

DESTINATION
MACAO

by

Paul French

BLACKSMITH BOOKS

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Introduction: The Gem of the Orient

*A weed from Catholic Europe, it took root
Between the yellow mountains and the sea,
And bore these gay stone houses like a fruit,
And grew on China imperceptibly.*

*Rococo images of Saint and Saviour
Promise her gamblers fortunes when they die;
Churches beside the brothels testify
That faith can pardon natural behaviour.*

*This city of indulgence need not fear
The major sins by which the heart is killed,
And governments and men are torn to pieces:*

*Religious clocks will strike; the childish vices
Will safeguard the low virtues of the child;
And nothing serious can happen here.*

– WH Auden, *Macao: A Sonnet* (1939)¹

Gem of the Orient earth and open sea, Macao!

– Sir John Bowring, Governor of Hong Kong (1854-1859)²

1 'Macao: A Sonnet', *Journey to a War* (London: Faber & Faber, 1939). According to Edward Mendelson this sonnet wasn't part of the original manuscript sent to Faber. Auden and Isherwood had planned to write another book, *Hongkong-Macao: A Dialogue*, but then dropped the idea and incorporated their brief thoughts on Hong Kong (but not Macao) into *Journey to a War* with Auden adding a sonnet on each location. See Ed. Edward Mendelson, *The English Auden*, (London: Faber & Faber, 1986), p.425.

2 The phrase comes from a sonnet written by Sir John Bowring while visiting Macao in July 1849 – 'Gem of the orient earth and open sea/Macao! That in thy lap and on thy breast/Hast gathered beauties all the loveliest/Which the sun smiles on in his majesty.'

The Macao of the Mind

Macao, on the western shore of the Pearl Estuary, is where the search for the earliest traces of an organised foreign presence in Asia might begin. The phrase ‘Gem of the Orient Earth’ comes from a sonnet written by Sir John Bowring while visiting Macao in July 1849 – ‘Gem of the orient earth and open sea/Macao! That in thy lap and on thy breast/Hast gathered beauties all the loveliest/Which the sun smiles on in his majesty.’ Five years later Bowring became the fourth Governor of Hong Kong and fortunately seems to have not had time to write any more sonnets. The few early wanderers, such as Marco Polo, aside it was the establishment of Portuguese trading posts at Canton and Macao around 1514 that initiated the collective involvement of Europeans, Americans, and others in what would become known as the “China Trade”. That commerce comprised the importation of opium (the Portuguese traded *ópio* into China from Macao from 1729) and the exportation of Chinese silk, cotton, wool, artworks, tea, rhubarb, and porcelain. The story of Macao is essentially the origin story of the foreign presence in Chinese history.

Portugal acquired a permanent lease of Macao from the Ming dynasty in 1557 (the Portuguese being the only Europeans to have serious contact with the Ming). Lest we forget, this was a year before Elizabeth I succeeded to the throne of England and 63 years before the *Mayflower* sailed to what became Massachusetts. Macao was a success. In 1587 King Philip II of Spain (and also King of Portugal from 1580) declared Macao *Cidade do Nome de Deus* (City of the Name of God). Regaining independence from Spain in the 1640s, King João, *o Restaurador* (King John IV, the Restorer), added the motto *Não há Outra Mais Leal* (None is More Loyal). The Reverend Father António Francisco Cardim of the Jesuit Seminary at Macao wrote in 1640: ‘Macao is put together of very fine buildings and is rich by reason of the commerce and traffic that go there by night and day.’³ Fine buildings indeed: 1640 was the year construction was completed on the impressive Igreja de São Paulo (the

3 Quoted in Richard Hughes, *Hong Kong: Borrowed Place – Borrowed Time*, (London: Andre Deutsch, 1968), p.129. Cardim (1596-1659) spent several periods of time in Macao in the 1620s and 1630s.

Church of St. Paul), the ruins of which still dominate the central parish of Santo António today. Destroyed by fire in 1835, the frontage remains, impressive to all visitors, as the writer Han Suyin described it, ‘...divested of any inside or any walls behind it, an abandoned stage prop, high on a hill, framing the evening sky in its doors and windows.’⁴

The city grew. Macao’s waterborne trade into China came to supplant the old Silk Road in the far north, devalued by disruption from constant skirmishing in Central Asia and improvements in European shipbuilding and maritime navigation. Macao was now the major landmark of arrival in the Chinese world for vessels sailing from Europe and points east of Europe. At the same time Macao saw a dual influx of missionaries and merchants, a hub for the trade in souls as well as goods.

Despite always having a majority Chinese population Macao was also something akin to a mini-Portugal in the South China Sea. Apart from small details and the occasional Gothic church or mansard roof Hong Kong does not look like Georgian London nor Saigon really resemble Haussmann Paris, yet the historic centre of Macao has always felt distinctly Portuguese and constantly been described as such. Old Lisbon was destroyed by an earthquake in 1755 and so had to be almost entirely rebuilt. Arguably the north Portuguese city of Porto (or Oporto) with, as the English writer William Kingston noted, its apparent abhorrence of right angles in its street layout, feels more like Macao.⁵ Macao’s plethora of small *praças* (squares or plazas), churches, convents, theatres, vibrant shops and markets (though admittedly lacking a major river to rival the Douro) mirrors Porto more than the Portuguese capital.

The bay (the *Porto Exterior* or Outer Harbour) is Macao: its *raison d’être*, main entry point, and the locus of trade and migration for centuries. It is where missionaries, Canton traders, navies, and Hong Kong ferries have all arrived, and where they, along with galleons destined for Japan, Manila, Malacca, as well as the indentured labourers bound for Cuba, Brazil, Peru, all departed from. The settlement extends from the bay, up past the Praia Grande (Great Bay) into the peninsula parishes of Santo António, Nossa Senhora de Fátima, and Sé. Macao has since spread far and wide: once quite distinct villages of Taipa and Coloane

4 Han Suyin, *A Many-Splendoured Thing*, (London: Jonathan Cape, 1952), p.99.

5 William HG Kingston, *Lusitanian Sketches of the Pen and Pencil*, (London: JW Parker, 1845), p.30.

are effectively now suburbs; the islands once named Lapa, Dom João and Montanha (collectively the Hengqin Islands) have been absorbed by reclamation, landfill, and levelling. So too as Canton boomed off the back of the China trade, the colony of Hong Kong consolidated and provided a constant flow of ferries. Later when the county town of Shum Chun became the kernel of the mega-city of Shenzhen, and even once humble Chuhai expanded to become the Pearl River entrepôt of Zhuhai, Macao came to adjoin southern China and Guangdong province in a way that feels far more intimate today than a century ago. And certainly more so than over 465 years ago when Macao was first leased from the Ming.

*

The story of colonial Macao would culminate on December 20, 1999, with the return of Macao to China. Yet despite its 500-year history the Macao bookshelf remains limited. Macao's first serious historian, Carlos Augusto Montalto de Jesus, in his book *Historic Macau* in 1902, observed that Macao, 'uncommonly rich and significant as it is, has been allowed to remain buried in obscurity, belittled by superficial writers whose prejudices and inaccuracies are always perpetuated.'⁶ It is to be hoped that this collection does not fall into that category.

Previous books in this series have added (unapologetically) to the already groaning shelves of Shanghai- and Beijing-related books. Works of travel writing, novels, histories, and memoirs of both cities by foreign writers number in the hundreds if not thousands. Macao, on the other hand, suffers from a paucity of texts, both in English and other languages European and Asian. If you go back to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the odd book in French or Spanish appears, a couple of travel memoirs in German and Dutch, a few studies in Chinese, a couple in Japanese.⁷ On trips to Lisbon and Porto I have spent several days scouring

6 Carlos Augusto "CA" Montalto de Jesus, *Historic Macao*, (Hong Kong: Kelly & Walsh, 1902), p.i. Montalto de Jesus is also a potential warning from history for anyone writing about Macao. Though the first edition of *Historic Macau* was well received and reviewed, a second revised edition (1926) was burned by the Portuguese colonial authorities for alleging they were unfit to run Macao and that its administration should be handed over to the League of Nations.

7 There are local writers working in both Chinese and Portuguese in Macao today of course. I would note the poets Agnes Lam and Un Sio San, the historical novelist Joe Tang, author of *The Lost Spirit, Assassin*, and *The Curse of the Lost City*, that are all

bookshops, a patient local friend from my Portuguese publishers dragged along to help, looking for anything on Macao. My search yielded only a couple of historical romance novels with Macao settings and a sun-faded cookbook.⁸

I should stress that, as with the previous volumes in this series, *Destination Macao* does not in any way seek to provide a comprehensive history of the Portuguese colony, nor serve as a complete catalogue to the most famous residents and sojourners. It is rather a gallimaufry of people, events and themes that have caught my attention over the years. And this particular *Destination...* collection is as much about the Macao of the mind as it is about the reality of Macao's history and former denizens. The historian César Guillén Nuñez, in an introduction to a reprint of the English colonial official Austin Coates's *A Macao Narrative* (1978) noted, 'Western historians of his generation had to contend with a literature not yet fully developed, in which parts of the city's history had been fictionalised.'⁹ This collection too deals with the fictional as well as the real Macao – it is incomplete, partial, and fragmentary by design.

City of Sin

While its presence may be lacking in serious works, Macao has certainly been a staple of effervescent hack journalism. This began in the mid-to late-nineteenth century, following the First Opium War (1839-1842) and continuing into the early twentieth century. A chief concern was the eclipsing of Macao as an entrepôt port, military garrison, and financial centre, by the new and dynamic British colony of Hong Kong. By the time of World War One this eclipse was total and so discussion throughout the inter-war years resorted to tropes of Macao as a city of sin, sex, opium, and piracy. This exotic impression remained on constant repeat after World War Two through to the 1970s by which time Macao, to all

set among key historical moments in Macao's past. Also, those late writers including the poet and defender of Macanese Patuá, José Inocêncio dos Santos Ferreira, aka Adé (1919-1993); Henrique de Senna Fernandes (1923-2010); Leonel de Barros, aka Neco (1924–2011) and others.

8 There is a partial, but not complete, list of other texts on Macao not otherwise noted in the footnotes throughout in the acknowledgments at the end of this book.

9 César Guillén Nuñez, Foreword to Austin Coates, *A Macao Narrative*, (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2009).

intents and purposes, largely dropped off the map, lost in the shadow of a booming Hong Kong and then of a reviving post-Maoist southern China. If mentioned at all Macao was noted as nothing more than a haven for smugglers, gamblers, and gold dealers, seemingly beyond any law – perhaps a place for adventurers but containing little of modern relevance.

Nevertheless, this hack journalism has much to reveal, whether from the likes of adventurer-journalists such as Aleko Lilius, or seekers of sin cities such as Hendrik de Leeuw and Maurice Dekobra in the 1920s and '30s, through to the numerous pulp fiction writers and then film makers who found a ready-made exotic locale in Macao. This was a vogue that continued with post-war visitors including the American journalist Harrison Forman, James Bond creator Ian Fleming, and the French writer Joseph “Jef” Kessel.¹⁰

Macao was represented as an island of debauchery, shadiness, and assorted villainy, whilst simultaneously being an idle, slow-paced, island of tropical lassitude and sleepy backwater boredom. A sultry Mediterranean town where little happened but that by chance was anchored to mainland China. It was also the vibrant, exciting ‘Monte Carlo of the East’. Could Macao really be both simultaneously? This apparent duality was in stark contrast to Shanghai’s unquestionable sin city reputation of rampant debauchery coupled with bare-knuckled capitalism, arch modernism, and the free-for-all appropriation of the city’s east-west fusion. Nobody ever doubted Shanghai’s credentials. Could Macao ever really be both sin and lassitude, sex and siestas? The frustratingly slim Macao bookshelf provides no conclusive answers.

City of Poets

I make no apologies for the fact that several stories in this collection – notably the chapters on the cinema of Josef von Sternberg and the fictional writings of Maurice Dekobra, concern movies and books by directors and authors who spent little or no time in Macao. Others who left us images of Macao, the artists George Chinnery and George

10 The American newspaper correspondent Harrison Forman’s Macao diaries are held as part of the Harrison Forman Collection, University of Wisconsin Library (Milwaukee). Joseph Kessel, *Hong-Kong et Macao*, (Paris: Gallimard, 1957).

Smirnoff, as well as the writer Deolinda da Conceição, spent more time in Macao but were influenced by outside locations (England, Ireland, British India, Harbin, Tsingtao, Hong Kong and Shanghai among them) and artistic movements (Chinnery was a classic portraitist in oil or crayon, though considered ‘new’ at the time he developed his style in the 1790s; Smirnoff excelled at ‘wash’ painting).¹¹ Including them is intentional, and it is because Macao has been so much an imaginary place over its entire history that separating the “idea”, or “dream”, of Macao from the reality is difficult if not impossible. They are hopelessly intertwined.

Even those who lived in Macao often preferred to dream of it, creating their personal visions of it. The one-eyed *Lisboeta*, street brawler, jailbird, and moody denizen of Portugal’s mid-sixteenth-century *demimonde* Luís de Camões (c.1524-1580) was expelled from Portugal to North Africa for his politics (where he probably lost his eye in Ceuta). Further trouble ensued – female related – which led to duels and a more distant banishment to Goa. There he was offered prison or exile to the furthest reaches of the Portuguese Empire. He chose Macao.



Luís de Camões, 1577

Camões’s entire biography is splendidly wreathed in myth and rumour. The epic poem *Os Lusíadas* (*The Lusíads*, or *Song of the Portuguese*) which would make him the great bard of Portugal is essentially a voyage of the mind imagining Vasco da Gama’s sea route to India.¹² Legend has it *Os Lusíadas* was (or at least the last three cantos were) written in Macao during his sojourn around 1557 (no one is entirely sure of his dates in

11 ‘Wash’ is a technique in which the brush is made very wet with solvent and paint that is then applied to a wet or dry support such as paper or canvas.

12 Macao acquired an Avenida Vasco da Gama in 1898 to commemorate the fourth centenary of da Gama’s discovery of the sea route to India, though the boulevard no longer exists. The Jardim de Vasco da Gama (Vasco da Gama Gardens) – between Rua de Ferreira do Amaral, Calçada do Gaio, and Estrada da Vitória – was also originally laid out in 1898 with fountains and a bust of da Gama added in 1911.

the colony), sheltering from the sun in a cave, right where the Jardim Camões now stands.¹³ Whether or not he wrote all, or just some, of *Os Lusíadas* (published in 1572 after surviving heat, shipwreck, and the censors) in Macao or not, he did have one of the most extraordinary jobs while resident there. He was Trustee for the Dead and Absent, taking care of the deceased's belongings and arranging for transport to their next of kin. He made no money from *Os Lusíadas*, despite its being recognised as a paean to the nation. He died in Lisbon impoverished in 1580, his grave unrecorded. Though he wrote next to nothing directly about Macao he has been consistently lauded there – the first record of a monument to Camões in Macao is as early as 1631. He left to return to Goa, as ever under a cloud and in some disgrace (alleged theft, misappropriation of goods/funds it seems), and so perhaps he preferred to gloss over his time as Trustee for Macao's Dead and Absent.



Wenceslau José de Souza de Moraes in Macao, 1893

Writers abounded in Macao. The Orientalist writer Wenceslau José de Souza de Moraes (1854-1929) is most closely identified with Japan – a symbolist poet and translator of *haiku* poetry often compared to Lafcadio Hearn. Serving in the Portuguese Navy in 1889 he was assigned to assist the Captain of the Port of Macao (essentially the highest ranked naval officer in the colony). Macao was very much a base for Moraes who spent time in the Kingdom of Siam, Portuguese Timor and Japan. However, he did form attachments to Macao during his decade there. He married a Macanese woman named “Atchan” with whom he had two sons José (born 1893) and João (born 1894).¹⁴ He also began work on his first book *Traços do*

13 Macao has certainly long claimed Camões's *Os Lusíadas* but at best it was only partly written in Macao and also partially, in Ormuz in the Persian Gulf as well as in Goa too. Camões is often spelt “Camoens” in English texts. The Jardim Camões includes a bust of the poet, large boulders, and originally small palm trees designed to be reminiscent of Portugal's colony in Brazil. Indeed, several busts had to be cast in Lisbon as the first two or three were defaced, indicating perhaps not everyone was a fan.

14 Atchan, aka Mo Wong-shi and Wong Ioc-chan, is variously described as Chinese, Anglo-Chinese and Macanese. She left Moraes in 1894 while pregnant and moved to

Extremo Oriente (Traces of the Far East, published in 1895).¹⁵ He left to establish Portugal's first consulate for Kobe and Osaka in 1898.

Moraes overlapped with the slightly later Portuguese poet Camilo Pessanha (1867-1926), who arrived in Macao in 1894, five years after Moraes and over three centuries after Camões. It was an inauspicious arrival being a year of terrible and deadly plague outbreak across southern China. He came ostensibly to teach philosophy, but also wrote poetry. Pessanha remained for 32 years living an unconventional life, ignoring the disdain of the colony's rather more strait-laced Portuguese administrative class for his somewhat Bohemian lifestyle.



Camilo Pessanha

Still, Pessanha was useful to the colonial elite. He advised the Lisbon-appointed governors (*governadores*) and acted as a lawyer, whilst also collecting Chinese art. He was decidedly more curious than most colonists about the local culture. His poetry was a hobby, largely intended to be read by his friends, and next to none was published during his lifetime. But he was clearly simultaneously dreaming of Macao while actually living his life there.

Pessanha's work (and dreams) were influenced by the nineteenth century French poets Rimbaud, Mallarmé, Verlaine and Baudelaire. Pessanha's best-known poem *Clepsydra* (or *Clepsidra*) was written around 1920.¹⁶ It appeared just six years before his death and catapulted him into the position of the leading figure of Portuguese symbolist poetry, for which there was a sizeable vogue in the country. But *Clepsydra* was not officially published until 1945. *Clepsydra*, and other of his works written

Hong Kong with the children.

15 Wenceslau José de Souza de Moraes, *Traços do Extremo Oriente — Sião, China e Japão* (Lisbon: AM Pereira, 1895).

16 The most recent English translation being by Adam Mahler, *Clepsydra and Other Poems*, (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2022).

in Macao, reject naturalism and realism favouring dreams, visions, and derangement to interpret the world (all admittedly perhaps helped along by his opium addiction).¹⁷ He has been described as the ‘most pure of the Portuguese Symbolist poets’, and ‘perhaps the purest of Macao poets – balancing the actual and the imaginary; melancholia and wistfulness; the Macao of reality and the Macao of the mind’.¹⁸

Such remembrance is an integral part of writing and thinking about, as well as visiting and living in, Macao. Apart from the dense cluster of streets and squares around the central *Leal Senado* (Loyal Senate House, built around 1784 with a number of later refurbishments in 1904 and 1936), Macao’s cityscape has altered beyond all recognition since the period this book covers (the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century). Of course, it is also true that Peking and Shanghai have seen wholesale heritage destruction, precious little serious preservation, and massive population expansions too, but Macao’s changes are arguably more fundamental. A small preserved historical area sits alongside the garish new casino buildings of recent years. But this process in Macao is accentuated in dreamlike fashion by the preponderance of illusory fanciful recreations littering modern Macao’s gaming house-strewn landscape – Fisherman’s Wharf, The Venetian, The Londoner, The Parisian, and Treasure Island, and among them faux relics of old Portuguese Macao.¹⁹

17 Christopher Chu & Maggie Hoi, *Camilo Pessanha’s Macau Stories*, (Macao: Os Macanese Publicações, 2023).

18 Pessanha as described by the Portuguese journalist, playwright, and film director Reinaldo Ferreira (aka Repórter X). A *clepsidra* (or clepsydra) is an ancient form of water clock. Pessanha’s work combined sonnets, scattered, and fragmentary verses, poetry, and translated Chinese poems. In 1914, Pessanha published translations of eight Chinese eulogies in the Macao newspaper *O Progresso*. A statue of Pessanha stands in the Jardim das Artes (Arts Garden) on the once banyan-tree lined Avenida de Amizade in Sé, while he is buried in St Miguel Arcanjo Cemetery (St Michael the Archangel) on Beco do Alm. Costa Cabral.

19 Incongruously the Fisherman’s Wharf development includes a replica of Rome’s Colosseum. The Venetian is a sister property to the one of the same name in Las Vegas and includes a section of the San Luca Canal with gondoliers etc and a replica Rialto Bridge. The Londoner Macao includes a model Houses of Parliament, Big Ben, and a Changing of the Guard show. Should you wish, you can stay in “Suites by David Beckham”. The Parisian of course includes a 525-foot replica of the Eiffel Tower and a ‘Parisian style’ fountain.

All old maps are redundant, reduced to antique curiosities. Substantial landfill created Cotai, the strip that now links the once distinct Coloane and Taipa into one island, and the 34-mile-long Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macau Bridge (HZMB). To traverse the HZMB at night, atop a double-decker bus, is to leave Macao and plunge into near-total darkness for 45 minutes with perhaps only the faint lights of a Kowloon- or Pearl River-bound cargo ship, only to then reappear into a brightly lit Hong Kong, and a very different historical trajectory.

Visiting Macao in the twenty-first century it is almost impossible to separate illusion and reality. The imaginative visitor to Macao's UNESCO World Heritage-listed official "historic centre" (*Centro Histórico de Macao*), with its remaining traditional shophouses, churches, art-deco, and *Português Suave* deco architecture, can sense a time past. Elsewhere are buildings inspired by the Bauhaus as well as Le Corbusier-influenced Brutalist architecture, and a few examples of the stripped-back and traditionalist architecture favoured during the authoritarian *Estado Novo* period (in opposition to "decadent modernism").²⁰ You can feel you might encounter Robert Mitchum in *Macao* (1952) disembarking on the Porto Exterior destined to intertwine his fate with Jane Russell, or perhaps Jennifer Jones and William Holden strolling along the Praia Grande (before it was hemmed in by land reclamation) hand-in-hand in *Love is a Many Splendored Thing* (1955).²¹ Or maybe join Erich von Stroheim in the French film *Macao, l'enfer du jeu* (1939) in a fan-tan house, or the adventuring journalist Aleko Lilius among the *cho* seagoing junks as he encounters (or imagines) Lai Choi San, the Pirate Queen of

20 There are any number of art-deco structures in Macao, both in the historic area and elsewhere, for instance in Coloane. Examples include the combined cinema-retail-residential development, Teatro Apollo, on Avenida de Almeida Ribeiro. *Português Suave* was a style advocated by the authoritarian Salazar *Estado Novo* regime. Originally termed *Estilo Português* (*Portuguese Style*) it became more commonly known as *Português Suave* after a popular cigarette brand. It incorporates elements of modernism with what some see as a provincial traditionalism. Le Corbusier's influence can be seen in the late 1950s Rainha D Leonor residential building (on Avenida do Infante Dom Henrique). The *Estado Novo* style was built principally in the 1940s and 1950s and can be found in several buildings including the Carmo Post Office in Taipa (1954).

21 The writer and former Hong Kong colonial district officer Austin Coates recalled, perhaps somewhat apocryphally, that 'you could picnic in the middle of the Avenida de Praia Grande without getting in the way of the traffic' in the 1950s. Ramon Rodamilans and Austin Coates, *Souvenirs and Letters*, (London: Athena Press, 2007), p.93

When I first visited Macao in the early 1990s it was most often talked about in terms of languor, ossification, a symbol for a sort of slow tropical decay. It was dismissed as frivolous when discussed alongside wealthy Hong Kong, the booming mega-cities of southern China, and the re-emergent Shanghai. It briefly perked up and attracted attention in 1999 – sensational triad street wars and machine gun battles faded into the handover and a sterner hand on the tiller. And then a 180-degree shift to vast casinos, money, glitz, and mainland gambling-driven tourism. The new Macao was born, but there were also continuities.

City of Indulgence

American author Sherwood King's bestselling novel *If I Die Before I Wake* (1938) formed the basis for the Orson Welles and Rita Hayworth film noir *The Lady from Shanghai* (1947). Welles had a major hand in the script as well as directing.²⁵ He moved the action from King's New York State's country estates and courtrooms onto a yacht to heighten the movie's claustrophobic tension. Quite where the "Shanghai" bit came in is unclear, though of course in 1947 the city's name was a byword for vice and corruption, appealing to Welles. In the film Hayworth explains the back story of her character (Elsa "Rosalie" Bannister, speaking in the third person):

'Her parents were Russian, White Russian. You never heard of the place where she comes from...'

Elsa comes from Chefoo in northern China's Shantung province. The Welles character (Michael O'Hara, a sailor-vagabond type) claims to know Chefoo:

'It's the second wickedest city in the world.'

'And the first?' Elsa asks,

'Macao. Wouldn't you say so?', answers Welles/O'Hara, to which Hayworth/Elsa replies:

'I would. I worked there...How do you rate Shanghai? I worked there too...You need more than luck in Shanghai.'

25 Sherwood King, *If I Die Before I Wake*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1938).

And finally, one of the potentially great accounts of Macao that we never got was that from WH Auden and Christopher Isherwood. The pair were commissioned in 1939 by the publishers Faber & Faber to highlight the war in China and research and write *Journey to a War*, which was published later that same year. They initially visited Hong Kong, which didn't impress them much. They then took the ferry to Macao. However, their experiences never made the book, except for Auden's sonnet where he dubs Macao, 'This city of indulgence...' The sonnet's opening lines in 1939 were:



WH Auden, 1939

A weed from Catholic Europe, it took root
 Between the yellow mountains and the sea,
 And bore these gay stone houses like a fruit,
 And grew on China imperceptibly.

But Auden later updated the sonnet, perhaps feeling he had been a little too flippant in believing that nothing serious could ever happen in Macao. The new opening lines read:

A weed from Catholic Europe, it took root
 Between some yellow mountains and a sea,
 Its gay stone houses an exotic fruit,
 A Portugal-cum-China oddity.²⁶

This volume – like the previous *Destination Shanghai* and *Destination Peking* – does not aim to tell those stories of Macao that have, in my

26 In *The Collected Shorter Poems* published in the 1960s, and *Auden's Collected Poems* published in the 1970s, the original opening lines were replaced by those, slightly amended, quoted here.

opinion, been told before in greater depth. It is by design some aspects of Macao's history and representation that have caught my attention and intrigued me enough to delve a little further. I should perhaps note that I am, like Auden, English, and so what jumps out to my non-Chinese, non-Macanese, non-Portuguese eye is, I think, sometimes different than what has often previously attracted Chinese and Portuguese writers on Macao. Though ultimately it is that *Portugal-cum-China oddity* that these contributions seek to tease out.

Paul French – December 2024