

Andrew Young (1885 - 1971)

Biographical notes by Tom Bacciarelli.

Andrew Young was a distinguished poet and naturalist whose precise, profound and deceptively simple poems deserve a far wider readership.

Andrew Young gained a scholarship to The Royal High School in 1896 where, according to his own account in the 'The New Poly-Olbion, he truanted as "a matter of principle". In the introduction to Young's 'Complete Poems' Leonard Clark writes:

He never forgot the roaring voice and raging temper of John Marshall, the Head Master, nor how he played truant on several occasions. While enjoying the free air on Arthur's Seat on, probably, the last of these occasions, he was unfortunately picked out by the chance telescope of one of the masters. He was nearly expelled for this escapade....

Andrew Young describes his schooldays in some detail, providing details about many of his teachers as well as his own experiences including his developing interests in nature and in literature.

I even sent a story to a magazine but unfortunately each time I used the word 'magic' I spelt it with a j. I little dreamed that the School magazine, 'Schola Regia', would one day review a book of my verse. And what a review! No poet could have read anything about himself more gratifying: "Over thirty years ago Andrew Young won the hundred yards at the School sports for three years in succession."

Scottish poetry library entry about Andrew Young (including a detailed biography and a link to some of his poems)
<https://www.scottishpoetrylibrary.org.uk/poet/andrew-young/>

Wikipedia entry about Andrew Young
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Andrew_Young_\(poet\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Andrew_Young_(poet))

University of Edinburgh profile of Andrew Young
<https://www.ed.ac.uk/information-services/library-museum-gallery/crc/collections/special-collections/scottish-literature/andrewyoung/about>

Website dedicated to Andrew Young
<https://andrew-young.de.tl/#>

Thoughtful essay on Andrew Young by Leslie Norris, reviewing Young's 'Poetical Works'
<https://newcriterion.com/issues/1985/10/a-profound-simplicity-the-poetry-of-andrew-young>

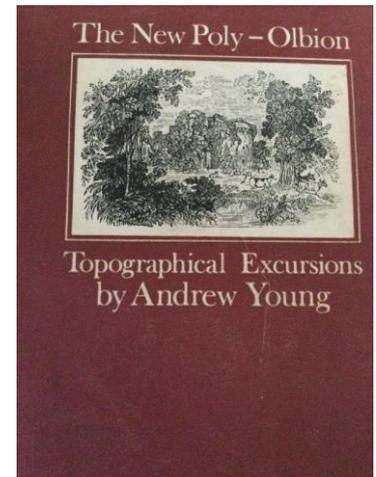
Another short appreciation by Stephen Pentz
<http://thedabbler.co.uk/2013/11/neglected-poets-andrew-young/>

Review of Richard Ormrod's 'Andrew Young – Priest, Poet and Naturalist: A Reassessment'
<https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2021/5-march/books-arts/book-reviews/andrew-young-priest-poet-and-naturalist-a-reassessment-by-richard-ormrod>

A short selection of poems
<https://travelingpoet.net/category/andrew-young/>

Footnote

Andrew Young's 1903 classmate Norman Macleod, winner of the coveted Macmillan prize for Dux of English that year (featured in an article at royalhigh.co.uk/editors-blog/), apparently vied for supremacy in the subject.



The following two articles are extended biographies of Andrew Young



Andrew Young, courtesy of Ruth Lowbury

The Rev. Canon Andrew Young, LL. D, was a Scottish-born poet and clergyman who spent most of his long adult life in Sussex. Born in Elgin on April 29th 1885, in early childhood (1887) Young moved with his parents to Edinburgh, where his father worked for the Century Insurance Company, and with subsequent promotions enabled the family to live a very comfortable middle-class life in the city. The definitive biography of Young's life and work, co-authored by his daughter Alison and her husband the poet Edward Lowbury, *To Shirk No Idleness* (Salzburg, 1997) claims that from the age of eight, at James Gillespie's School in Edinburgh, Young was already reading and writing poetry. In 1933, with the publication of his first successful collection of poems, *Winter Harvest* (Nonesuch Press) Young strained to put about the 'fiction' that he was a late-comer to poetry, as an attempt to distance himself from his earlier, derivatively 'Decadent' work, published under the title A. J. Young (Andrew John Young – his full name).

In 1896, Young was awarded a scholarship to the Royal High School where his life-long interest in the countryside and wild flowers began as he played truant from school. His repeated truancy led to the revocation of his scholarship but this did not prevent him from carrying on at the school, graduating and moving on to the University of Edinburgh (in 1903) where he took an arts degree with the hope of 'becoming a poet', graduating with an M.A. in 1907. There followed a directionless year when Young spent the summer in Paris with friends. In 1908 he enrolled at New College in Edinburgh to enter the seminary of the United Free Church of Scotland. Around this time he met Janet Green, who became his wife and major source of support until her death, in 1969.

In 1910, Young's father paid Alexander Moring Ltd. to publish his son's first small collection – *Songs of Night*. It may appear an indulgent and generous act, but was supposedly done so that Young could get the poetry writing 'bug' out of his system once and for all. It was clearly a very unsuccessful move from that perspective. This tiny, very rare book represents little more than a vanity-publication and in later life Young claimed to be deeply embarrassed by these early, sub-Decadent poems, written out of his obsession with Swinburne and the Celtic Twilight. After he had established a reputation as a major poet, Young went as far as destroying copies of this book, and did all he could to deny its existence. While even Young's most ardent admirers, such as the late Professor Philip Hobsbaum, admit that the poems in *Songs of Night* are clearly juvenilia, they (the poems) share the characteristic musicality and terseness that mark out Young's later, more mature work:

Sometimes an autumn leaf
That falls upon the ground,
Gives the heart a wound
And wakes an ancient grief.

But I weep not that all
The leaves of autumn die,
I only weep that I
Should live to see them fall. ('The Leaf')

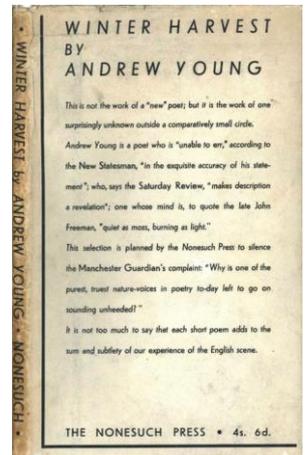
Young completed his seminary studies in 1912 and in 1914 (the year he married Janet Green) he was elected Minister of the United Free Church at Temple, Midlothian. Throughout the first and second World Wars, Young maintained a rather ambivalent pacifist stance. After World War I, in which he served as the superintendent of a YMCA rest-camp in France and lost one of his closest friends, Young moved his family to Hove in East Sussex where

he had been offered the position of Minister of the Presbyterian Church. He was never to return to live in Scotland from this point on. In the second conflict, his son Anthony was conscripted, giving Young much worry during the war years. He claimed that he wrote his prose study of UK flowers: *A Prospect of Flowers* (Cape, 1945) in order to distract himself from thoughts of his son, Nazism and the war. The move to England also put him in touch with supportive literary circles in London, one of his closest champions being Viola Meynell. During the 1920s and into the early 1930s, Young's friend, the bookseller J. G. Wilson, helped to print five small poetry collections. There is some speculation as to whether these fragile pamphlets were, like *Songs of Night*, vanity publications. They also contain immature work and were strenuously rejected by Young later on in his writing career.

In 1927 Young suffered a nervous breakdown, which led to periodic depressions throughout his life, culminating in another breakdown in 1956. In *To Shirk No Idleness* the authors do not give the reader an entirely positive image of the private, domestic Young, who could be verbally violent and domineering, despite the quiet reflectiveness suggested by his poems. As Young's literary reputation grew, beginning with the publication of *Winter Harvest* in 1933 and firmly cemented with the publication, in 1939, of *Speak to the Earth*, he continued serving as a popular and successful Presbyterian Minister as well as trying to writing poetic religious dramas such as *Nicodemus* (1937). In that same year, 1937, he began to grow disenchanted with his life as a Minister and decided to take the bold step of converting to Anglicanism so he could enjoy a country life as a poetry-writing parson, or so he admitted in letters to friends. In a letter to the church authorities, however, he claimed his change of mind was due to the emphasis in Presbyterianism on the personality of the preacher, not so prominent, to his mind, in Anglicanism. After a year of study, in Wells, he was in 1939 ordained a Deacon. In 1941 he moved his family to Stonegate, East Sussex where he was to live until moving, on his retirement, to Park Lodge in Yapton where he lived until his death in 1971. In 1947 he was made a Canon and in 1951 he received an Honorary LL.D from his alma mater, The University of Edinburgh. This was followed, in 1952, with the award of the Queen's Gold Medal for Poetry. While Young had achieved recognition for his work at last, the 1960s were overshadowed by the deaths of many of his friends, and in 1969 that of his wife Janet, a blow from which he did not recover, and which left him bereft and wishing for his own death to swiftly follow hers.

Many of Young's poems have been repeatedly anthologised and some remain much loved by readers, yet his name and poetry seem to have become neglected. Once his poems were valued in the classroom for their precision and immediacy. Perhaps this has something to do with Young's own disregard for 'contemporary' poetry in his time. After reading Young's small, limpid poems, one is very tempted to agree with Leslie Norris in his claim that Young wrote some of 'the most satisfying lyrics of this [twentieth] century'. He tried hard to distance himself from any recognisable poetry school, being embarrassed by his earlier connections to the Decadent and neo-Georgian movements. His work is perhaps best described in the posthumous poetic festschrift *Andrew Young: Remembrance and Homage* (Tidal Press, 1978) where it is said to offer a 'quiet voice in the midst of disquiet'. Such an approach could arguably be said to remove the poet from, or make them irrelevant to, the troubles of their life, times and society. This is just one of the many contradictions that exist in Young's life and work. He was a religious poet who believed in the afterlife, yet all of his poems are shot-through with an awareness, or fear, of death. He began as an urban dweller who hated the country, yet it became his creative lifeblood. He was Scottish, born, raised and educated yet once he reached Sussex, he never returned to Scotland. He had a pronounced Scottish accent, yet was embarrassed by this while simultaneously expressing disbelief that Hugh MacDiarmid might be said to be the 'greatest Scottish poet', when he thought he would clearly have a better claim to such a title. He was an intensely private as well as (his biography makes us aware) a very self-centred person whose poems leave little room for anyone else except the dead he mourns, yet he served his congregations tirelessly for well over half a century, as a Minister, parson, Deacon and latterly Canon. In short, he was far from the rural, uncomplicated parson-poet that the poems and mythology would have us believe. These seeming contradictions – the stability of the poems versus Young's own personal instabilities – only add greater power to his work, which is ever-searching for contentment but haunts us for the questions it cannot answer, which must have put Young in a frustrating position, as the moral compass of the villages which he served as a religious man:

Though I know well enough
To hunt the Lady's-Slipper now
Is playing blindman's-buff,
[...]



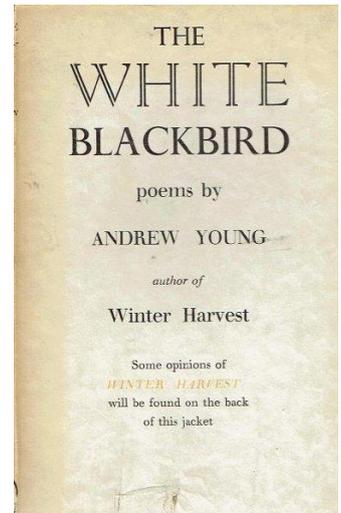
Yet through this hill-wood, high and low,
I peer in every place;
Seeking for what I cannot find
I do as I have often done
And shall do while I stay beneath the sun. (from 'Lady's-Slipper Orchid')

Article written by Richie McCaffery, 2016

Andrew Young was born in 1885 in Elgin, Scotland, Andrew Young was a poet and minister who, while less well known than some of his literary peers, produced a large body of work that has appeared in several anthologies over the years. His father was a station master and the family moved to Edinburgh when Young was only two years old.

After going to Gillespie's School he transferred to the Royal High School and was an excellent good student, earning a place at Edinburgh University. There he studied the classics and also fine art which saw him spend a year in Paris where he had to live hand to mouth for much of the time. In 1910 he published his first collection of poetry, *Songs of Night*, with the financial help of his father.

Young initially intended to train in the legal profession but his brother disappeared in mysterious circumstances following a scandal in Singapore and, instead, he joined New College and studied theology. In 1912 he became a full time minister and initially had a post in Berwick on Tweed before moving to Temple in the district of Midlothian. Here Young met English teacher Janet Green and married her shortly after. His congregation in Temple was small but exclusive, including a previous Prime Minister amongst them. With the outbreak of war, though, Young decided that he should enlist and spent much of the war providing religious comfort to the soldiers behind the front line before returning to Temple for a short while.



The stable-boys thud by
Their horses slinging divots at the sky
And with bright hooves
Printing the sodden turf with luck grooves.

In 1920, Young became minister for the Presbyterian Church in Hove on the south coast of England and wrote and published his second collection of poetry, *Boaz and Ruth*. Because he was an avid walker and loved the outdoors, he wrote a number of poems about nature and wildlife and these were warmly regarded at the time.

It wasn't until 1933 that he achieved the poetic heights that he had hoped for when young, when he published the collection *Winter Harvest*. He began to write in a new way and largely dismissed his earlier works as simply practice for this period in his life. He published four more works in the 1930s and 40s which he considered to be part of his canon but also spent time rewriting his older poems in his new 'Georgian' style.

There is a happy land, far, far away,
Where saints in glory stand, bright, bright as day.
Oh, how they sweetly sing, worthy is our Savior King,
Loud let His praises ring, praise, praise for aye.

Come to that happy land, come, come away;
Why will ye doubting stand, why still delay?
Oh, we shall happy be, when from sin and sorrow free,
Lord, we shall live with Thee, blest, blest for aye.

By the beginning of 1940, Young had left the Presbyterian Church behind and moved to join the Anglicans, taking up another ministry at Stonegate in Sussex. He continued to write well into later life and his most well-known religious poem was perhaps *Out of the World and Back* which was published in 1958. His other great achievement from this period was the long poem *Into Hades* as well as a number of prose works about poetry and landscape.

Young finally retired from his ministry in 1959, by which time he had received a number of awards including the Queen's Gold Medal for Poetry in 1952. He and Janet spent much of their later years in Yapton, Chichester, before old age saw him at nursing home in Bognor Regis. He died there in 1971 at the age of 86.