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What Auden believed

by David Yezzi

On Auden's religious beliefs, and Arthur Kirsch's "Auden & Christianity."

Mr. Matthew Arnold. To him, Miss Mary Augusta, his niece: "Why, Uncle Matthew, oh why, will not you be always wholly serious?"

—Max Beerbohm, in a caption

But why do you take everything I say so seriously?

—W. H. Auden to Stephen Spender

W.H. Auden collected hats, at least as a younger man (he subsequently renounced them). He had a workman's cap that he picked up in Berlin and later consigned to the fireplace after throwing up into it, a panama hat that leant him the air of a lunatic vicar (his impersonation of which always brought the house down), and a mortarboard for his more donnish moods. In his biography from 1979 of the poet, Charles Osborne suggests that "there was a strong element of the poseur, the role-player, in the mature Auden." This proclivity for assuming different guises extended not only to Auden's choice of...

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