

a marvellous teacher—unafraid of showing what he knew, propounding theories whose audacity he had no desire to see turned into dogma, and, above all, illuminating his friends' and his students' moral natures by analysis, advice and example. Nicolas Nabokov's contribution pays eloquent tribute to Auden's power to suggest the solution to a moral dilemma without interfering in his friend's freedom of choice. Nabokov, too, manages to mix a flavour of "camp" (for so long piously kept out of all writing about Auden, following his own prohibition) with the morality, and, along with James Stern and Lincoln Kirstein, shows us the mysterious figure of the poet, in American uniform, travelling through the ruins of Germany in 1945.

Nabokov was to receive almost the last gift which Auden bestowed, the libretto of *Love's Labour's Lost*, in 1973. He and Robert Craft discuss Auden's musical collaborations, and indicate firmly the leading role played in them by Chester Kallman, who died so tragically soon after his friend. Kallman, on all the evidence a fairly undistinguished poet, became, as librettist, a very considerable figure. Many opera lovers regard the brothel scene in *The Rake's Progress* as one of the most perfect structures, musically and verbally, since Mozart. This, we are reminded, was conceived and executed in the libretto by Kallman. Craft seems to have loved and admired Auden sincerely, but his acidulated style permits him to spice his affection with observations such as "[he] came to rehearsals in a white linen suit, polka-dotted in front with Chianti stains."

AND SO THE PROGRESS CONTINUES, to the unhappy end of reiterated anecdotes, blessings too often counted and the inability of the admiring world to give the poet the serenity his old age desired. At Oxford, David Luke saw the very real generation gap which separated Auden from the new iconoclasts. One undergraduate said, "It didn't matter two shits what he did—we'd have thought him great." But another, and I suspect more representative, declared, "I wasn't the least interested in Auden, any more than I am in Picasso or Stravinsky or Casals or Shostakovich; our inspirations and models are different nowadays." That difference is all around us: Auden, who seemed so immediate for so long, is now a growth area of literary criticism. The authors of this book join with the great public in feeling his loss. The wonderful legacy of the works remains, but it is not only his friends who feel that a powerful protector has gone. For years, the world of the imagination was illuminated by Auden's presence, and those of us who hardly knew him or never met him grieve as acutely as do his close friends. He was our mentor too.

## AUTHORS

**Nadine Gordimer** shared the Booker Prize for her last novel, *The Conservationist* (Cape, 1974). . . .

**Alasdair MacIntyre's** article was read at a conference organised by the University of Texas Medical School at Galveston last year. It is appearing in the proceedings of that conference, *Exploration and Evolution in the Biomedical Sciences* (Reidel, 1975). We are indebted to the University of Texas for permission to publish it. . . .

**Dr W. O. Henderson** has published numerous books on European and particularly German economic history in the 18th and 19th centuries, including *The Zollverein and Britain and Industrial Europe 1750-1870*. He was until recently Reader in International Economic History in the University of Manchester. His 2-volume biography of Engels was published in October (1974). . . .

**Dr W. H. Chaloner** has collaborated with Dr Henderson in a number of translations from the German, particularly of F. Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (2nd ed. 1971). He is reader in Modern Economic History in the University of Manchester. . . .

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**Don Cook** was resident correspondent for *The New York Herald Tribune* in Britain, Germany and France, and is now correspondent for the *Los Angeles Times*.

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## EAST & WEST

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# On Revealing the “Last Secret”

By Don Cook



A NAME WHICH recurs with particular interest in *The Last Secret*,<sup>1</sup> Nicholas Bethell's even-handed and harrowing account of the forced repatriation at the end of World War II of some two million Russians who had fallen into the hands of British and American forces, is that of Thomas Brimelow.

At the time Brimelow was a junior in the diplomatic service, assigned to Northern Department in the Foreign Office where he initiated many of the first drafts of policy recommendations and political analysis concerning the Soviet Union which then moved on up through the machinery, minute by minute, to become official policy. Brimelow was then 28 or 29 years old, fluent in a number of languages including Russian, of marked intelligence and self-confidence, and particularly clear, incisive, precise and forceful in expressing himself on paper. The Foreign Office has a public reputation for woolliness and obfuscation of language because that is what diplomats generally do in public pronouncements, but in fact Foreign Office written English prose (and occasional verse) often turns out to be very good reading indeed.

The trouble is, of course that nobody gets to read Foreign Office prose until so long after the events that by the time old records and documents are released there are few writers or historians (or even journalists) around who can relate the ideas and language and expression of thought to the personalities, the political conditions, the emotions, the smell and the feel of the

time when they were written. The change in the old “fifty-year rule” in Britain which now permits release of most official government records after thirty years is beginning to bring source material out into the open within living memory of events and within the lifetime of participants.

Sir Thomas Brimelow, permanent under-secretary of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, as he is today, thus becomes a first “victim” (as he may feel himself to be) of the new rule. For the first time in British diplomatic history, the records of policy minutes of a junior diplomat have been made public not only during his lifetime but while he is still active and now highly influential at the top of government service.

Brimelow was not called upon to make any moral or indeed political judgment about “The Last Secret”—forced-repatriation policy. The minutes which he found himself drafting on the subject concerned implementation of a policy already laid down. The moral and political judgment, such as it was, had already been made by Anthony Eden, with a determination verging on that of some high cardinal of the Inquisition marking out victims by casuistical category and drawing up lists of dead souls. Even before the invasion of Normandy, the Foreign Office concluded that if any Russian fell into Allied hands

“in due course all those with whom the Soviet authorities desire to deal must be handed over to them, and we are not concerned with the fact that they may be shot or otherwise more harshly dealt with than they might be under English law.”

On 20 July 1944, before the Allied armies had even broken out of the Normandy bridgehead (and also the day of the assassination attempt against Hitler), Eden wrote to inform the Soviet Ambassador in London of the capture of the first few thousand Russians serving with German labour battalions on the West Wall, and added with almost unctuous solicitude:

“The Soviet government will no doubt wish to ascertain in detail the circumstances in which these Soviet nationals came to serve in enemy military or para-military formations and the conditions under which they are at present being detained. For this purpose, His Majesty's Government are anxious to make arrangements whereby the Soviet authorities in the United Kingdom may be put in direct contact with these Soviet nationals.”

The outcome of this invitation bordered on black humour. A Soviet military attaché in London was indeed dispatched to visit the camps, and shortly after Ambassador Gousev turned up at the Foreign Office to deliver an astounding verbal protest to Anthony Eden about the “degrading” conditions and treatment which these Soviet nationals were receiving from

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<sup>1</sup> *The Last Secret*. By NICHOLAS BETHELL. André Deutsch, £3.45; Basic Books, \$8.95.