



ART YOUNG IN LETTERS

The dean of American cartoonists, haunted by "mass wretchedness," driven by financial worries, retained faith in a new day.

THE following excerpts from letters and postcards written by Art Young, the late and great cartoonist and people's artist—the first two to Corliss Lamont, the rest to his biographer and fellow artist, Gilbert Wilson—reveal his unchanging hope for the world, and the conditions in his personal life which a lesser man might have allowed to obscure that hope. The gnawing anxieties that attended his last years, his worries over how he would continue to pay the rent, to find the bare necessities for life, are revealed here—and his strong determination to work again as he had in the past. Always, Wilson says, he was possessed by the feeling he had not done enough, in mankind's struggle for a better world. With this humility went a determination, to live longer, to produce more, and an unshaken belief in the rising sun—Art Young's own trademark.

May 14, 1941; postcard to Corliss Lamont: "Gosh! I like that quote. And I like you for having a poet's vision accompanied by a faith in the 'innocent and wise' . . ." alluding to four lines from the Russian poet Anatole Lunacharsky, which Lamont had sent his friend:

*O happy earth, out of the blood
of generations
Life yet will blossom, innocent
and wise
And thou, my Planet, shalt be
cleansed of lamentations
A jade-green star in the moon-
silvered skies.*

March 18, 1940, in a letter to Lamont on having read his *You Might Like Socialism*, he speaks of "this time of chaos" and tells him "it's fine that you have contributed this book to the cause of order and justice." He described the book as "the economic struggle fairly, but boldly and honestly handled," adding, "I like also your presentation of the results of applied socialism in Russia."

May 28, 1940, New York; to Gilbert Wilson: "... I think we have the true religion. If only the crusade would take on more converts we would conquer all along the line. But faith, like the faith they talk about in the churches, is ours and the goal is not unlike theirs in that we want the



Self portrait of Gilbert Wilson, one of Art Young's closest friends.

same objective but want it here on earth and not in the sky when we die. The situation abroad is so frightful I am often upset and inconsolable—but (here Art Young had drawn a bird flying against that inevitable Art Young backdrop, a rising sun) a bird of light I can see winging its way through the chaos—and I am myself again."

Feb. 2, 1940; to Gilbert Wilson: "About that rumor—a misleading headline in the *Philadelphia Record* across the top of their book page read: 'Art Young's Autobiography—A Nobel Prize Novel.' (January 21.) My book was reviewed with reproduction of cartoons, also other books and one a Nobel prize novel. From that headline . . . others were a bit muddled if not taken in. . . . But I appreciate the spirit of your letter."

Feb. 2, 1940, New York; to Gilbert Wilson (All the letters which follow are to Wilson): "Last night around 4 o'clock I had one of my sleepless spells when I lie awake thinking of the mass wretchedness . . . I like your description of the new mural. If I could only shake off this 'involuntary melancholy,' the aftermath of last night, I'd sing joyously here in my room."

Aug. 30, 1941: "Letter from Medcraft to you—you know, the California man who wants my books, also an original, but don't believe in my socialistic-Communist ideas. I opened it by mistake and he wants the books sent COD inscribed—and I'm attending to the job today. . . . I'm hoping and praying that I can be as fortunate as old Elijah again this winter and get fed by the ravens, although I'm always looking out for ways and means to get transactions going that will amount to some money. Agent writes that someone else is looking at my house—no rent, no sale—but I try as you suggest not to worry."

March 11, 1940, Mt. Pocono, Pa.: "In spite of the blessed sun pouring in my window and other reasons for being undisturbed and a fortunate among men—all day I've had one of those spells. It makes me mad to think I can't rise above them. I glance at a headline or hear a fragment of conversation or other manifestation that seems to me to reveal ignorance and I am hurt. . . . I must rise above it all and try not to take so much of world woe into my poor mind. . . . Shaw at eighty-three laughing at the ignorance of men. Why can't I? Goya was old and deaf—what's the matter with me? Maybe I magnify too much. Enclosed article about Flaubert which is something like my case. These references to the big shots of arts and letters are just for my own comfort and determination to withstand my drawbacks, but improve. Word from Bethel—the icestorm broke a big limb off the spruce, and an old apple tree gave up."

"I wrote a short introduction to the anticipated book of *Types*. What's in the offing no one knows. My publisher is having his trouble. . . ." (This alludes to a book on small town types written and illustrated by himself which to date has not appeared. Wilson said that Art Young wrote with a profound sympathy for all of them, even the village drunkard and half-wit.)

Sept. 1, 1939, Bethel (speaking of a contemplated visit from Wilson): "... We have so much in common to work at . . . but you of course now understand my limitations for enterprises and initiative at seventy-four, and my nervous peculiarities. If I could clear up my main

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worries (I accept little ones) might live to be ninety—and active.

"This letter is written on my thirty-five-year-old stationery [acquired] when I was trying to be dignified.

"I'll welcome you with open arms." A postscript was scribbled at one side in pencil: "It would be fine if we had a typewriter here."

Feb. 4, 1938, Danbury (alluding to a mouth operation): "It was successful. I parted with two teeth that have stood by me since childhood. Like all revolutionary movements the old and decayed had to go. Now (also like the aftermath of revolutionary movements) I'm feeling better, but may have to live on mush—till the new plan is developed on the upper and lower jaw."

April 13, 1939, Danbury: "Just came from oculist where I went to see about the [here three lines of waves are drawn] flickering eyesight, especially mornings. . . . So I go floundering through life like all of us humans—guessing and hoping for the best."

April 20, 1939, Danbury: "My financial resources get so low—I feel like one who is gasping for breath—and now I'm not sure about renting the place. But—still hoping. . . . This is just to let you know I received your letter—and life goes on, with a few signs of spring." (Here he drew a bough and birds.)

March 6, 1939, Danbury: "Went to NY for a day. Decided not to stay over and get involved in engagements. Didn't even go to my exhibition now on at ACA. Have read about it in *New Yorker*, *Herald Tribune*, and others—but I feel that my work is not so much for promotion by myself—but it's up to others and what's called the public. . . . I understand the artists' congress for May has been postponed. Maybe you can come this way re-

gardless. Anyway, we ought to have one of those crying-laughing together over the world's broken pitcher of the milk of human kindness. But in the long run things will be adjusted and the new era will gain momentum."

Aug. 23, 1939, Bethel: "The old pine stands majestically, after your good trimming."

Nov. 1, 1939: "It seems to me that you ought to get back to your work—panels, single canvases, any kind of pictures. You are becoming too introspective. Turning your troubles over and over and looking at them discouragingly will not help. After all you are just beginning. There is some sense in an old man contemplating his failures—and wishing he had accomplished more, but not you."

Jan. 18, 1940, Mt. Pocono, Pa.: "The sun is out today breaking a lot of storm."

"I know I should expect counter-revolutions in my interior. Last night the pain around my heart kept me awake. The doctor says it's nothing to alarm me—the gaseous poisons asserting their right to exist."

Jan. 24, 1938, Danbury: "The book is being rounded up, but, my gawd, what a job. I swear I'll never write another book or write anything but letters now and then to such as you who have been so considerate and helpful—and even these letters will have to be short, for I *must* get at my drawing." Across the side of this letter was scrawled: "Best to Sherwood Anderson—literary pioneer."

April 4, 1942, New York: "I open letters cautiously expecting that maybe something will develop that will cancel the sale of the old home—and yet, if I sell, how long can I exist on the proceeds? I must get my rent reduced *someway somehow*. I am so much oriented to this Gramercy Park section I'm spoiled for a change."

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From Art Young's Friends

Tributes and remembrances from those who knew and loved him.

THERE was a warm friendliness about the memorial mass meeting held for Art Young under NEW MASSES auspices the night of January 27. It had that quality of simplicity which, as Rockwell Kent said, characterized Art Young. It was an evening in which the writers and artists who had loved the great cartoonist and leader, and learned so much from him, and never got ahead of him—he was always abreast with the youngest, someone said—met with the people for

whom his cartoons were drawn, some 2,000 of them. It was not an occasion for mourning Art Young, as Joseph North said in opening the meeting. Actually it recalled Art Young's sense of gaiety and joy of life, mixed as it was with some poignancy. His brother, William Young, said later, "Art would have liked this kind of memorial." It was an evening of song and laughter, when men and women in the galleries stood and craned necks not to miss a bit of the dances of Jane Dudley,