point I realized how little I really knew him, and I found this feeling shared by many to whom I applied for impressions of him or information about him, even by some of those who felt his death as a personal loss. And yet all are agreed on the warmth of his presence and his gift for friendship across all barriers. When you met him after a long absence, it was as though your last meeting had been yesterday; contact and rapport were immediate. A Selwyn colleague wrote:

He was 'companionable and communicative' and generous with his time in dealing with his friends. I once heard him say aloud while he walked around the S.C.R. after a feast: 'I like people, I like people'.¹ For all that, I didn't find Auty easy really to get to know deeply; no doubt my own fault.

There was a private central sphere, a *for intérieur*, to which only very few were admitted. His sister Phyllis came near to defining it when she said: 'He was a great romantic'. A basic idealism and an emotional engagement combined with strong determination lay behind his 'Pimpernel' activities as well as the more humdrum devotion which he gave to his college and his university, to all the multifarious bodies on which he served, to his students, to his research, and to his friends.

There was little trace of romanticism in his exterior. He dressed very soberly. His face was long and narrow, with a long chin and upper lip, and—except when he laughed—quite remarkably unexpressive; it was difficult to guess what he was thinking. In his student days in Germany he, like me, found, somewhat to his surprise, that he was what Germans then called a 'blonder nordischer Langschädel'; blonde was a good thing to be in those days and could be extended to cover lightish brown, as in his and my case; he was certainly 'nordic' and dolichocephalic. His hair bleached very early; he was grey before he was thirty and white before he was forty. This was a great asset to him in his Civil Service career and later; in hierarchical contexts he appeared to have more seniority than he actually possessed and he was quick to realize this. His walk was characteristic—his stride was a shade longer than normal for his (medium) height. His laughter was infectious. He died in the midst of life the way most scholars would wish: his scout found him in the morning of 18 August 1978 lying

¹ On a similar occasion he took the same theme a stage further and said: 'I like people, but the people one is with do not always like people.'

dead in bed with the light on and a book open in front of him; the radio was still tuned in to Central Europe. A memorial service was held for him in the University Church on 28 November; his college had rightly assumed that its chapel would prove too small. In fact the great church was packed with visitors from far and near to hear Dimitri Obolensky's moving address. His successor in the chair, Anne Pennington, planned a conference on 'The Formation of the Slavonic Literary Languages' in his memory. It was held in Oxford in July 1981, but she did not live to take part. She died in May of that year, not yet fifty years old, and so the conference was in her memory as well. The Serbian poet Vasko Popa wrote lines for her which are also appropriate to her predecessor:¹ he too until his last breath enlarged his Oxford home built in Slavonic vowels and consonants.

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I have been greatly helped in the composition of this memoir by personal communications, written and oral, from many quarters, for which I am extremely grateful, especially from Professor Phyllis Auty, who provided me with a great deal of material over and above her own memories, and Professor Vilém Fried, upon whose personal reminiscences I have drawn heavily. Others whose help I am glad to acknowledge are Professor Richard Griffiths, Professor Richard Samuel, Professor Rudolf Filipović, Professor Eric Herd, Professor R. A. Wisbey, Dr P. J. Durrant, Mr Trevor Jones, Dr Mary Beare, and Dr James Mark. I have also profited by various previous obituary notices, of which the following are the most important:

The Times, 24 August 1978, with a follow-up notice by R. M. Griffiths on 4 September.

Selwyn College Calendar, 1978-9, by Peter Hutchinson.

Jewish Chronicle, 15 September 1978, by Herta Simon.

Almanach der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, cxxviii (1978), pp. 377 ff., by Josef Hamm (in German).

Slavonic and East European Review, lvii (1979), pp. 89 ff., by Dimitri Obolensky and Anne Pennington, with a list of Auty's publications.

The Brazen Nose (1978), pp. 29 ff., by R. M. Griffiths, repeated with minor alterations in *The Caian* (November 1979), pp. 58 ff.

Slovo a slovestnost, xl (1979), pp. 75 f., by Ivan Lutterer (in Czech).

Slavica slovacica, xiv (1979), p. 79, by Eugen Pauliny (in Slovak).

¹ Vasko Popa, 'Anne Pennington', translated by Peter Jay, Anthony Rudolf, and Daniel Weissbort, *Times Literary Supplement* (26 June 1981).

Filologija, ix (1979), pp. 245 ff., by Rudolf Filipović (in Croatian).

Earlier, Vilém Fried had written an appreciation of Auty's work for his fiftieth birthday in *Naše řeč* (1964), pp. 244 ff. under the title 'Bohemistika a slovakistika ve Velké Británii'.

I have not traced any notice in Soviet journals.