

fails to set off “somewhere else” with commas, as Auden did, and his commas alter the meaning. Compared to all these distortions, Auden’s change of “some” to “no” seems small potatoes.

Yet even the rest of the argument makes little sense. Auden’s poem strongly suggests that whatever the “voice without a face” is claiming is a lie. If it’s proving that some cause is just or that no cause is just, what it says is a lie. Severn seems to think otherwise, that we should believe the voice. All Auden’s work makes clear his utter contempt for dictators of the kind implied here, who drive credulous citizens or persecuted victims to their destruction. It doesn’t matter much whether the disembodied voice is rallying people to *some* cause for which it is recruiting them to fight or mocking them for putting their faith in *any* cause. Auden may, in copying the poem, have leaned toward the second view and written “no.” Both readings show the cynical malevolence of the tyrant.

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TO THE EDITOR:

In his interesting and instructive speculations on a variant reading in a fair-copy manuscript of Auden’s “The Shield of Achilles,” Stephen E. Severn argues that the variant resulted from a deliberate authorial act. But it also seems possible that it resulted from a common scribal error known as an eye-skip.

As Severn observes, all printed texts of the poem have this reading: “Out of the air a voice without a face / Proved by statistics that some cause was just.” The fair-copy manuscript that Auden made to be sold at a charity auction in 1960 (seven years after he wrote the poem) re-

places “some cause was just” with “no cause was just.”

The manuscript is otherwise almost identical to the printed versions, so it seems likely that Auden prepared it by copying from a book that was open on his desk. The two lines that immediately follow the lines quoted above are these: “In tones as dry and level as the place: / No one was cheered and nothing was discussed. . . .” The phrase that Auden miscopied (“some cause was just”) has the structure “some *x* was *y*.” While he copied it, Auden’s eye or memory may have skipped ahead two lines to the phrase “No one was cheered,” which has the similar structure “no *x* was *y*.” Auden may have anticipated the “no *x* was *y*” structure of this second phrase while retaining the *x* and *y* of the first phrase (“cause” and “just”). The result would be the miscopied phrase in the manuscript: “no cause was just.”

Of course, this suggestion contradicts none of Severn’s speculations. Even a simple scribal error may have had complex motives behind it—or it may have been nothing more than an eye-skip.

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Sexual Victims of War

TO THE EDITOR:

An entire issue of *PMLA* on the topic of war (124.5 [2009]) and not one prostituted voice anywhere? One of the most important aspects of war—the turning of the vulnerable into “comfort women”—and you completely ignore this terrible sexual atrocity?

Name withheld