

# Auden at Swarthmore

*by* Bill Yarrow

I was first in line that  
Sunday, but it wasn't like  
I hadn't heard other poets  
read there. I had.

Rexroth, Berrigan, Padgett  
Strand, Sidney Goldfarb  
Jean Valentine, Daniel  
Hoffman, Galway Kinnell.

They were known  
or emerging but  
not outlandishly famous  
not like W. H. Auden.

So I went to see the wrinkled  
and rumpled poet who insisted  
on reading from memory, stumbling  
through his sheaf of poems.

Someone in the audience  
should have heckled him  
but everyone was in awe  
of his assembled glory.

When I saw him, I was barely  
twenty, and he was solidly  
sixty four, years younger  
than I am now.

Two years later, he died in Vienna.  
That winter I returned to Philly

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to see the exile Joseph Brodsky  
read at the Broad Street Y.

He read his elegy to Auden, declaiming  
*Poetry without you equals only us.*  
"More blood! More adrenalin, you  
parasite!" a young drunk cried.

As they dragged out the man  
flailing his arms, yelling like  
jealousy, the future Nobel  
Laureate bowed his head.

