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THE INTELLECTUAL BACKGROUND OF THE POETRY
OF
W.H. AUDEN

Trevor Davison
Master of Letters thesis, 1974
University of Durham

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ABSTRACT

'Intellectual background' refers to the ideologies upon which Auden draws and the poetic theory arising from the interaction of these ideas and his practice.

The thesis is divided into four chapters, the first dealing with Auden's introduction to poetry in 1922 and his subsequent imitation of Hardy and Eliot. Eliot's theory of impersonality and the austerity of Saga literature produce a clinical effect in Poems 1928. The Norse mood dominates the charade Paid on Both Sides (1930) which uses material from the Mummer's play and contemporary German theatre. Poems 1930 utilises theories of Blake, Lawrence, Freud, Homer Lane and Groddeck to criticise the depressed social and spiritual state of England.

Chapter Two considers The Orators (1932) which demonstrates that oratory, including poetry, is a substitute for action. Didacticism of a new directness marks Auden's first play The Dance of Death (1933), its basis, returned to in On the Frontier (1938), being the Capitalist-Marxist dichotomy. The Dog beneath the Skin (1934) and The Ascent of F6 (1935), written with Isherwood, deal respectively with the necessity of choice and the will for psychic health.

Auden's technique becomes more lyrical in Look, Stranger! (1936) and Letters from Iceland (1937) which includes the 'Letter to Lord Byron'. Two works consider actual wars: Spain (1937) dramatises universal guilt and Journey to a War (1938) deals

lyrically with the hardships and anomalies of war. The occasional poem is introduced in Another Time (1940). In three long essays the relationship between Christianity, art and Communism is examined.

Chapter Three deals with the four long, Christian poems written in America. New Year Letter (1941) is his longest attempt at philosophising in verse. With copious appended Notes it draws on several theorists and theologians especially Kierkegaard. For the Time Being (1944) takes the form of an oratorio dramatising the mystery of the Incarnation in Kierkegaardian terms. The Sea and the Mirror (1944), a commentary on The Tempest, examines the dichotomy of man's nature and imagination, concluding that art is merely a surrogate of the 'real Word'. The Age of Anxiety (1947) adopts the alliterative style of Old English verse to chart the spiritual journey of four people in wartime.

Chapter Four, (1948-1969), examines Auden's collected criticism. The Enchafèd Flood (1950) is a collation of stock Romantic images while The Dyer's Hand (1962) comprises aphoristic reflections on art and life, and essays on Shakespeare, America, opera and Christianity, the latter two recurring in Secondary Worlds (1968).

The poetry of this period is exuberant, its five books

having distinguishable themes. Nones (1951) is concerned with the City and the need to civilise it; The Shield of Achilles (1955) looks to Rome and the Mediterranean; Homage to Clio (1960) meditates on History, Time and Nature; About the House (1966) illustrates the concept of a habitat and City without Walls (1969) includes the more personal self-analyses of the elderly poet.

Auden's extreme awareness of his poetic objectives is the main impression left by his writing.

INTRODUCTION

'Intellectual background' refers to the body of ideas which make up Auden's theories of poetry and life, either original or the result of influence by other writers and theorists. Auden's poetry and prose are examined chronologically, their theoretical content abstracted, its origins specified, its development traced and its relation to the poet's practice made clear. It has seemed desirable both to correlate intellectual exegesis and literary criticism and to make the examination as comprehensive as possible.

The problem of defining exactly what constitutes an 'idea' is facilitated by the extremely intellectual cast of Auden's imagination and expression, and by the large number of articles and essays he has written elaborating his views, especially about poetry. (Reference is made to several prose pieces which have received little critical attention before.) Necessarily, however, there is a tendency to assume that influences can be specified more precisely than is perhaps the case and that the poet was absolutely conscious of what he was writing. (It seems, though, that both assumptions may be more justifiable of Auden than of most poets.)

The thesis deals with Auden's writing from its inception in 1922 to the date of City without Walls, 1969. It is

divided into four chapters covering the years 1922-1932, 1932-1939, 1939-1948, 1948-1969 respectively. The work of each period seems to form a distinct unity though the poet's development is, of course, continuous.

CHAPTER ONE

(1922-1932)

This period includes Auden's introduction to writing poetry and his first three full-length works : Poems 1928 , Paid on Both Sides and Poems 1930 . The period is obviously important for the indication it gives of Auden's first approach to poetry and the rapidity of his subsequent development both of technique and of a point of view.

The poet has provided a comprehensive portrait of himself as a schoolboy:

The son of book-loving, Anglo-Catholic parents of the professional class, the youngest of three brothers, I was.....mentally precocious, physically backward, short-sighted, a rabbit at all games, very untidy and grubby, a nail-biter, a physical coward, dishonest, sentimental, with no community sense whatever, in fact a typical little highbrow and difficult child.(1)

Until the age of sixteen Auden's interests were mainly scientific. He was particularly interested in the machinery and techniques of lead mining and wanted to be a mining engineer. As a result his

(1) '"Honour": Gresham's School, Holt', The Old School, edit. Graham Greene, (London, 1934), p.9

reading had included such specialised works as Machinery for Metaliferous Mines and Lead and Zinc Ores of Northumberland and Alston Moor.⁽¹⁾ His father's profession as a doctor placed before him a library of medical books such as The Edinburgh School of Surgery and Dangers to Health (a Victorian treatise on plumbing), as well as works on human anatomy from which, according to Isherwood who attended St. Edmund's Preparatory School with him, he divulged "the first naughty stupendous breath-taking hints of sex."⁽²⁾ His Icelandic ancestry and High Church upbringing (his second name is taken from St. Wystan of Repton) meant that he grew up familiar both with the Icelandic sagas and legends, and with Anglican hymns and psalms. Clearly all these were latent influences on the emergent poet.

Having made the decision to write poetry "one afternoon in March at half-past three"⁽³⁾ in 1922, he turned for models from which to learn the rudiments of writing to the library

(1) The list of Auden's reading is condensed from several sources by M.K.Spears in his The Poetry of W.H.Auden: The Disenchanted Island, (New York, 1963), p. 61, note 2.

(This work is hereafter referred to by its author's name alone.)

(2) Christopher Isherwood, Lions and Shadows, (London, 1937), p. 182
(This work is hereafter referred to by its title alone.)

(3) 'Letter to Lord Byron', Letters from Iceland, (1937), p. 208

(All quotations from Auden's works in book form are from the first London editions unless otherwise stated.)

of Gresham's School, Holt, "taking up some poet for a few weeks then dropping him for another, de la Mare, W.H.Davies, and even A.E., without finding what I really wanted."⁽¹⁾ The discovery of Hardy in the summer of 1923 was crucial, (its effect being overwhelming enough to be described later using the psychological term 'transference'), and for more than a year afterwards he read no one else.⁽²⁾

Auden identified his own world with Hardy's and valued Hardy's "hawk's vision", his ability to adopt a perspective which showed "the individual life related not only to the local social life of its time, but to the whole of human history."⁽³⁾ Even more important, however, was the practical model Hardy presented to the young poet in the variety of his verse forms which "help the imitator to find out what he has to say"⁽⁴⁾ and in his emphasis on direct colloquial diction, especially useful because "his directness was in phrasing and syntax, not in imagery."⁽⁵⁾

(1) 'A Literary Transference', Purpose, XII, (1940), p.127

(2) Ibid., p.128

At about this time Auden was given de la Mare's anthology Come Hither! (1923) which, he later said, "more than any other book I have read before or since, taught me what poetry is" ; 'Jacob and the Angel', The New Republic , CI, 1308 (1939), p.292

(3) 'A Literary Transference', p.132

(4) Ibid., p.134

(5) Loc. cit.

Auden's first published work, 'Woods in Rain',⁽¹⁾ relies on the pathetic fallacy more than Hardy and gives the impression of being a rather self-conscious response to Nature, written in neat couplets:

Flowers open mouths as wide I say
As baby blackbirds do in May;
While trees shake hands as grave and slow
As two old men I used to know.

The six poems which Auden sent Isherwood just before Christmas 1925 are, as Isherwood says, interesting "chiefly because they most successfully resemble their originals",⁽²⁾ Hardy and Edward Thomas.

The two poems most reminiscent of Hardy are 'The Carter's Funeral' and 'Allendale'. The former, on a typical Hardy theme, death,

- (1) Public Schools Verse, 1923-4, edit. M.Gilkes, R.Hughes & P.H.B.Lyon, (London, 1924), p.72
Some idea of Auden's production while at Gresham's School is given by two lists of poems belonging to John Pudney and the Rev. A.S.T.Fisher, the former comprising 19 poems, 3 of which were published, the latter comprising 40 poems, 4 of which have been published. B.C.Bloomfield, in whose W.H.Auden: A Bibliography, (Charlottesville, Virginia, 1964), Appendix II, pp. 123-5 these lists appear, acknowledges that they "cannot pretend to be complete", (Ibid., p.123).
To judge by those poems which have been published, Auden's titles give little guide to the content of poems, so their generally Georgian, pastoral titles --- 'Now far from eastern wolds, the bay...', 'Christmas Eve', 'In a country churchyard' --- may not warrant the assumption that their treatment is similarly pastoral.
- (2) Lions and Shadows, p. 185 'The Traction Engine', 'The Engine House', 'Rain' and 'The Rookery' are reproduced in this book, pp. 186-8 ; 'The Carter's Funeral' and 'Allendale' appear in Isherwood's 'Some Notes on Auden's Early Poetry', New Verse , 26-7, (1937), pp.4-6

makes use of the short final line frequently used by him:

Sixty-odd years of poaching and drink
And rain-sodden waggons with scarcely a friend,
Chained to this life; rust fractures a link,
So the end.

Sexton at last has pressed down the loam,
He blows on his fingers and prays for the sun,
Parson unvests and turns to his home,
Duty done.

Little enough stays musing upon
The passing of one of the masters of things,
Only a bird looks peak-faced on,
Looks and sings.

The colloquial 'sixty-odd', the semi-coined 'unvests', the archaic 'loam', the sense of life's oppression expressed in the phrase 'chained to this life', the homely metaphor of death, 'rust fractures a link' and the final summing up of the carter as 'one of the masters of things', all suggest the influence of Hardy.

'Allendale' shows Auden imitating Hardy's long dactylic lines and his rhetorical questions usually posed through some natural object. The poem ends with Hardy-like stoicism, although the turning to dreams is, perhaps, more suggestive of de la Mare:

So under it, stand we, all swept by the rain and the wind there,
Muttering, 'What look you for, creatures that die in a
season?'
We care not, but turn to our dreams and the comfort we find
there,
Asking no reason.

Auden's interest in machinery is revealed in 'The Engine House'. It may owe something to Wilfred Gibson, a poet Auden admired, in such a poem as 'Power':⁽¹⁾

He paced the power-house platform, with his eyes
Upon the dials, and in his ears the roar
Of dynamos.

The same melodramatic sense of heroism is conveyed by the same rather stilted, literal inclusion of technicalities in 'The Engine House':

The quiet gave us room to talk:
"How many horse-power is the large turbine?"
"Seventy. The beck is dammed at Greenearth Fork:
Three hundred feet of head. The new pipe-line
Will give another hundred though, at least;
The mill wants power badly."

'The Rookery' is not dissimilar from 'Woods in Rain' in the sentimental attitude it adopts towards the departed rocks, concluding:

"The rooks have gone, have gone..." We said no word;
But in the silence each one's thought was heard.

This is obviously an attempt at the kind of pregnant understatement reminiscent of many Georgian writers. 'Rain' is the least imitative of the six poems and the only one Auden thought worthy of re-publication in Poems 1928⁽²⁾. It draws a daring

(1) The Golden Room, (London, 1928), p.46 John Pudney, Auden's contemporary at Gresham's School, mentions Gibson as one on whom Auden delivered "urgent monologues" ; see Home and Away, (London, 1960), p.45

(2) It is I(d).

comparison between the lull in a storm and the temporary abatement of sexual passion, so that the features of the former become suggestive symbols of the latter whilst still preserving their literal character:

...for this brief hour or so
I am content, unthinking and aglow,
Made one with horses and with workmen, all
Who seek for shelter by a dripping wall
Or labour in the fields with mist and cloud
And slant rain hiding them as in a shroud.

This evokes a strongly Lawrentian-Georgian feeling of pastoral potency, bringing out the ambivalence and height of passion, since, for the writer, walking in the rain is actually a relief from its heady insistence.

The discovery by Auden of the work of T.S.Eliot in 1926 had a radical effect on him; he later refers humorously to "the battle of Oxford"⁽¹⁾ when Eliot "spoke the still unspoken word"⁽²⁾ with the result that:

For gasworks and dried tubers I forsook
The clock at Grantchester, the English rook.⁽³⁾

The effect on his writing was immediate and cataclysmic, as Isherwood

(1) 'A Literary Transference', p. 129

(2) 'Letter to Lord Byron', Letters from Iceland, p. 209

(3) Loc. cit.

explains:

Auden developed a severe attack of allusions, jargonitis and private jokes.(1)

For Eliot's Dante-quotations and classical learning, he substituted oddments of scientific, medical and psychoanalytical jargon. His magpie brain was a hoard of curious and suggestive phrases from Jung, Rivers, Kretschmer and Freud. He peppered his work liberally with such terms as 'eutectic', 'sigmoid curve', 'Arch-Monad', 'ligature', 'gastropod'; seeking thereby to produce what he himself described as a clinical effect.(2)

The poem which best illustrates this process is perhaps 'Thomas Epilogises'.(3) Its epigraph is from Gertrude Stein and references are made to Rembrandt, Mozart, Handel, Ophelia, Ulysses and the sirens, Job, Nebuchadnezzar, the Apocalypse, Brobdingnag, and Grendel. Auden uses Greek and German words ('Weltschmerz' and 'Wanderlust', giving the 'u' in the latter an unneeded umlaut). The scenery glimpsed from a train window is made up of gasmeters, gallipygous, nymphs and pterodactyls. (One line, "Mutual love has reached its first eutectic" demonstrates the 'eutectic' mentioned by Isherwood.) The landscape of Eliot's 'Preludes' is suggested in "a sunk acreage of basement kitchens."

- (1) 'Some Notes on Auden's Early Poetry', New Verse, 26-7 (1937), p. 4
- (2) Lions and Shadows, p. 191
- (3) Oxford Poetry 1926, pp. 1-3

The phase of imitation seems to have been short, for, as Auden later said, Hardy's rhetoric was "more fertile and adaptable to different themes than any of Eliot's gas-works and rats' feet which one could steal but never make one's own."⁽¹⁾ Eliot's real influence was theoretical, particularly his theory of impersonality which Auden took to extremes, as Spender relates:

A poet was a kind of chemist who mixed his poems out of words, whilst remaining detached from his own feelings. Feelings and emotional experiences were only the occasion which precipitated into his mind the idea of a poem. When this had been suggested he arranged words into patterns with a mind whose aim was not to express a feeling, but to concentrate on the best arrangement that could be derived ~~for~~ the occasion.⁽²⁾

The practical manifestations of this principle of impersonality, as Auden interpreted it, are also listed by Spender:

A poet must have no opinions, no decided views which he seeks to put across in his poetry.

Above all, poetry must in no way be concerned with politics.

Politicians are just lackeys and public servants whom we should ignore.

The subject of a poem is only a peg on which to hang the poetry.

A poet must be clinical, dispassionate about life. The poet feels much less strongly about things than do other people.

Poems should not have titles.

Never use exclamation marks, and avoid abstractions.

At this time Auden was convinced that modern poetry should not be written in conventional verse patterns.⁽³⁾

(1) 'A Literary Transference', p.134

(2) Stephen Spender, World within World , (London, 1951), p.56

(3) Ibid., p.434

These criteria clearly derive from Eliot's theory that "poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality."⁽¹⁾ More specifically, Eliot holds that 'emotion recollected in tranquillity' is an inexact formula for poetry:

For it is neither emotion, nor recollection, nor, without distortion of meaning, tranquillity. It is a concentration, and a new thing resulting from the concentration, of a very great number of experiences and it is a concentration which does not happen consciously or of deliberation.⁽²⁾

Two statements of Auden's invite comparison with this. The first uses virtually the same terms as Eliot but shows, perhaps, less willingness to relinquish the poet's sense of intellectual control over his material:

Emotion is no longer necessarily to be analysed by 'recollection in tranquillity' : it is to be prehended emotionally and intellectually at once.⁽³⁾

In explaining to his tutor at Oxford, Nevill Coghill, how a poem should be understood, Auden described a process more fully symbolist than Eliot's example would seem to warrant:

(1) 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', The Sacred Wood, (London, 1920), p. 52

(2) Loc. cit.

(3) W.H. Auden and C. Day-Lewis, 'Preface' to Oxford Poetry 1927, p. vi

Auden explained with clarity and pity that to 'understand' a poem is not a logical process, but receiving as a unity, a pattern of co-ordinated images that had sprung from a free association of sub-conscious ideas, private to himself.(1)

T.E.Hulme defined the Imagist ideal of poetry as a "visual concrete" language, "a compromise for a language of intuition which would hand over sensations bodily" and prevent the reader from "gliding through an abstract process." (2) (He also [actually] stated that "subject doesn't matter" (3) and refrained from giving his own poems titles.) It was not so much Hulme's explanation of the psychology of symbolism that apparently impressed Auden but the sense of mathematical precision he envisaged for art. Isherwood records a homily Auden delivered on art:

Of course, intellect's the only thing that matters at all.....Apart from Nature, geometry's all there is.....Geometry belongs to man. Man's got to assert himself against Nature, all the time.....Of course, I've absolutely no use for colour. Only form. The only really exciting things are volumes and shapes... Poetry's got to be made up of images of form. I hate sunsets and flowers. And I loathe the sea. The sea is formless.(4)

This is comparable with Hulme's observation of a new desire in art for "austerity and bareness, a striving towards structure and

- (1) Nevill Coghill, 'Sweeney Agonistes', T.S.Eliot: A Symposium compiled by R.Marsh and Tambimuttu, (London, 1948), p. 82
- (2) Speculations, (London, 1924), p. 134
- (3) Ibid., p. 137
- (4) Lions and Shadows, p. 189

away from the messiness and confusion of nature and natural things."⁽¹⁾ (A poem Auden wrote at Oxford is entitled 'Cinders', the title Hulme gave to his notes, 'A New Weltanschauung',⁽²⁾ exemplifying the idea that "the cosmos is only organised in parts; the rest is cinders.")⁽³⁾

The only published expression of these views by Auden himself is the two prefaces to Oxford Poetry for 1926 and 1927 which he co-wrote with Charles Plumb and Cecil Day-Lewis respectively. The former attests the extent of Eliot's influence in its scathing allusion to the public's preference for art based on Keatsian fantasy rather than contemporary realism, a bias it implicitly assumes itself to be correcting:

If it is a natural preference to inhabit a room with casements opening upon Fairyland, one at least of them should open upon the Waste Land.⁽⁴⁾

The preface of 1927 is less rhetorical and more analytical, though the very stringency of its dichotomies suggests an underlying adolescent fierceness indicative of rather self-conscious pioneering. It considers poetry as the outcome of three conflicts, the most elementary being "the formation

(1) Speculations, p. 96

(2) Ibid., pp. 217- 245

(3) Ibid., p. 220

(4) Oxford Poetry 1926, p. i

of private spheres out of public chaos."⁽¹⁾ Assuming that "on the whole it is environment which conditions values, not values which form environment"⁽²⁾, the 'Preface' seems to regard it as a logical inference that the poetry so written will lack homogeneity. Its second and vituperative assertion that "we must hold partly responsible for our mental 'sauve-qui-peut', that acedia and unabashed glorification of the subjective so prominent in the world since the Reformation"⁽³⁾ seems to imply the opposite, that the Oxford poets are the victims of a tradition of egocentricity and can hardly be expected to respond to the world. If these points do not actually contradict each other, they do fail to differentiate between the necessary subjectivity of any personal response to experience and a deliberate cultivation of idiosyncratic perception and expression, a distinction which the following examination of the psychological, ethical and logical implications of communication through writing presupposes and explains.⁽⁴⁾

The psychological problem is clearly if tautologically stated

(1) 'Preface' to Oxford Poetry 1927, p. v

(2) Loc. cit.

(3) Loc. cit.

(4) C. Day-Lewis's claim that this section "was written by myself and embodies an idea I had thought up all by myself" (The Buried Day, (London, 1960), p. 179) does not alter the fact that Auden put his signature to it and presumably agreed with it fully. There is, of course, an inescapable irony in the fact that this most schematic exercise in analysis should not be attributable to the writer with whom such theorising will soon become immediately associated.

as the "conflict between self as subject and self as object"⁽¹⁾. The origin of this conflict is the attempt "to synchronise within the individual mind the synthesis and the analysis of experience"⁽²⁾: this seems to be "the prime development of this century". Since simultaneous synthesis and analysis are necessary functions of the mind, functions which the mind itself does not treat as separate and antithetical, this 'conflict' appears strangely hypothetical.

The ethical necessity involves striking a balance between "an art completely isolated from everything but its own laws of operation and the object to be created as such"⁽³⁾ and "those exigencies which its conditions of existence as a product of a human mind and culture must involves."⁽⁴⁾ The writers' bias towards autonomous, formal art seems to betray itself in the somewhat grudging concession that the poem must be allowed to reflect a minimal degree of human relevance, contained in this second statement. The main objection to this dichotomy, however, must surely be its uselessness: obviously art is a compromise between mimesis and poesis. Yet the significance of the whole preface must take into account the revolutionary appearance of statements like these in such technical language to an audience in 1927.

Finally, the logical, linguistic conflict is between the denotatory

(1) 'Preface', p.vi

(2) Loc. cit.

(3) Loc. cit.

(4) Loc. cit.

and the connotatory sense of words which is identified as "the root divergence of classic and romantic"⁽¹⁾ with an implicit bias against the "hedonism tending to kill language by dissipating (the sense of words) under a multiplicity of associations."⁽²⁾

While Eliot's is the prevalent influence on Auden's theory, his actual writing is dominated not by the concept of impersonality but by austerity, the latter including a degree of heroic self-identification inadmissible by Eliot's standard. According to Isherwood, Auden's idea of austerity was linked to his attitude to "the heroic Norse literature --- his own personal variety of 'War'-fixation."⁽³⁾ To Isherwood and others of his generation the first World War, for which they had been too young, had come to represent the test "of your courage, of your maturity, of your sexual prowess."⁽⁴⁾ The main literary exponent of austerity was E.A. Robinson: "Robinson, it appeared, was very austere indeed."⁽⁵⁾ His influence was first noticeable in "about half-a-dozen lines (all scrapped) and notably in some lines about 'a Shape' in an Irish mackintosh."⁽⁶⁾ 'Portrait',⁽⁷⁾ which includes the mackintosh reference, may be said to demonstrate little more than Robinson's influence:

(1) 'Preface', p.vi

(2) Ibid., pp.vi-vii

(3) Lions and Shadows, p.192

(4) Ibid., p.76

(5) Ibid., p.192

(6) Loc. cit.

(7) The Cherwell , XVII, n.s.4 (1926), p. 130

The lips so apt for deeds of passion
The hair to stifle a man's breath
The symmetry of form beneath
An Irish mackintosh, the wild
Defiant pupils of a child.

'Deeds of passion' sets the tone as heroic, prevented from becoming portentous by the virtual ambiguity of 'apt', ('likely to indulge in' as well as 'well suited to'), which the claustrophobic image of the second line transmutes to the erotic. The word 'symmetry', strikingly abstract in this context, is balanced by the surprisingly specific reference to the mackintosh. The assonance of the last line increases its romantic aura, though 'pupils' retains for the phrase a certain clinical harshness. Repetition of the definite article is especially characteristic of Robinson as is the introduction of 'the gods', nebulous but potent beings, with whom Auden concludes his stanza:

The gods responsible for these
Whatever else to blame one sees
Were artists in their fashion.

The poet is implicitly adopting a position as elevated as the gods he has just invoked.

The second stanza devolves into verbal and metrical awkwardness as it considers the gods' lack of persistence in finishing their work:

But left the signature unwritten
Too early tired; 'twas strange to botch
A masterpiece,....

From this embodiment of imperfection the poem soars to new heights of drama and stoic heroism shared by the inclusive 'we' (another habit adopted from Robinson):

but we who watch
Horizons to redress the wrong
See only Götterdämmerung.

The poem concludes with an extended, stoic lament at man's impotence to change this situation. This section of the poem is necessarily somewhat vague since, it must now occur to the reader, the situation itself is a vague one. In what sense has the masterpiece of man (or woman) been left unfinished? In what sense could 'horizons' redress this 'wrong'? The fact that this situation is referred to as a story which "has no happy marriage-ending" because "neither friendliness nor tears/ Have hands to push away the years" may suggest either that lament is merely an exaggerated appeal for eternal youth, that the process of ageing is what the gods failed to take account of, or that this is a love poem, making use of the traditional conceit that love dies in time. The former would perhaps justify the intensity and rhetoric of the poem but must, in itself, seem to be a theme whose futility is matched only by its arrogance. If a love poem,

the second two stanzas and especially the conclusion itself, effectively disguise any personal feeling it may contain:

We can but turn our eyes away
Before the last act of the play
And its unlovely ending.

The potent, sinister ending, often in the last line itself, is a prominent feature of Robinson's style and one which will become equally conspicuous in Auden's work. Here the word 'unlovely', an awkward, literal negative, conveys exactly that sense of unfortunate, almost unaesthetic disaster which appears to be the real subject of the poem.

Auden's other works at Oxford leave a comparable impression of excited but unassimilated influence. MacNeice, writing apparently with reference to Poems 1930, says that Auden was then "fascinated by the subtleties of Graves, Laura Riding and Emily Dickinson"⁽¹⁾, but, in fact, he seems to have absorbed Emily Dickinson's influence, at least, considerably earlier.

'At Parting'⁽²⁾ is on the typical Dickinson theme of the stoic acceptance of separation by the lovers, but this is incidental by

(1) Louis MacNeice, Modern Poetry: A Personal Essay, (London, 1938), p. 171

(2) The Cherwell, XVII, n.s.4 (1926), p. 130

comparison with the overwhelming debts to her characteristic style. The stanzaic pattern is one frequently used by Emily Dickinson, employing iambic trimetre in stanzas of four lines that rhyme in couplets. The first stanza presents Time's severing in the metaphysical conceit of screwing together the fractured heart:

Though Time now tears apart
A universe, each heart,
By long-accustomed use
Will tighten up the screws.

The image itself is comparable with that in Emily Dickinson's poem LXV:⁽¹⁾

Essential oils are wrung
The attar from the rose
Is not expressed by suns alone:
It is the gift of screws.

'At Parting' concludes by inverting the contrast already established between the lovers and time:

East finds it hard to tell
The sun to bid farewell
But even lover's eyes
Acknowledge boundaries.

The combined personification and abstraction in the first two lines emphasises the intensity of a love by comparison with which the East's reluctance to part with the sun seems unreasonably possessive.

(1) The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson, edit. M. Dickinson Bianchi & A.L. Hampson, (London, 1933), p. 187

'Portrait' and 'At Parting' gain their effect from the tension they create between expressions of basically sexual feeling and the form imposed on them by art and the mind. The result is an 'image of form' , at once sensuous and disciplined. At its most literal and explicit this appears as a simple statement--- "The symmetry of form beneath/ An Irish mackintosh." Personification is an obvious amenity though one that carries a strong charge of sentimentality (the gods of 'Portrait' left "the signature unwritten" on their prototype, man) unless offset by a harshly odd context of the kind explored by Emily Dickinson.

The main sense of form in these poems probably appears to come, in fact, from the ambiguous effect of phrases and lines which seem to possess such a degree of autonomy that they abnegate their context altogether (an impression obviously facilitated by the prominence and frequency with which the definite article recurs) : "the lips so apt for deeds of passion", "the hair to stifle a man's breath." The poems are lacking, that is, in the essential complement of geometrically formal imagery, namely symbolism. Symbolism supplies the numinous content to balance the structuring effect of the image itself and without it the image will fail to assert itself especially when it is surrounded by a diction as 'strict' as Auden's.

'In Due Season',⁽¹⁾ seems to supply this symbolic 'content', its theme being (like that of 'Rain',⁽²⁾) the awakening and growth of sexual desire presented in a context (infinitely) more suggestive than 'Rain's' simple pastoralism. It begins with the blunt statement: "In Spring we waited." That this peregrination is actually a state of sexual suspense and anticipation only becomes clear from the development of the stanza with its incongruous alliance of images: princes reach for their sleeping queens, the solitary lover sublimates the crude itch of love by weighing himself on an old-fashioned railway station machine, and Jacob tussles with an angel who first pursues him, monster-like "down passages."

"The Summer hid the grass" is classically suggestive, inviting a perfectly innocent, literal appraisal but permitting a fully sexual one: grass may be a symbol of the pubic hair which both conceals and emphasises the genitals. The sexual reading is obviously commensurate with the highly evocative, almost traditional portrait of sexual knowledge acquired in the context of religious feeling and, probably literally, among fellow choirboys. The singer is aware of puberty both in the change of voice and the onset of a kind of erotic aestheticism:

That pedal-entry in the fugue
Roared in, swept soul and knees away.

(1) Oxford Outlook, VIII, 41 (1926), p. 298

(2) See above, pp. 6-7

The autumn of the affair brings its 'casuistry', division of loyalties and quarrels, since love is made subject to "the nice distinctions lust had made", its perspective being suitably earthy:

The robin on the fallen spade
Saw eyelashes upon close flesh.

The school atmosphere of the whole poem is specified now in terms, apparently, of the lovers' habit of 'glueing' their hands in each other's pockets. This cryptic and unsavoury detail is followed by the extremely lyrical picture of the anticipated touch of the loved one alone in the wood, heralded by "the rusting chains of creaking gates."

Finally, the conflict seems to be between the idealised natural beauty and lovers in literature, and the reality of present love which partakes of and yet discredits both:

The sunset pours contempt upon
The choking sticks. Was Cressid fair?
Shall pages lose their meaning now
For steps approaching on the stair?

In the summer of 1928 Stephen Spender printed an edition of 27 poems⁽¹⁾ (if the 8 parts of the first poem are taken separately) only one of which, I(f), had appeared previously.⁽²⁾

- (1) Spears (p. 19) says that about 45 copies were produced; Spender himself refers to an edition of 30 copies, (World within World, p. 116)
Quotation is from the MS. of Durham University Library, number 24 of the edition.
- (2) As 'Extract', Oxford Poetry 1927, p. 1

The order of composition of these poems is not known but some seem more imitative than others and are, presumably, the earlier works chronologically.

Poems 1928 has no dominant theme or style; indeed the main impression it leaves is of stylistic intensity vying with thematic coherence for the reader's attention. In Greenberg's words:

A surface of laconic statement, produced by ellipsis and an irregular syntax, operates to obscure the literal sense of things, intensifying the problem of establishing the precise context of reference within which circumstances occur or the background of assumption against which they have meaning.(1)

Isherwood's explanation that Auden used to salvage those lines from his poems that he, Isherwood, liked, and 'assemble' from them a new, composite work⁽²⁾ is just credible of a poem like I(h) or, perhaps, VII, but is obviously untrue of the majority.

The real reason for the obscurity of Poems 1928 seems to be that in it Auden's temperamental and acquired poetic tastes are at odds, that is, his original and sentimental attachment to the traditional subjects and styles of poetry clash with what Eliot had shown poetry's potential and obligation to be. The conflict is

- (1) Quest for the Necessary: W.H.Auden and the Dilemma of Divided Consciousness, (Cambridge, Mass., 1968), p. 16
(This work is hereafter referred to by its author's name only.)
(2) 'Some Notes on Auden's Early Poetry', New Verse, 26-7 (1937), p. 5

a subtle and well disguised one: where the traditionalism is of subject-matter, the technique is strikingly 'modern' and vice versa. It is important to appreciate that content and technique are to this extent distinct in Auden's mind. John Bayley, for example, criticises the early work for its failure to achieve the synthesis accomplished in later work of "the rational structure of wit poetry"⁽¹⁾ and the suggestiveness of Symbolism. Apart from disregarding the stylistically fascinating question that these early poems are created from a poetic intelligence which sees no dichotomy between the two methods, Bayley takes no account of the fundamental characteristic of Auden's writing, his attitude to language.

This attitude is tellingly revealed in Auden's memory of being shocked as a boy to hear an aunt mispronounce the geological name 'pyrites'. Upon this basis the adult poet founds, amongst others, his theory that "philology, the study of language in abstraction from its uses, so that the words become, as it were, little lyrics about themselves...[is] the most poetical

(1) The Romantic Survival, (London, 1957), p. 166
(This work is hereafter referred to by its title alone.)

of all scholastic disciplines."⁽¹⁾ The fundamental novelty of Poems 1928 is linguistic. There is a predominance of startling, awkward combinations of noun and adjective: "snoring midges", "shouting air", "a curlew's creaking call", "the jabber of the blood", "your alone success." Noticeable too is the use of two adjectives which, as it were, modify each other, a device which will become a virtual trademark of Auden's poetry: "Spring's green preliminary shiver", "close ungenerous intimacy", "insolent new spring."

Equally prominent are phrases and images based on technical, medical and mechanical things: "life stripped to girders, monochrome", "the funnel of a dream", "the suction of goodbye", "love's worn circuit", "such lethal factors". Above all, phrases of appalling awkwardness recur as if they were favourite encapsulations of the poet: "'I want' voiced treble", "crack at East", "forgot old whiffs", "the jawbone juts from the ice", "a greater but not fortunate in all", "an image pause", "the snowstorm on the marsh", "lightning loosed the frantic skull", "idols nodded", "but these are still to tempt", "the bulb pillow/ Raising the skull,/ Thrusting

(1) Auden's inaugural lecture as Oxford Professor of Poetry, delivered on 11th June, 1956; reprinted in The Dyer's Hand, (1963), p. 35

(This work is referred to by title alone in this and the two succeeding chapters; for its designation in Chapter Four, see p. 356)

a crocus through clenched teeth." Poems often end with a rhetorical flourish: "Too just for weeping argument"; "Like Solomon and Sheba, wrong for years"; "And that which we create/ We also may destroy"; "Touching, decline to hear/ Sounds of conclusive war"; "The tongue ashamed, deceived by a shake of the hand." (The predominance of definite articles here is also conspicuous.)

The antagonism of Georgian to 'Eliotic' diction⁽¹⁾ is shown more fully by examining a single poem in which the two exist side by side. XIII describes the deaths of friends:

The too~~o~~loved clays, born over by diverse drifts,
Fallen upon the far side of all enjoyment,
Unable to move closer, shall not speak
Out of that grave, stern on no capital fault.
-Enough to have lightly touched the unworthy thing.

The word 'clay' meaning 'person' is a common Georgian usage and the abridged, composite adjective, 'too~~o~~loved' is also a Georgian characteristic. By contrast, the phrases 'born over by diverse drifts' ('born' seems meant to be 'borne') and 'fallen upon the far side of all enjoyment' present strange, awkwardly combined physical and abstract pictures. The literalness of 'unable to move closer' seems, inadvertently, to mirror the naivety of expecting movement or intimacy of the dead, especially dead relatives or comrades. The phrase 'shall not speak' gains

(1) One indication of this 'duality' is the presence or absence of traditional metrical forms. Of the 27 poems, 9 are rhymed, 10 unrhymed and 8 half-rhymed.

additional imperative emphasis by being thus detached from its subject, 'the too~~lo~~ved clays', but 'stern on no capital fault' is obscure. Were there a comma after 'on' it would be possible to read 'stern on' as the nautical phrase meaning 'back-facing'. That this posture constitutes 'no capital fault' might then be taken to mean that facing away from life is not a cardinal error, though such an interpretation could only be tentative. The poem's conclusion gains from the dash which precedes it a dramatic decisiveness which is echoed in the adverbs 'lightly' and 'unworthy' suggesting the peculiar finess required in dealing with death.

The styles of Poems 1928 may be said to range from the more to the less linguistically dense. Most 'compact' of all is the writing produced by omitting less important words such as articles, conjunctions and some demonstrative and relative pronouns. MacNeice christened it 'telegraphese' on the assumption that its aim was "an economy difficult to attain in English, which is an uninflected language."⁽¹⁾ The best example of this kind of

(1) Modern Poetry, p.171

economic, terse writing occurs, perhaps, in XI:

Your letter comes, speaking as you
Speaking of much but not to come.
Nor speech is close, nor fingers numb
If love not seldom has received
An unjust answer, was deceived;

The degree of economy here, especially in the first two lines, is best revealed by a comparison with prose paraphrase which might run as follows:

Your letter comes, the writing echoing your
characteristic tone, referring to many things
but omitting any mention of the future.

'Telegraphese' is not merely a kind of shorthand, however. Its terseness bears a clear resemblance to a literal translation of Old English poetry or the Sagas; indeed some lines are actual translations. John Fuller identifies the conclusion of XV — "They would shoot of course,/Parting easily who were never joined" — as coming from the Old English poem 'Wulf and Eadwacer' which he renders as: "They can easily part that which was never joined together."⁽¹⁾ Similarly, a correspondence seems to exist between two lines of VII:

'Approaching, utterly generous, came one,
For years expected, born only for me.'

(1) A Reader's Guide to W.H.Auden, (London, 1970), p.34
(This work is hereafter referred to by its author's name alone.)

and line 33 of 'The Vision of the Cross',⁽¹⁾ which may be translated:

Then I saw Christ of Mankind hastening forward
with all his might.

The likelihood of borrowing is strengthened by the exact translation of line 13 of that poem as the first line of the second stanza of VII:

Syllic waes se sigebeam, and ic synnum fah.

The connotation of Old English poetry is significant only in so far as it evinces Auden's knowledge and appreciation of such poetry and, more especially, as a mark of his ingenuity in exploiting the laconic potential of the style in a modern context.

A similar 'dualism' exists in Auden's use of the Sagas, further intensified by his apparently ambivalent personal attitude towards them. In spite of his acquaintance with the Sagas as part of his childhood reading Auden is dispassionate about the world they portray, " a rotten society... a society with only the gangster virtues."⁽²⁾

The main effect of the Sagas in Poems 1928 is to augment the sense of fate as inexorable and harsh. Her role is similar to that

(1) See Sweet's Anglo-Saxon Reader, (14th edition, Oxford, 1959), p. 143

(2) 'W.H.A to E.M.A.' No.1 , Letters from Iceland, p.119

Auden ascribes to Nature in Robert Frost's poetry:

She is....the Dura Virum Nutrix who, by her
apparent indifference and hostility, even, calls
forth all man's powers and courage and makes a
real man of him.(1)

Auden's Fate is, however, a good deal more dramatic and the
human reactions to it more intense than in Frost's poetry. At
one extreme the saga tone can be used to convey a sadistic
satisfaction at the downfall of presumptuous individuals; in
IV it happens to the lovers who had at first defied conventional
morality but eventually succumbed to its pressure:

Down they fell. Sorrow had they after that.

Poems XVIII and XIV both present versions of doom.(2) The
former(3) starts from the pleasure and expectation aroused by
summer but passes to the anticipation of holocaustic destruction
which it is impossible to avert:

(1) The Dyer's Hand, p. 348

(2) These two poems in addition to XIII, XVII, XIX and XX are
included in Paid on Both Sides which presents the
archetypal saga situation; see below, pp. 67-82

(3) Spears would call this a 'Clipped Lyric', the style involving
short lines set against each other to suggest the terse
statements of argument, and probably derived from a reading
of Laura Riding, Robert Graves and John Skelton. The manner
only really asserts itself in Poems (1930).

But loving now, let none
Think of divided days
When we shall choose from ways,
All of them evil, one.

Look on with stricter brows
The sacked and burning town,
The ice-sheet moving down,
The fall of an old house.

The latter, the poem which best captures the mood of the Sagas, begins with the juxtaposition of man's moral struggle and the contest of night with the intractability of darkness:

Night strives with darkness, right with wrong.

The image is a deceptive one, tempting the reader to take 'night' as 'light' perhaps, for the straightforward meaning this would yield. The combatants also evoke the world of primitive myth in which darkness, the spirit of disorder, fights with its master, night. The image implies a state of human turmoil now made explicit:

Man thinks to be called the fortunate
To bring home a wife, to live long.

But he is defeated; let the son
Sell the farm lest the mountain fall:
His mother and her mother won.

The rudimentary yet comprehensive denomination 'the fortunate' both reflects and accentuates by contrast what actually happens.

Similarly, the imperative yet 'weak' clause "let the son/ Sell the farm" reacts with the apparent hyperbole of the alternative, the fall of the mountain, to increase the impression of contradiction. The summary of the resultant state of affairs as another victory for the mothers is, however, unequivocal.

The poem's conclusion is oddly optimistic, holding out the prospect of revival -- "Big fruit, eagles above the stream" -- which nonetheless seems devoid of human participation, as if nature will resume its cycle of procreation only when man has been eliminated.

The heroic is the dominant mood of Poems 1928, one to which the Saga style is most obviously suited. Heroism itself has various degrees. Less horrendous than annihilation is the situation of the stranger in VI, warned to leave the country he has scarcely entered:

Go home now, stranger, proud of your young stock
Stranger, turn back again, frustrate and vexed.
This land, cut off, will not communicate.

His dramatic anonymity itself reflects the unspeaking stoicism of the country's inhabitants, derived from long proximity to the land, which asserts itself in the mundane heroism of routine work:

Two there were
Cleaned out a damaged shaft by hand, clutching
The winch the gale would tear them from; one died
During a storm, the fells impassible.

a

The poem's conclusion unites the stranger's intrusive, life-enhancing presence with the mechanical and lyrical properties of the land:

Beams from your car may cross a bedroom wall,
They wake no sleeper.

(This ability to use machinery in a lyrical manner is a feature of Poems 1928 and is one of the most fruitful products of the conflict of traditional and modern.) Finally, even Nature itself is baffled by its own incomprehension:

...you may hear the wind
Arriving, driven from the ignorant sea
To hurt itself on pane.

The reader's need to visualise the poem's final situation is a crucial part of its ambiguity. The creature, a hare perhaps, in the grass nearby "scenting danger" symbolises the precariousness of life, its vitality dependent on the warnings received from the antennae of the senses.

Heroism begins to seem attractive when its subject is the romantic figure of the spy, though Auden's treatment of his one appearance in the volume is restrained.⁽¹⁾ Let down by his own side he nonetheless acknowledges that the real fault was

(1) XV

his own: -

He, the trained spy, had walked into the trap
For a bogus guide, seduced with the old tricks.

The pathos of his position is that the comforts of civilised life, so long denied him and including the companion "dreamed of already", may now be enjoyed but only under the shadow of impending and inevitable death:

They would shoot of course,
Parting easily who were never joined.

(The suggested derivation of this line from the monologue of a captive woman addressed to her lover, serves to confirm, if in a rather esoteric way, that it is love that is being sacrificed.)⁽¹⁾

The element of splendid defiance increases in inverse proportion, almost, to the lucidity of the writing and the coherence of its context. This is well shown in VIII where the protagonists, the "chosen in a cave", have:

Suffered the dizzy calm,
Waited the rising storm,
Prayed through the scorching season.

They now realise that their only alternatives are gestures of defiance, both futile, though the second passive option has a grand stoicism which the first lacks:

(1) See above, p. 28

To breast the final hill
Θαλασσο on the tongue,
Snap at the dragon's tail
To find the yelp its own;
Or sit, the doors being shut,
'Twixt coffee and the fruit,
Touching, decline to hear
Sounds of conclusive war.

The element of romantic male solidarity which clearly underlines the heroic spirit, reaches a unique climax in II. The protagonist, apparently Auden himself to judge by the references to Christopher and Margaret⁽¹⁾, descends to a buried engine room where he:⁽²⁾

→ Talked feverishly to one
Who puckered mouth and brow
In ecstasy of pain
Professional listener
I know I know, I know
And reached his hand for mine.

Its emotional openness and naivety of expression gives this episode great, if inadvertent, power.

By contrast, the effectiveness of XII comes from its very calculation, the setting borrowed from Hardy⁽³⁾ but given an impersonality so deliberate as to make Hardy's characteristic

(1) See below, p. 37

(2) It is clearly possible to see Auden's interest in machines as itself a kind of male power-worship.

(3) Cf. 'The Announcement' or 'Under High-Stoy Hill'.

pessimism seem a romantic indulgence. Auden's four speakers are identified by number only, the room in which they meet is bare and the fire unlighted. The first speaker recalls parting from his loved one in a railway waiting-room, a reminiscence which prompts his colleagues:

Said Two, and Three, — 'All kinds of love
Are obsolete or extremely rare.'

'Yesterday', Four said, 'falling on me
Through the glass pavement overhead
The shadow of returning girls
Proclaimed an insolent new Spring.'

If the first comment is that of statisticians, Four's story seems to be typical of an artist (or a basement dweller!). A glass pavement is uncannily precarious, revealing yet incongruous — a characteristic artistic perspective. That he sees only a shadow implies that the glass fails to make his vision 'transparent' but, as it were, 'frames' it at an erotic distance. The effect is not dissimilar from the use of glass to suggest the ambiguous alternatives of reflection, refraction or plain transparency in the visual metaphor for human imagination found in surrealist art.

The poem's summing up further 'polarises' the participants

first by assuring the reader that they are 'distinguished' and then by denominating love as 'the enemy'.⁽¹⁾ The final image is a geographically incongruous combination, as exaggeratedly apocalyptic as what has preceded it:

Saw closing upon the bare room
The weight of a whole winter night,
Beyond the reef high-breaking surf.

Especially conducive to the aura of male solidarity and romance is the world of school and the use of private references. The latter is one of Auden's most notorious habits in his early poetry though its purpose has not always been understood. Poem II seems to be autobiographical, a fact which does not lessen the cryptic effect of its allusions to 'Margaret the brazen leech' and 'that severe Christopher'. It is not merely who these people are that interests the reader⁽²⁾ but how the qualities given them should be interpreted. (If 'brazen leech' means 'shameless parasite or extortionist' it is surprising that the poet is talking to her at all!)

The reference to Captain Ferguson⁽³⁾ in XVI lacks the context which would give it even the interest of obscurity, but the

(1) The same view of it is expressed, but with justification, in XIX; see below, pp. 58-9

(2) Spears identifies them, p. 68, note 41

(3) Fuller attempts identification, p. 263, chpt. 2, note 1

mention of Morgan and Cousin Dodds among those who have died stoically endows XIII with esoteric human interest especially as Cousin Dodds "passed out, asleep in her chair", a peaceful, homely end.

It is in relation to school, however, that the private references are most provocative. XVII includes this consciously cryptic 'ubi sunt' reflection:

For where are Basley who won the Ten,
Dickon so tarted by the house,
Thomas who kept a sparrow-hawk ?

'Winning the Ten' must be some form of competition either sporting or academic; 'tarted' connotes the vulgarising effects of adolescent admiration, while keeping a sparrow-hawk seems a properly eccentric hobby for a public schoolboy. (The 'curriculum vitae' of Michael Ransom in The Ascent of F6 shows how far this kind of esoterica can be taken.)⁽¹⁾

The privacy of IX is even more significant for the very reason that no names are mentioned; the poet merely records:

Falling in slush, shaking hands
With a snub-nosed winner.

The autobiographical context of this incident is supplied (from a source hardly available to the general reader) by a

(1) The Ascent of F6, pp. 49-50

'ungenerous'.

The same taut, suppressed camaraderie may be thought to underlie the eight parts of the first poem of the volume. Fuller, for example, regards the sequence as "a kind of farewell to the homoerotic romanticism of school."⁽¹⁾ Certainly, the first poem in the sequence is remarkable for its brevity, lucidity and suggestiveness:

The sprinkler on the lawn
Weaves a cool vertigo, and stumps are drawn;
The last boy vanishes,
A blazer half-on, through the rigid trees.

The setting is one of traditional peacefulness, the end of a school cricket match. The sprinkler's action is at once relaxingly patterned and repetitive, yet hypnotising, a combination reflected in the casual action of pulling on a blazer and the tension implied (perhaps with phallic suggestion) by the rigidity of the trees.

With the exception of I(h) whose extremely fragmentary arrangement, plethora of references (Solomon and Sheba, Eve, Don Quixote, Til Eulenspiegel and Gargantua are mentioned)

(1) 'Early Auden; An Allegory of Love', The Review, 11-12 (1964), p. 87

and obscenities, give it a truly adolescent air, no other poem of the group makes any reference to school.

Complementary to the effect of 'telegraphese' in sustaining the heroic theme in Poems 1928 is the presence of landscape. ^{via} Isherwood describes its nature and origin:

The scenery of Auden's early poetry is, almost invariably, mountainous. As a boy, he visited Westmorland, the Peak District of Derbyshire, and Wales. For urban scenery, he preferred the industrial Midlands; particularly in districts where an industry is decaying. His romantic travel-wish was always towards the North. He could never understand how anybody could long for the sun, the blue sky, the palm trees of the South. His favourite weather was autumnal; high wind and driving rain. He loved industrial ruins, a disused factory or an abandoned mill; a ruined abbey would leave him quite cold. He has always had a special feeling for caves and mines. (1)

Just as his preference for mines over cathedrals attests a greater interest in human beings in their working environment than in the aesthetic embodiment of metaphysical aspirations, so his pleasure in Nature's harsh aspects betokens not only a love of physical austerity but the implicit feeling that such climatic conditions have unconscious symbolic associations for the people who experience them. Thus, the different 'roles' Nature has in the poems of the

(1) 'Some Notes on Auden's Early Poetry', New Verse, 26-7 (1937), p. 4

volume may be said to be a reflection of these symbolic values.

Literally, landscape may be the proper location of the human activity which is the poem's subject; in this respect the Northern upland is appropriate to man's struggle with nature, best exemplified in VI where both man and machine have become intractable through long proximity to the land:

Two there were
Cleaned out a damaged shaft by hand, clutching
The winch the gale would tear them from; one died
During a storm, the fells impassible. a

The conclusion drawn for the benefit of the stranger summarises man's relation to his surroundings and by placing the onus of action upon the latter — "this land, cut off, will not communicate" — endows it with something of the heroism displayed by its occupants.

At one further remove, nature provides for the artist an image of formal discipline which was a desideratum of Hulme and the Imagists.⁽¹⁾ The poem to exhibit the most recognisable 'image of form' is, perhaps, II, whose 'lean country' was chosen by the poet:

For seven day content,
To satisfy the want ^h
Of eye and ear, to see
The slow fastidious line
That disciplines the fell.

(1) See above, p. 11

III perhaps dramatises Auden's dislike of the sea for its archetypal formlessness⁽¹⁾ and his conviction that art must impose its own form on experience. Hence the diver's "quiet break from the sea" is qualified by the observer's "deliberate" eye, illustrating the poem's conclusion with its ironic echo of Wordsworth:

.... that which we create
We also may destroy.

Finally, landscape becomes fully symbolic in one of two ways. Firstly, it supplies a correlative to the mood of whoever occupies it. In II, for example, the poet is uncertain in uncertain conditions:

Now in a brown study
At the water-logged quarry,
I think how everyman
Shall strain and be undone,
Sit, querelous and sallow
Under the abject willow,
Turning a stoic shoulder
On a Saint Martin's summer.

This virtually dramatises that parallelism which is the basis of symbolism.

The second type of symbolism is that in which individual natural or man-made features are endowed with special significance. Greenberg provides a concise summary of these features and their meaning:

(1) See above, p.11

Islands represent isolation and withdrawal because they are detached from the mainland; water conveys hope of vitality and rebirth, usually because regarded as a means of passage; mountains, because they challenge initiative and require the effort of climbing; indicate determined action or a choice in defiance of safety, and test allegiance and the ability to venture; while valleys represent the beckoning future when they are places to be settled.....or the entrapping past when they are sites that should properly be abandoned or resettled. (1)

This list represents the fully 'matured' mythology which only appears in Poems 1930 . Of the correspondences Greenberg suggests, only those connected with valleys, mountains and water seem to have gained their symbolic meaning in Poems 1928.

Apart from its overt use as a Freudian symbol in I(g), (2) the valley fulfills its function as the place of residence. In XI it is the destination of the exile, though his staying there is fortuitous:

From the very first coming down
Into a new valley with a frown
Because of the sun and a lost way
You certainly remain.

The association of valleys with confinement is established in VI where the dead man "in his wooden shape" goes to ground "in a final valley."

(1) Greenberg, pp.34-5

(2) See below, p.63

By contrast, the hill is not a habitable region at all but a point of crisis requiring nerve to cross. Thus in XV the spy realises that control of the passes is essential to the capture of a new district, and in XX the exile's success is marked by his "crossing the pass". The actual ascent of a hill represents either the recognition of the need to make a decision or the action begun to fulfil it. In II, for example, the poet's dilemma is resolved by such an ascent:

And, breaking from the copse,
I climb the hill, my corpse
Already wept, and pass
Alive into the house.

The same sense of conclusiveness may be implied in VIII where:

...mind
Sees faculty confined
To breast the final hill
'θαλαββα' on the tongue.

Whatever its exact significance in this context, any reference to the sea (especially in Greek) must include the literal sense in which the sea is an 'absolute' phenomenon, so that " 'θαλαββα' on the tongue" corresponds to the finality implied in climbing the hill.

Conversely, hesitancy or doubt appears as the inability to descend the hill having reached its summit. This is the situation

in X, where the mind harangues the body with their joint failures
for which it holds the body responsible:

Never to the Dark Tower we rode,
But, turning on the hill crest, heard,
Catching the breath for the applause,
A tolling disillusioned bell.

The hill's summit being a place of exposure, makes one vulnerable
to influence, in this case the 'applause' of social approval craved
by man the social animal.

Sometimes, however, a prominence facilitates analysis of
situations by providing a panoramic view. This is the case in VI
where a true perspective of industrial decay is gained from
"the crux left of the watershed". (The development of this feature
to the ridge viewpoint in the poems of the early 1930s is obvious.)

The healthiness of an upland environment composed of promontary
and valley, as opposed to the lowland plain, is confirmed by the
former's greater conduciveness to the passage of water. So, in
XIV the fact that "if there show / Passage for water he will miss
it" is not merely a sign of the protagonist's bad luck or
inattentiveness, but symbolises a more serious deficiency of
character.

The symbolic association of water and health obviously derives from the physical necessity of water for fertility and growth, and in Poems 1928 its symbolic meaning has the same generality as its literal one. In XX the exile's successful accomplishment of the difficult part of his journey is followed by an easy descent to the source of health, his self-awareness being properly limited to the physical realm:

Crossing the pass, descend the growing stream
Too tired to hear except the pulse's strum.

Water is connected with another traditional image of equilibrium, the orchard. Thus the lovers, having achieved a kind of peace, walk:

....in the windless orchard
Where the brook runs over the gravel, far from
the glacier.

(XVI)

One of the reasons for the spy's plight in XV is that owing to the inefficiency of his own side "the bridges were unbuilt and trouble coming." The ambiguity of his position is that he himself is partly responsible, having been "seduced by the old tricks", an ambiguity symbolised by his proximity, in the infertile region of the desert, to water, but his inability to actually reach it: he merely hears "water / Running away in

the dark."⁽¹⁾ By contrast, the desert represents all kinds of sterility which is 'open' to those in I(f) who reject a rigorous attitude to love.⁽²⁾

More provocatively symbolic is the episode in IX where the poet asks whether it is love who has been seen:

Riding away from the farm, the ill word said,
Fought at the frozen dam?

That the farm stands for a healthily natural environment and the frozen dam for the frigidity of man-made constructions seems intentional, especially in view of the connotations the farm acquires in Poems 1930.⁽³⁾

Fuller goes so far as to interpret the whole of XV in terms similar to this. The spy, he thinks, represents "the individual's emotional urge to make contact with another human being ('this new district')." ⁽⁴⁾ Thus the failure to extend the railway line and to build new bridges symbolises his failure to establish sexual contact with the loved one.

(1) The image is expanded in VII of Look, Stranger! :

They built by rivers and at night the water
Running past windows comforted their sorrow.

(2) See Auden's opposition of the sea and the desert in The Enchafed Flood, (1951), p. 278

(This work is referred to by title alone in this and the two succeeding chapters; for its designation in Chapter Four, see page 356)

(3) See below, p. 97 and p. 101

(4) Fuller, p. 34

Fuller's interpretation in fact shows up the tenuousness of the symbolism in the volume. These are symbols chiefly because they recur in poetry which is powerful but obscure. Above all the literal intensity of these landscape features is at least equal to any symbolic value attached to them.

If heroism may be said to represent the spiritual and poetic 'status quo' of Poems 1928, a state which Nature in its traditional guise tends to reinforce, the agency which will disturb all three conventions is love.

With the exception of slight, lyrical approaches such as I(e) (which depends, ingeniously, on the reader's visualising the lovers, presumably in an embrace, the one turning away to follow the flight of the buzzards, to the surprise of the other) or the entirely symbolic treatment of I(g)⁽¹⁾, all the poems connected with love⁽²⁾ reflect Auden's ambivalence towards it. The most revealing account of this attitude is given by Isherwood:

To be 'clinically minded' was, he said, the first duty of a poet. Love wasn't exciting or romantic or even disgusting; it was funny. The poet must handle it and similar themes with a wry, bitter smile and a pair of rubber surgical gloves.⁽³⁾

(1) See below, p. 63

(2) Only poems I(a), VI, XIII, XIV, and XVII fail to mention it.

(3) Lions and Shadows, p. 191

Auden's clinical attitude expresses itself in two kinds of poem: those which are personal in the basic sense of being written in the first person, and those (not necessarily different poems) which employ unusual or technical words and images. Of the former the outstanding examples are XI and XVI. XI seems to actually be the reply to a letter which breaks the news of the end of an affair. The recipient reacts unemotionally as if the loss were half-expected and in any case something endurable, even, in a sense, mundane:

Nor speech is close, nor fingers numb
If love not seldom has received
An unjust answer, was deceived.

The effectiveness of the work lies in this sort of acceptance whose reserved, understated quality authenticates the feeling itself. Barbara Hardy regards the style as seminal:

This minimal anecdote which suppresses almost everything but feeling, which has a reticence of concentrated passion, and which asserts the privacy of the relationship as an essential part of love for individuals and God, seems to me to be Auden's most original and characteristic achievement as a love poet.(1)

Whereas XI is a poem of separation, XVI involves a precarious union. The couple, taking an evening stroll, remember similar

(1) 'The Reticence of W.H.Auden', The Review, 11-12 (1964), p. 60

meetings when they were younger in the same idyllic, though
'northern' setting:

in the windless orchard
Where the brook runs over the gravel, far from
the glacier.

This lyrical mood is broken by the introduction of apparently Freudian symbolism. Freud holds that "flame is always a male genital, and the hearth its female counterpart."⁽¹⁾ Thus the couple's other meeting place, "the room with the sofa hiding the grate" may suggest some barrier (a sofa connotes middle-class comfort) to their sexual fulfilment.

The poem's theme, man's failure and loss through time, manifests itself in three ways. First, there is the totally cryptic allusion to Captain Ferguson of whom we hear our last, presumably because he has died. Second is the exemplification of failure in language of strangely diverse connotation:

It is seen how excellent hands have turned to commonness.
One, staring too long, went blind in a tower;
One sold all his manors to fight, broke through, and faltered.

The first line is strongly reminiscent of the Prayer Book, while the image of the second resembles poem IX of 'The Quest',

(1) 'Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis, I & II',
The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of
Sigmund Freud, edit. James Strachey, (London, 1955), vol. XV,
p. 162.
(This work is hereafter referred to as Freud.)

New Year Letter, 1941), which uses the tower as a symbol of the artist's isolation (presumably with Yeats in mind) leading eventually to the blindness of total self-absorption.⁽¹⁾ The final image reverts to stoicism, the irony being that failure so often comes when one is on the brink of success.

Psychology, morality and stoicism are brought together in the third stanza:

Nights come bringing the snow; and the dead howl
Under the headlands in their windy dwelling,
Because the Adversary put too easy questions
On lonely roads.

The Adversary seems to be Freud's Death-Wish.⁽²⁾ 'Adversary', however, has connotations of challenge and matched struggle, like the "supreme Antagonist" of XXIX, Poems 1930, who seems to be the Devil. This heroic character as an aspect of the Death-Wish is brought out by Lionel Trilling when he comments that even if the theory itself is rejected, we still "cannot miss its grandeur, its ultimate tragic courage in acquiescence to fate."⁽³⁾

The context is thus established for the elements of resignation and temporal insecurity inherent in the love affair to be exposed

(1) See below, p. 268

(2) See below, p. 101 and p. 132

(3) 'Freud and Literature', The Liberal Imagination, (London, 1951), p. 56

in the finale:

Noises at dawn will bring
Freedom to some, but not this peace
No bird can contradict, passing but is sufficient
now
For something fulfilled this hour, loved or endured.

Of Auden's overtly clinical approaches to love I(f) makes the most blatant use of medical terminology⁽¹⁾ to condemn the flabby, romantic attitude of 'others' who:

Less clinically-minded, will admire
An evening like a coloured photograph,
A music stultified across the water.

By contrast "we" have "ligatured the ends of a farewell", that is, tied them off securely. Even so, if:

Sporadic heartburn show in evidence
Of love uneconomically slain,
It is for the last time, the last look back,
The heel upon the finishing blade of grass,
To dazzling cities of the plain where lust
Threatened a sinister rod.

Ambiguity hinges here on the sense of 'for'. Read as 'wishing for', it implies that the psychosomatic consequences and frustration are simply the result of miscalculation in killing a love which insists on living. If, however, 'for' means 'due to', then what follows is the outcome of a sentimental gesture, "the last

(1) In the original version the lovers were straining to preserve the "glabrous suction of goodbye"; see Oxford Poetry (1927). Auden now omits "glabrous" presumably as being too grotesquely scientific.

look back."

Yet the second interpretation does not remove the reality of the heartburn (nor its obvious pun) or the sense in which love is beyond conscious control. This tacit admission that love cannot be conquered even by a clinical attitude, seems to underlie the poem's final picture of sentimentalism:

 we shall turn
To our study of stones, to split Eve's apple,
Absorbed, content if we can say 'because' :
Unanswerable like any other pedant,
Like Solomon and Sheba, wrong for years.

Sterile analysis, sublimating sexual desire, seems hard to dissociate from the clinical approach though it is avowedly antithetical to it. It is tempting, in fact, to regard this poem as evidence that Auden's clinicality is merely a pose, every bit as romantic as what it opposes.

The thesis on which this attitude is based is stated least ambiguously in IX. Having presented an authentically personal view of lost love, the poem asks:

Love, is this love, that notable forked-one,
Riding away from the farm, the ill word said,
Fought at the frozen dam? Who prophesied
Such lethal factors, understood
The indolent ulcer? Brought in now,
Love lies at surgical extremity;
Gauze pressed over the mouth, a breathed surrender.

Love's deceptiveness, transitoriness and ability to do permanent harm are well conveyed in the incredulous tone of these questions. (The reference to psychosomatic illness has an ambiguous effect, for its very novelty, both intrinsically and as something introduced into a poem, may detract from the effectiveness of the passage as a whole.) The final image is completely convincing; love itself has been in a disastrous accident, the accident of sentimentality, from which only surgery of a similarly drastic kind can restore it. The state of affairs is made explicit in Auden's review of Liddell-Hart's book on T.E.Lawrence in which Auden refers to the "Western-romantic conception of personal love" as a "neurotic symptom only inflaming our loneliness." He continues:

It is at least doubtful in our convalescence whether sexual relations can do anything but postpone our cure. It is quite possible that the way back to real intimacy is through a kind of asceticism.(1)

(As the allusions to psychosomatic illness must suggest, a feeling of guilt at the awareness of sexual feeling complements sentimentality as both cause and effect of the present attitude to love.)

I(b) presents, in a kind of dream sequence, the adolescent's frustration at the thwarting by moral convention of that urge which is seen to be a natural part of growth. His childhood burden of knowledge and a sense of visual confusion, hostility

(1) 'T.E.Lawrence', Then and Now: A Selection....1921-35, (London, 1935), p. 22

The affair is doomed by the perfectly logical, predictable course of conventional morality, represented with suitably resigned irony, in the image of a carefully produced graph:

Gught passes through points fair plotted, and you
conform.

The conflict between convention and impulse is intensified by the support the former gets from the Church. In IV the lovers whose union is an 'effective' one, (it is able to "filter off the day's detritus,/And breach in their continual history"), succumb to their patriarchal upbringing:

Yet, spite of their new heroism they feared
That doddering Jehovah whom they mocked;
Enough for him to show them to their rooms-

The poem most explicit of sexual revolution as it involves flouting religious and moral traditions is VII. Arising apparently from Auden's realisation of "the erotic implications of the Christian myth"⁽¹⁾, the poem seems to be about the sexual climax of adolescence which has a religious fervour. In particular it is the sense of uniqueness, the "delicious lie" which persuades the adolescent that, ruled only by his desires, he is all-powerful:

'Approaching, utterly generous, came one,
For years expected, born only for me.'

(1) Fuller uses the phrase without applying it to this poem specifically; 'Early Auden: an Allegory of Love', The Review, 11-12 (1964), p.87

The sexual climax seems to be being suggested in the line taken from 'The Vision of the Cross', a fact which obviously redoubles its sacrilegious import:⁽¹⁾

Wonderful was that cross and I full of sin.

The religious association is amplified in the last stanza:

....these bones shall live, while daffodil
And saxophone have something to recall
Of Adam's brow and of the wounded heel.

The provocative amalgam of Wordsworthian nature and modern jazz will remind us of our mortality and hence the vitality of life.

The most sophisticated way of treating this new love is to allegorise it. In XIX it appears both as saint and "that handsome raider still at large,/ A terror to the Marshes." The marshland inhabitants find him fearsome at first because they are sexual inhibited. The poet advises, however, that we must attend to such messengers and recognise their account of love in our midst, passing evangelically among us. The poem ends cryptically as love reveals itself, a revelation striking and potent enough to quell the frustrated adolescents, 'the angry sons' : seeing themselves through love's eyes obviously makes them aware of

(1) See above, p. 29

how far they have departed from its tenets.

It is clear that by the time of Poems 1928 psychology had become a major influence on Auden's view of personal relations. He seems first to have read Havelock Ellis while at Gresham's School,⁽¹⁾ but it was not until his year's stay in Berlin, commencing in the summer of 1928, that he began to absorb specific theories. He met John Layard, a follower of Homer Lane.⁽²⁾ Lane propagated an extreme form of psychosomatic theory⁽³⁾ which, according to Isherwood, Auden assimilated "with his customary zest and ease, adding to (it) a touch of extravagance which was peculiarly his own."⁽⁴⁾ Relatively little use is made of such theory in Poems 1928, however. It occurs twice only; in I(f) sporadic heartburn is the result of "love uneconomically slain" and in IX the "indolent ulcer" is produced by the same condition.⁽⁵⁾

(1) According to John Pudney, Home and Away, (London, 1960), p. 45

(2) See Spears, p. 62

(3) See below, pp. 126-9

(4) Lions and Shadows, p. 302

(5) The psychosomatic intention is confirmed by the form this episode takes when incorporated in the 'Argument' section of The Orators (1932), pp. 26-7:

Love, that notable forked one, riding away from the
farm, the ill wind said, fought at the frozen dam,
transforms itself to influenza and guilty rashes.

The influence the mind exerts over the body is dramatised in X. The mind expresses dissatisfaction with the body's lack of asceticism:

Often, equipped and early, you
Traced figures in the dust, eager
To start, but on the edge of snow
As often then refused me further.

In the penultimate stanza the mind is forced to admit that the body has supplied its own satisfactions:

Granted that in a garden once
And a wind blowing a voice,
Beyond the wall, unbroken, hid
The jabber of the blood, and bred
No fever.

The poem is best explained by Auden's later comment on the relation of the body and soul:

In the debate between the Body and Soul, if the former could present its own case objectively, it would always win. As it is, it can only protest the Soul's misstatement of its case by subjective acts of rebellion, coughs, belches, constipation, etc., which always put it in the wrong.(1)

The corollary of this would seem to be that the mind automatically denigrates the body's contribution, the extent to which it does so being a measure of its own frustration.

A more eccentric variety of the psychosomatic theory is that

(1) The Dyer's Hand, p. 100

propounded by Wilhelm Reich⁽¹⁾ to the effect that the face in particular reveals the spiritual battles going on behind it. Auden himself supplies the following diagnosis:

After thirty the face exposes bit by bit what
lies behind it, the flesh being, as it were,
a kind of negative and on that surface you see
the fears, disappointments, spiritual powers
coming out.⁽²⁾

It is perhaps in these terms that part of the fourth stanza of VIII may be explained:

.....eyes
Look in the glass, confess
The tightening of the mouth;
Know the receding face
A blemished psychogogue.

(Alternatively its meaning may be akin to the entirely untheoretical "stare, stare in the mirror" of 'As I walked out one evening'.)⁽³⁾

Equally dubious are Auden's possible debts to Freud. The Oedipus complex is strangely implied in XIV where the protagonist's

- (1) See Character Analysis, transl. by T.P.Wolfe, (2nd edition, New York, 1945)
This is one of the books in the bibliography appended to Auden's essay 'Psychology and Art Today', The Arts Today, edit. G.Grigson, (London, 1935), p.20
- (2) Howard Griffin, 'A dialogue with W.H.Auden', Partisan Review, XX,I (1953), p.77
- (3) New Statesman & Nation, XV, n.s. 360 (1938), pp.81-2

desire "to bring home a wife, to live long" is thwarted by matriarchal authority, the final result being:

His mother and her mother won.

Similarly, the angry sons of XIX whom love silences, have presumably arrived at that state because they are unable to establish satisfactory relationships.

More tenuous and more important in prefiguring Poems 1930 is the connotation to be attached to 'the Adversary' of XVI:

Nights come bringing the snow; and the dead howl
Under the headlands in their windy dwelling,
Because the Adversary put too easy questions
On lonely roads.

Fuller compares the figure with the "supreme Antagonist" of XXIX in Poems 1930 , commenting that "this oblique reference to the Devil implies a respectful reappraisal of the Christian terms."⁽¹⁾ Respect for Christianity is not a conspicuous feature of the volume but psychology is, and the Adversary acquires a fuller sinister force if he is taken as a personification of the Death-Wish.

Freud first propounded the idea of an instinct which seeks to reunify life with the inorganic matter from which it arose and in the process counteracts every attempt of the erotic instincts in his

(1) Fuller, p. 32

'New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis' in 1920. Clearly the Death-Wish is the spirit of negation and inertness and normally associated with a similar conscious attitude in the person under its influence. In Poems 1928, as already noted, death is seen as a fate to be endured with fortitude rather than as a perverse wish for non-existence.

The main influence of psychology on Poems 1928 is its encouragement of symbolism, increasing Auden's temperamental disposition to see things as symptomatic. He takes some symbols from Freud, the most direct borrowing being in I(g):

Amoeba in the running water
Lives afresh in son and daughter
'The sword above the valley'
Said the Worm to the Penny.

The sword symbolises the male organ,⁽¹⁾ the valley the female, the former dominating the latter in a position appropriate to intercourse. This, the Worm (the 'deflated' male organ) tells the Penny (society's economic basis) is the cyclical machinery of procreation upon which both, in their respective ways, depend.

Phallic symbolism may also be present in V where:

He in love
Too curious for the East stiffens to a tower.

(1) 'Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis, I & II',
Freud, vol. XV, p. 154

....although the tower could as easily be a sentry watch tower.

In compiling the symbolic hierarchy of Romanticism Auden cites wind as being "always a force which the conscious will cannot cause or control."⁽¹⁾ Its relevance to sexual feeling is most obvious in XIII of Poems 1930⁽²⁾ but occurs with only marginal ambiguity in Poems 1928. In I(d) it connects natural surroundings with sexual feeling:

As surely as the wind
Will bring a lark song from the cloud, not rain,
Shall I know the meaning of lust again;

Lark song signifies general optimism ; its conveyance by wind gives it appropriate sexual afflatus. In X the presence of wind allows the body to gain control over the mind:

....in a garden once
And a wind blowing a voice
Beyond the wall, unbroken, hid
The jabber of the blood.

One more obscure source of sexual symbolism may be Groddeck⁽³⁾, the psychologist whose influence on Auden seems as great as that of Freud during this period. Reference to 'the wounded heel' in association with 'Adam's fall' in the last stanza of VII immediately suggests Achilles's one point of vulnerability. Yet

(1) The Enchafèd Flood, p.69

(2) See below, p. 133

(3) See below, pp.129-30

Groddeck's interpretation of the text: "The woman shall bruise the head of the serpent and the serpent shall bite the woman in the heel" is that it signifies "the relaxation, the death of the member through the outpouring of semen, and the 'storkbite' of our childhood, birth."⁽¹⁾

The only poem in the volume to associate the diagnosis of illness with a positive means of cure is XX which suggests that voluntary, unspectacular exile can teach us more than asking questions at home and "makes us well / Without confession of the ill." That this is in direct contradiction of the basic principle of psycho-therapy, the recreation of the traumatic experience, is confirmed by the summary conclusion: "All pasts/ Are single old past now." The corollary of this rejection of the psychological method rests in the vague assertion of optimism, resembling a belief in the Marxist Wave of the Future:

The future shall fulfill a surer vow.
(sic)

Yet the actual manifestations of this vow are obscure:

Not smiling at queen over the glass rim,
Not making gunpowder in the top room,
Not swooping at the surface still like gulls,
But with prolonged drowning shall develop gills.

Q

This, contradictorily, implies the need for the conscious adoption of

(1) The Book of the It, trans. V.M.E.Collins, (London, 1923), p. 166

a change/(developing gills), of evolutionary magnitude as an alternative to a life typified by discreet gestures towards society and the restriction of any revolutionary activity to experimentation at a distance from the actual conflict.

The remainder of the poem amplifies this idea of overcoming the hazards of exile as a necessary prelude to psychic peace, associating it with physical exhaustion and rural surroundings:

Too tired to hear except the pulse's strum
Reach villages to ask for a bed in
Rocks shutting out the sky, the old life done.

It seems significant that the last poem of the volume should gesture in this way to a means of resolving the conflicts it has dealt with. Not only is the solution offered but it is offered in a poem noticeably less convoluted than the majority of Poems 1928. The development of both tendencies will constitute the main feature of Poems 1930.

Contemporary with Poems 1928 both in theme and treatment is Paid on Both Sides. It was begun late in 1928 and finished in Berlin about Christmas of that year.⁽¹⁾ Its inspiration was,

(1) It was published in The Criterion, IX, (1930) and incorporates six poems from Poems 1928: XIII 'Tonight when a full storm surrounds the house'; XIV 'Night strives with darkness, right with wrong'; XVII 'The spring will come'; XVIII 'The summer quickens grass'; XIX 'Some say that handsome raider still at large'; XX 'To throw away the key and walk away'. Spears felt that these poems seemed to be excerpted from a work already in existence but Auden replied that they were written as separate poems but "seemed to be part of something", (Spears, pp.19-20). All quotations are from the edition of Paid on Both Sides in Collected Longer Poems, (1968).

apparently, Isherwood's observation of the resemblance between the saga world and the world of the public school:

These warriors, with their feuds, their practical jokes, their dark threats conveyed in puns and riddles and deliberate understatements ('I think this day will end unluckily for some, but chiefly for those who least expect harm'): they seemed so familiar---where had I met them before ? Yes, I recognised them now: they were the boys at our preparatory school.⁽¹⁾

Auden was, apparently, pleased with this idea and shortly afterwards wrote Paid on Both Sides.⁽²⁾

Paid on Both Sides is about a feud between two mill-owning families, the Nowers of Lintzgarth and the Shaws of Natrass, which has gone on as long as anyone can remember. Except for the first 'scene' where John is born, the action of the play takes place on Christmas Eve. John is born prematurely as a result of the shock occasioned by his father's death and is thus "peculiarly a child of the feud"⁽³⁾; his task is to avenge his father and having done so he tries to end the feud by marrying Anne, the daughter of the rival house. As the wedding is in progress

(1) Lions and Shadows, p. 192

(2) Loc. cit.

(3) William Empson, 'A note on W.H.Auden's Paid on Both Sides', Experiment, 7, (1931), p. 60

her mother goads one of her brothers to shoot John in revenge for another son, apparently Anne's half-brother, whom John had earlier shot; so the feud continues.

Paid on Both Sides is called a Charade, a form Auden grouped with the music hall and Christmas pantomime as "the most living drama today."⁽¹⁾ 'Living' may be understood both in terms of the audience participation these productions invite⁽²⁾ and the difference between them and realistic drama, all of which since Checkhov, in Auden's opinion, "had got to go".⁽³⁾ Although the absence of scenery and the identification of the two 'sides' by means of armbands could be said to resemble the technique of a traditional charade, the main effects in the play seem to derive from contemporary theatrical developments. The use of verse, the presence of the Chorus, the simulation of the spy's groans by jazz instruments⁽⁴⁾, all suggest the influence of the German expressionist theatre which Auden presumably saw in Berlin. Of equal if not greater importance, however, is the charade's English antecedent, the Mummers' play. Auden had probably read R. J. E. Tiddy's The Mummers' Play, (Oxford, 1923) and bases the central dream episode of Paid on Both Sides on the comic business

- (1) Programme note to The Dance of Death produced at the Westminster Theatre, London, on October 1st, 1935.
- (2) In the same programme note Auden says: 'Drama began as the act of the whole community. Ideally there would be no spectators. In practice every member of the audience should feel like an understudy.'
- (3) The words are those attributed to Auden by Isherwood, Lions and Shadows, p. 215
- (4) Collected Longer Poems, p. 21

of the Mummer's plays, adopting the characters of Father Christmas, the Man-Woman, and the Doctor and his boy.⁽¹⁾ He borrows some of the dialogue of the latter directly from the play of Weston-sub-Edge, Gloucestershire, in which the Doctor says:

Ladies and gentlemen, all this wolf's tooth has
been growing in this man's head ninety-nine years
before his great grandmother was born: if it hadn't
have been taken out today, he would have died yesterday.⁽²⁾

The way in which Auden incorporates into this framework the psychological analysis of John's mind constitutes a virtual reversal of his own explanation of the nonsense passages in these plays and in Elizabethan drama:

The Elizabethans used madness, not as a subject for clinical description but as an opportunity for a particular kind of associational writing (e.g. Lear and The Duchess of Malfi). Something of the kind occurs even earlier in the nonsense passages in the Mummer's play.⁽³⁾

This whole episode and its derivation produces a complex effect of literary⁽⁴⁾ and psychological meaning, appropriate to the real sense of charade in Paid on Both Sides, that is, the sense of acting

(1) Fuller suggests, p. 21, that Bo and Po may derive from Sambo, another stock character.

(2) R.J.Tiddy, The Mummer's Play, p. 166

(3) 'Psychology and Art Today', The Arts Today, edit. G.Grigson, (London, 1935), p. 1

(4) The play is full of other incongruous literary echoes: Shakespearian--- "this pretty lisping time", p.13 ; "if I cut my finger it bleeds like his", p. 17; "oaths of comparison", p. 22; "Now this shall end in marriage as it ought", p. 28 Biblical--- "See clear what we were doing, that we were vile," p. 14 Eliotic--- "inadequate counsel to /An infirm king", p. 14

arbitrary roles whose meaning is uncertain since no system of absolute value is presupposed, for the creation of such a system is part of the actors' task.⁽¹⁾

The prevailing mood of the sagas~~es~~ determines, in both style and action, the tone of the work, though it also reveals that element of school-boy melodrama suggested by Isherwood,⁽²⁾ the sense in which "the two worlds are so inextricably confused" that "it is impossible to say whether the characters are really epic heroes or only members of the C.T.C."⁽³⁾ This impression is mainly the result of the frequent infusions of public-school slang, as, for example, when Kurt and Culley have a drink before leaving to ambush Red Shaw:

KURT: There's time for a quick one before changing. What's yours?

CULLEY: I'll have a sidecar, thanks.

KURT: Zeppelin, one sidecar and one C.P.S. I hear Chapman did the lake in eight.

CULLEY: Yes, he is developing a very pretty style. I am not sure though that Pepys won't beat him next year if he can get out of that double kick. Thanks. Prosit.⁽⁴⁾

- (1) The detailed stage directions and the indication of which parts should be doubled suggest that the Charade was intended for performance, but only, presumably, under those circumstances in which a charade is usually performed.
- (2) See above, p. 67
- (3) Lions and Shadows, p. 193
- (4) Collected Longer Poems, pp. 15-16

This is, arguably, appropriate to pre-manoeuvres tension being dispersed by exaggeratedly private and understated remarks. Elsewhere, however, it is more noticeably incongruous. Having delivered John prematurely the doctor says:

We've had a hard fight, but it's going to be all right. She'll pull through and have a fine infant as well. My God, I'm thirsty after all that. Where can I get a drink?(1)

The second two sentences here seem unduly jargonistic and partially deflate the tension created by the first two.

The incongruity is made more obvious still by excursions into film slang, as when the spy says, "You may look big, but we'll get you one day Nower." The greatest failure of dialogue is to keep pace with the action, so that when the spy is caught, the stilted exchanges are almost comically inadequate, not, surely, the deliberately "breezy clichés" Fuller takes them for:(2)

Hello they've caught a spy. Look out. There he is. Catch him. Got you.(3)

Paid on Both Sides shows the 'telegraphese' style at its least unified and intense whenever it occurs as dialogue. A good

(1) Collected Longer Poems, pp. 15-6

(2) Fuller, p. 16

The impression of naivety is added to by the names of the characters: the Germanic strictness of Kurt, Zeppel and Walter, and the corresponding Jewishness of Aaron and Seth. Red Shaw, on the other hand, suggests American Indian origins.

(3) Collected Longer Poems, p. 19

example is John Nower's interview with Number Six who has information about Red Shaw. It moves from pidgin English to normal grammar in a way obvious enough to emphasise the naivety of the terse style:

NUMBER SIX: My area is Rookhope. Last night at Horse and Farrier, drank alone, one of Shaw's men. I sat down friendly next till muzzed with drink and lateness he was blabbing. Red Shaw goes to Brandon Walls today, visits a woman.

JOHN NOWER: Alone?

NUMBER SIX: No sir. He takes a few. I got no numbers.

JOHN NOWER: This is good news. Here is a pound for you.

NUMBER SIX: Thank you very much, sir. (1)

At its most successful 'telegraphese' produces expressions of great intensity, especially in the speeches of the Chorus. Fuller compares Walter's reflection on companions killed in the feud:

The best are gone.
Often the man, alone shut, shall consider
The killings in old winters, death of friends. (2)

...with the opening of 'The Wanderer' which may be translated:

Often he who dwells alone experiences for himself
the mercy of the Lord, even though, troubled in heart
he has had to stir with his hands the ice-cold sea.... (3)

(1) Collected Longer Poems, pp.14-5

Red Shaw's visit may have been suggested by 'Cynewulf and Cyneheard' in which the former surprises the latter who is visiting his mistress at Merantun. See Parker MS. 755.

(2) Ibid., p.17

(3) Fuller, p.18 : Exeter Book, edit. G.P.Krapp & E.V.K.Dobbie, (London, 1936), p.134 (My translation.)

(Lament for dead comrades is conveyed in the 'Ubi sunt' device of Old English poetry, as in 'The Wanderer', lines 92-3.) Fuller also notices the resemblance of lines 48-51 of 'The Seafarer' to the second stanza of Walter's lament. in the more general sense that both evoke the mood of Spring's revivification.⁽¹⁾

Within this framework, what can Paid on Both Sides be said to be about ? Various 'levels' may be suggested.

The charade has obvious political overtones.⁽²⁾ It illustrates the fact that laws and the power to enforce them are essential to civilised life, but this does not seem central to its theme. Nor is the main issue class, for there is no differentiation between the social status of the Nowers and the Shaws. Fuller contends that the piece is first and foremost "an enigmatic and mythical evaluation of the middle-class ethos of its day."⁽³⁾ But far from criticising middle-class behaviour, Paid on Both Sides seems in its use of middle-class slang and attitudes (shared by John Nower himself) to imply that the sense of stability so imbued is important and valuable.

(1) Fuller, p. 18

(2) The differentiation of the two sides by means of armbands seems to derive from theatrical expediency rather than political intention.

(3) Fuller, p. 13

Fuller detects suggestions of a Marxist-Capitalist dichotomy in the speech of the Chorus "The Spring unsettles sleeping partnerships" which portrays the awakening of Spring in terms of the individual and of industry:

Foundries improve their casting process, shops
Open a further wing on credit till
The winter. In summer boys grow tall
With running races on the froth-wet sand.(1)

The fact that disaster threatens both factories and boys because "proudest into traps have fallen" suggests that this state of spiritual arrogance rather than economic ineptitude is responsible.

Joseph Warren Beach cites two uses of the word 'left' occurring in what he considers a socialist context.(2) The first is in Aaron's speech immediately before the announcement of John's engagement:

There is a time for peace; too often we
Have gone on cold marches, have taken life,
Till wrongs are bred like flies; the dreamer wakes
Who beats a smooth door, behind footsteps, on the left
The pointed finger, the unendurable drum,
To hear of horse stolen or a house burned.(3)

(1) Collected Longer Poems, p. 20

(2) The Making of the Auden Canon, (Minneapolis, 1957), p. 147

(3) Collected Longer Poems, p. 28

To substantiate political reference involves interpreting "the pointed finger, the unendurable drum" as perhaps the call to revolution through propagandist literature, art and music. A simpler interpretation, certainly, is to take the whole passage as describing a leader or guide pointing the way to a rudely awakened recruit at the start of a raid. The second instance occurs in the Chorus's proposal "To throw away the key and walk away":

Not abrupt exile, the neighbours asking why,
But following a line with left and right,
An altered gradient at another rate.(1)

Clearly, this does not substantiate an exclusively socialist view. (Fuller compares the line to one in the poem which is part of the note to line 1629 of 'New Year Letter:

Left and right alternately
Is consonant with History.

The context here is the attempt of 'Anthropos apteros', like Descartes, to discover certainty. Mathematics would suggest movement in straight lines but history contradicts that view.)

- (1) Collected Longer Poems, p. 28
(2) Fuller, p. 262, note 5.

The charade could be said to illustrate the Marxist principle that society cannot be changed by one individual but only by the support of the masses. Yet 'the masses' do not exist as such and there is no sense of converting large, powerful numbers to a certain pragmatic point of view, for the feud is not a means but an end to the participants. Indeed, Dick's emigration seems, as Fuller says, a kind of evasion instead of staying to try to win the game of the feud.⁽¹⁾

Marxism may be suggested by phrases like "the future shall fulfill (sic) a surer vow" but their force is diminished by the lack of operative details; its promise seems to involve immersion and mutation as opposed to planning destruction at a distance whilst enjoying a privileged social position:

Not smiling at queen over the glass rim,
Not making gunpowder in the top room,
Not swooping at the surface still like gulls
But with prolonged drowning shall develop gills.⁽²⁾

Auden does not apparently share the Marxist's belief in the inevitability of change as part of an historical or evolutionary pattern. Indeed, John Nower laments the irrelevance of history to future decision-making since it is always a "following wind."⁽³⁾

(1) Fuller, p. 27

(2) Collected Longer Poems, p. 27

(3) Ibid., p. 19

Evolution itself is warped by society's violence and produces consequent deformities: "Last night at Hammergill/A boy was born fanged like a weasel."⁽¹⁾ To conclude, however, that the message of Paid on Both Sides is that "memory—the ingrained influence of culture—is death"⁽²⁾ ignores Auden's view of two years later that man is nourished through "the essential artery of memory/Out of the earth the mother of all life."⁽³⁾ Whilst it may be said that "throughout the play....the imagery works to establish a sense that when men go counter to their involvement in nature, they go wrong"⁽⁴⁾, no back-to-nature remedy is ever considered seriously.

In general, a psychological reading of Paid on Both Sides seems better able than a political one to take account of the personal struggle centred on John Nower, most obviously in the section examining his motives. Two psychological points may be being made: firstly, the disastrous influence of the Oedipus complex from which John is seen to suffer⁽⁵⁾, and secondly, the problem of aggression which Freud considered fundamental. Writing

(1) Collected Longer Poems, p. 17

(2) Greenberg, p. 29

(3) II, Poems, 1930

(4) Greenberg, p. 34

(5) John is not presented as the victim of his mother's influence to the same extent that Michael Ransom is in The Ascent of F.6: see below, pp. 202

in 1929 he says:

The fateful question of the human species seems to me to be whether and to what extent the cultural process developed in it will succeed in mastering the derangements of communal life caused by the human instinct of aggression and self-destruction. In this connection, perhaps the phase through which we are at the moment passing deserves special interest. Men have brought their powers of subduing the forces of nature to such a pitch that by using them they could now very easily exterminate one another to the last man. They know this—hence arises a great part of their current unrest, their dejection, their mood of apprehension.(1)

But while this kind of analysis increases the play's relevance to contemporary issues, it implies that it is of a more theoretical nature than is the case. Psychology does, however, figure prominently especially in the central episode revealing the conflict of motives in John's mind. At the beginning of this scene his state of mind is uncertain judging by the speech 'Always the following wind of history'. In it he regrets, somewhat unreasonably, that his education which instilled in him the principles of 'emigrating' from weakness, did not entirely free him from the sentimentality of memory, to prepare him for a day:

When to gaze longer and delighted on
A face or idea be impossible.

- (1) 'Civilization and Its Discontents', Freud , vol XXI, p.145
- (2) Collected Longer Poems, p. 19

This seems crucially ambiguous, for if the face is Anne's and the idea is to end the feud, it should be possible to say which is the prime motive, for to equate the two destroys the credibility of both. Whichever comes first, his success has just been fatally jeopardised by his decision to have the spy shot.

William Empson adduces complex motives for this:

He has the spy shot partly to tie his own hands, since he will evade the decision if he can make peace impossible, partly (the other way round) because it will make peace difficult, so that the attempt, if he chooses to make it, will expose him to more risk (for this seems to make it more generous), partly from self-contempt which, in search of relief, turns outwards, and lights on the man who seems likeliest to himself.⁽¹⁾

Were these reasons consciously or even semi-consciously arrived at, they would throw interesting light on John's character, but clearly they are not. It does not even seem true, as Empson implies, that John pays particular attention to the shooting of the spy, that it is a decision he has to take in order, as it were, to know his own mind. He actually makes it in the heat of rather childish anger ("I'll destroy the lot of you") and the dream sequence that follows is (like its original)⁽²⁾ based on guilt. Is it that John subconsciously

(1) 'A note on W.H.Auden's Paid on Both Sides', Experiment, 7 (1931), pp. 60-1

(2) According to Fuller (p. 22) the origin of this dream is one related by W.H.R.Rivers in Conflict and Dream, (London, 1923), pp. 22-5, the interpretation of which revealed "the transformed expression of a wish to commit suicide in order to escape from a conflict which was becoming intolerable."

envisaged the death of the spy as a kind of suicide (it might also be said to be the death of his hopes) or simply that having killed him he cannot bear to live? The answer depends on the status accorded to the spy, a clue to which is given when he groans and Joan, John's mother, replies, brandishing a feeding bottle, "Be quiet, or I'll give you a taste of this." Clearly the bottle symbolises the process of weaning of which one part of John, the child in him, has had too much. (In the stage directions Joan is the spy's warder.) John is a victim of the Oedipus complex, though bearing in mind his earlier criticism of his education for omitting the feminine principle of reflection and his general behaviour (Joan does not seem to dominate him) this is not obvious. Yet the accusations of the Man-Woman representing life, "the real victim of the feud"⁽¹⁾, indict John as one who has never achieved natural sexual or emotional relations. Whether his mother's influence is to blame for this or his own tendency to intellectualise the experience of love⁽²⁾ is doubtful.

This is paradoxical for two reasons. Firstly, in shooting the

(1) Fuller, p. 23

(2) When John tries to see what the doctor is doing to the spy, he is pushed away. In the spy too, brain dominates; his illness is diagnosed as "adamant will, cool brain, laughing spirit", characterising rigidity and insensitivity.

spy in his fantasy John is surely trying to rid himself of that part of himself which clings to his mother and unless the Oedipus complex involves a tendency to intellectualise one's experience, it is a laudable action. Secondly, it is just his power to intellectualise and, indeed, to fall in love with Anne that reveals him as an exceptionally independent and 'progressive' individual.

The ideology is further complicated by the doctor's revival of the spy and John's reconciliation with him, symbolised in their planting of a tree. His personality is reunified after the removal of a tooth⁽¹⁾, symbol of fear of castration, and hence guilt for his Oedipus complex. Since the spy is symbolic of John's divided personality, it becomes possible to see the whole feud as a symbol of personality, especially if aggression is seen as the result of frustrated impulses, the situation which Lane describes:

The external conflict....between child and mother becomes an internal conflict between two sets of desires in the unconscious mind of the child (and so later on in the adult) ---a conflict between an imposed and to that extent accepted system of law and order and the desire for pleasure or happiness.⁽²⁾

This being so, one would expect the feud to end. It does not because the mothers remain unpacified, though John succeeds in marrying Anne Shaw. Even if their brief union is

- (1) Freud gives the following explanation: "The falling out of a tooth, or the pulling out of a tooth is a particularly notable dream symbol. Its first meaning is undoubtedly castration as a punishment for masturbating." 'New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis I & II', Freud, vol. XV, pp. 156-7
- (2) Talks to parents and teachers, (New York, 1949), p. 50

interpreted as the working out of John's guilt at killing the spy, the sense in which John is the spy has still to be accounted for. Fuller attempts to unite the social and psychological planes thus:

The key to the play (and to the meaning of the title) lies in seeing the society that Auden portrays as an allegory also of an individual psyche, sick and irrevocably divided.

Social unity is thus in effect a psychiatric objective, the point being that no one can really win: one side's defeat is the defeat of the other.(1)

This is to ignore John's personal success in self-realisation and marriage; in effect the point seems to be that the individual has no influence on his society. This disjunction is so marked that it may be questioned whether Auden has yet made the crucial connection between a decayed society and sick individuals.(2)

Paid on Both Sides is remarkable as a dramatic experiment, as an example of the sustained use of the 'telegraphese' style, for its adaptation of the Mummer's play and for its integration therein of psychological analysis. Its greatest virtue which derives from this amalgam is, perhaps, precisely its enigmatic character.

Paid on Both Sides further defines, by placing it

(1) Fuller, p. 15

(2) The connection seems even less definite than that made in 'In Praise of the Brothers Grimm', New York Times, (12th November, 1944), section 7, p. 28, to the effect that "retribution becomes law to those who, because they envy, cannot forgive."

within the framework of dramatic action, the properties of Poems 1928. Poems 1930⁽¹⁾ carries this process of definition to its conclusion in the form of overt didacticism. Spears sums up this development as follows:

The feud-war-sports images, the biological-geological metaphors and the psychology--- the feeling that there is something wrong with love---of the earlier poems are all brought into focus and fusion by the implication that they form an analysis of bourgeois society, of capitalist England. This implication is never made fully explicit, and ambiguities and obscurities remain in plenty.(2)

This increased lucidity is reflected by the stylistic developments of the volume in two main ways. Firstly, the stylistic influences are of a much more overt kind than in Poems 1928 in as much that Auden looks to writers of a verbally sophisticated kind and adopts their 'tricks' rather than their ethos. The most

- (1) Poems 1930 contains 30 poems, 9 of which had appeared in Poems 1928 as I(b), III, IV, VI, VII, VIII, XI, XV, XVI. These are not significantly revised. The second edition, Poems 1933, introduces 7 new poems replacing poems I(b), III, IV, VII, VIII of Poems 1928 and II and VI of Poems 1930 .

Auden's intention seems to have been to replace early work with more mature productions, though his prefatory note to the 1933 edition states that all the poems in it were written before 1931. In view of this fact the volume will be referred to in the following analysis as Poems 1930 even though all the poems mentioned come from the 1933 volume.

- (2) Spears, p. 31

obvious 'benefactor' is Laura Riding⁽¹⁾ whose style combines very short lines, usually in half-rhymed couplets, producing a series of terse, oblique statements which are subsequently modified in the stages of an argument. Auden's closest imitation of it occurs in X which begins:

Love by ambition
Of definition,
Suffers partition
And cannot go
From yes to no,
For no is not love, no is no,
The shutting of a door,
The tightening jaw,
A wilful sorrow.

With this Riding's 'All Nothing, Nothing'⁽²⁾ may be compared:

The standing-stillness,
The from foot-to-foot,
Is no real illness,
Is no true fever
Is no deep shiver.

- (1) Though Auden's versions seem accurate enough to enable Laura Riding to be identified as the specific influence, the work of Graves and Skelton in similar vein seems to have attracted him. His admiration of the latter's technique is apparent in his review of The Complete Poems of John Skelton, edit. P. Henderson, The Criterion, XI, 43 (1932), pp. 316-9
MacNeice cites XIV, 'Sentries against inner and outer' as clearly revealing Graves's influence; Modern Poetry; A Personal Essay, (London, 1938), p. 171
- (2) Collected Poems, (London, 1938), p. 100

or 'Rhythms of Love' :⁽¹⁾

"Yes!" to you is in the same breath
"No! No!" to Death.

The resemblance here is obviously mainly in stanza form. 'The Definition of Love'⁽²⁾ illustrates the more significant similarity in the manner of argument:

The definition of love in many languages
Quaintly establishes
Identity of episodes
And makes the parallel
Of myth colloquial.

Even more overtly literary (in a sense) is Auden's two imitations of the kind of satirical song featured in German cabaret and gleaned by him, presumably, during his Berlin sojourn. Poems IX and XIII display the style in conjunction with strongly Lawrentian concepts and terms.

The second feature of Poems 1930 is the development of what Spears calls the 'Middle style', associated with a tone of schoolmasterly demonstration.⁽⁴⁾ It is particularly useful in allowing Auden to establish his most authoritative position addressing a nebulous 'you', representing either a doomed class or merely the holder of an inert attitude to life, authoritative because the very exaggeration of this brusque, peremptory

(1) Collected Poems, (London, 1938), p. 133

(2) Ibid., p. 74

(3) See below, pp. 122-3

(4) Spears, p. 24

address seems to overcome the reader's normal defence to this kind of direct confrontation:

Since you are going to begin today
Let us consider what it is you do.
You are the one whose part it is to lean,
For whom it is not good to be alone.(1)

In XXII the exhortation is even more abrupt and irony is replaced by straightforward identification:

Get there if you can and see the land you once were proud to
own
Though the roads have almost vanished and the expresses never
run.

Changed too is the heroic mood of Poems 1928, though its legacy remains. XXIV seems totally ambiguous. It introduces the leader, a figure archetypally heroic and romantic, in a situation which brings out the masochism and pathos of stoicism:

The tall unwounded leader
Of doomed companions, all
Whose voices in the rock
Are now perpetual,
Fighters for no one's sake,
Who died beyond the border.

The accepted view of courage is inadequate:

Heroes are buried who
Did not believe in death
And bravery is now
Not in the dying breath
But resisting the temptations
To skyline operations.

The word 'now' gives this passage a crucial ambiguity, suggesting that the new definition of bravery is merely a change of fashion occasioned by the heroes' stronger sense of self-preservation perhaps. Yet the very habit of regarding heroism as subject to changes of popular taste indicates accurately the real basis for the choosing of heroes. The fact, therefore, that the summer visitors come "each thinking that he will /Find heroes in the wood" merely confirms that heroism remains a myth quite divorced from the facts of bravery.

The poem ends as the leaders receive the command to "leave for Cape Wrath to-night". Fuller argues that this incident is "inescapably ironic"⁽¹⁾ if read in the light of Isherwood's account of just such a futile journey undertaken by him.⁽²⁾ This, however, would be a remarkably esoteric reference even for Auden and it is much simpler to interpret this ending as the inevitable recurrence of circumstances which tempt one to act heroically in the old romantic, adolescent sense.

The same ambivalence asserts itself in IV where heroism is given a social setting. The 'playboy', though apparently enviable, is as much the victim of frustration as the ordinary man:

(1) Fuller, pp. 32-3

(2) See Lions and Shadows, pp. 265-70

Watch any day his nonchalant pauses, see
His dextrous handling of a wrap as he
Steps after into cars, the beggar's envy.

The word 'after' implies both physical and social inferiority while the assonance of 'beggar's envy' echoes self-satisfaction and smugness. The socialite's precarious position is conveyed in appropriate metaphor and in language which reflects its stilted falsity:

But poised between shocking falls on razor-edge
Has taught himself this balancing subterfuge
Of the accosting profile, the erect carriage.

These images of rigidity hint at the petrifying consequences of sublimation. But whilst admitting that "the varied action of the blood" would free him immediately, Auden concedes that "with love's fidelity and with love's weakness", that is, in the actual circumstances of life, the playboy's circumambulatory approach may be the only one possible. In this sense, his preservation of all the forced gestures and subservient attitudes is a kind of heroism.

VII undermines the heroic ideal more effectively than any other poem in the volume by casting doubt on the reality of friendship itself. Safe as long as it is only a matter of ritualistic gestures, "calling of each other by name taking a

willing arm", greater intimacy involves discrimination:

On neither side let foot slip over
Invading Always, exploring Never,
For this is hate and this is fear.

(The virtue of Laura Riding's technique reveals itself here, especially as it facilitates the easy, concise use of abstractions.)

This conclusion obviously implies a considerable and new scepticism about love itself as a possible source of unity in human relations. Basically, the function of the mind must be taken into account:

Love by ambition
Of definition
Suffers partition
And cannot go
From yes to no. (X)

This seems to mean (the very ambiguity of its tersely logical structure is contributory to the meaning) that love which is confident enough to attempt self-analysis will destroy itself because its conclusions will entail a dogmatic definition of love as either complete harmony between its partners or ascetic separation. Both are equally wrong:

For no is not love: no is no^o
The shutting of a door^y
The tightening jaw^o
A wilful sorrow^o
And saying yes
Turns love into success^o
Views from the rail
Of land and happiness.

The poem goes on to personify love (another clear advantage of Riding's reliance on definition and illustration is the opportunity it gives Auden to conjure up salient imagery) and, paradoxically, makes it seem impersonal and arbitrary as the poem moves into vague and esoteric reference:

Love has moved to another chair^o ;
Aware already #
Of what stands next, h. h.
And is not vexed,^o
And is not giddy,^o
Leaves the North in place
With a good grace.

As frequently happens, however, Auden salvages a good deal in the conclusion, where love, rejected:

Designs his own unhappiness
Foretells his own death and is faithless.

The effectiveness of personification here to suggest love's independent existence, even to the extent of possessing its own powers of self-analysis, leaves in the reader's mind the complex problem of the responsibility he bears for love.

X includes the phrase "hushed for aggression /Of full confession", a radical and startling review of a process quasi-religious and laudable in the traditional sense. The same idea is propounded, though with greater pathos in VIII: conversations bring us nearer but do not make our relationship

any clearer:

For every news
Means pairing off in twos and twos,
Another I, another You,
Each knowing what to do
But of no use.

The last two lines contrast interestingly with the refrain of
IX:

Here am I, here are you:
But what does it mean? What are we going to do?

A sense of purpose and satisfaction are missing. One reason for
this may be that we are under the influence of stultifying traditions.
Two poems indicate the lack of spontaneity in the middle-classes
and the reactionary tendencies of the aristocracy. XVIII implies
that for the aristocrats, love is no substitute for the loss of
their lands:

This gratitude for gifts is less
Than the old loss;
Touching is shaking hands
On mortgaged lands.

Their love is 'backward' in the obvious sense that they love
what has passed and the poet does not seem altogether unsympathetic
to their plight. (Regressive affections are elsewhere attributed
unequivocally to the influence of the Death-Wish.)

XXI adds another dimension to the aristocrat's situation

by considering it from the point of view of their servants, to whom they seem conquerors worthy of imitation:

Sitting all day
By the open window
Say what they say
Know what to know
Who brought and taught
Unusual images
And tunes to old cottages.

Remembrance of families and their achievements induces nightmares and superstition, for legend is not enough to live by:

And what was livelihood
Is tallness, strongness
Words and longness,
All glory and all story
Solemn and not so good.

The remaining poems of the volume are overtly didactic. Their criticism is of the middle-class social structure which has gradually eroded England's vitality and spiritual and economic health. The most overt criticism is the actual imitation of the language and attitudes of bureaucracy in XII. The defeated and failing order have made their plans to try to stay in control and issued the appropriate orders. Protests are forthcoming however:

Chiefly against our exercising
Our old right to abuse:
Even some sort of attempt at rising,
But these were mere boys.

Here the parody falters however, for either the awareness of the

administrators that they have abused their office must indicate extreme cynicism or Auden is trying to infuse satire additional to that contained in parody itself. As it is, the reader may interpret the satire as directed by the administrators against themselves and hence feel some sympathy for this recognition of failure.

I reverses the problem^{of} identity. It is quite clear who is being attacked, but the poem acquires its invective force largely from the directness of its address to the reader himself:

Will you turn a deaf ear
To what they said on the shore,
Interrogate their poises
In their rich houses;

Of stork-legged heaven-reachers
Of the compulsory touchers
The sensitive amusers
And masked amazers ?

Here is the most esoteric psychology in the service of social criticism (the 'stork-legged heaven-reachers' comes from a theory of Homer Lane's)⁽¹⁾ and whilst provocative, it suggests the degree of arbitrary condemnation tantamount to witch-hunting facilitated by the use of just such symptoms.

Sheer provocation outweighs any charges of unfairness in the poem's examination of our relations with the Death-Wish:

(1) See below, p. 127

Will you wheel death anywhere
In his invalid chair,
With no affectionate instant
But his attendant?

The insidious appeals to spiritual mortification are brilliantly characterised in terms of patronage and condescension ("to be joke for children"), nostalgia and, perhaps, homosexuality; death's favourite colour is blue:

Colour of distant bells
And boys' overalls.

Even more striking is the evocation of those challenges habitually thrown out to human initiative, specifically to masculinity which asserts itself crudely and incongruously beside self-conscious intellectual and spiritual pretensions:

To accept the cushions from
Women against martyrdom,
Yet applauding the circuits
Of racing cyclists.

In one sense the greatest psychological problem is to realise that there is:

No recognised gift for this;
No income, no bounty,
No promised country.

There are none, in fact, of the customary rewards for heroism and their very absence implies that heroism itself is merely a form of materialism or a desire for power.

The same provocative imagery is present in XXIII but with the important change of perspective from 'you' to 'we'. Once again the arrogant and arresting quality of the address is remarkable. The first stanza awakens the participants, ourselves, and locates a source of health, the fortified farm, a goal which, in the second stanza, we realise with alarm, it is up to us to reach:

Are we the stubborn athletes;
Are we then to begin
The run between the gin
And the bloody falcon ?

'Stubborn athletes' suggests public schoolboys of intellectual disposition, but also anyone unwilling to 'run' in life.

There follows a neurotic nightmare conveyed in the suitably ambiguous imagery of monster and aircraft:

The horns of the dark squadron
Converging to attack;
The sound behind our back
Of glaciers calving.

The writer reflects that "in legend all were simple" but since we are not fictional characters we must face the complex manifestations of our weakness. His 'cure' is ironically mundane with middle-class suburban connotations and seen, with double irony, in surrealist perspective:

Bitter the blue smoke rises
From garden bonfires lit,
To where we burning sit:
Good, if it's thorough.

Thus purged, we shall not have the satisfaction of synchronising our heartbeats in love, a characteristically tortuous image combining the mechanical and the romantic.

The didacticism of I is self-evidently directed to the individual. XXV makes the crucial connection between personal crisis and the physical environment:

Metals run
Burnished or rusty in the sun
From town to town,
And signals all along are down;
Yet nothing passes
But envelopes between these places,
Snatched at the gate and panting read indoors,
And first spring flowers arriving smashed,
Disaster stammered over wires,
And pity flashed.

Communication between people either takes an artificial, impersonal form or is based on pity, that sentiment which Auden had learned to regard as "loveless and sterile."⁽¹⁾ But as it is presented here the breakdown of communication could be an accurate summary of English society in 1930 or merely an image of the lack of contact between people inevitable in any community larger than a village. The final section of the poem develops the latter

(1) See below, p.127

while appearing to particularise the former:

No one will ever know
For what conversion brilliant capital is waiting,
What ugly feast may village band be celebrating;
For no one goes
Further than railhead or the ends of piers,
Will neither go nor send his son
Further through foothills than the rotting stack
Where gaitered gamekeeper with dog and gun
Will shout 'Turn back.'

Railheads and piers symbolise man-made and therefore artificial termini, just as the gamekeeper, borrowed from D. H. Lawrence, represents the health of liberated instincts. (Hence the man in the first section "leaning on chained-up gate/At edge of wood" was, unconsciously, on the verge of forbidden freedom. Similarly the headland overlooking the bay is a point where one is precariously suspended above a place of almost decadent ease.)

The symbols may not have presented the contemporary reader with serious interpretative difficulties but they are obviously not conducive to the immediate impact associated with rhetorical writing. Nor indeed is this form of verse; the short, epigrammatic couplets are too terse for the large effects of declamation.

XXII represents an essential change of style. Its initial injunction is as arrogant as its final 'prescription':

Get there if you can and see the land you once were
proud to own.

Its metre, Bayley notes, is that of 'Locksley Hall', "the use of which for full-blooded egotistic declamation was one of Tennyson's greatest discoveries."⁽¹⁾ The bulk of the poem depends on evoking nostalgia from identification with the settings now desolated:

Head-gears gaunt on grass-grown pitbanks, seams abandoned
years ago;
Drop a stone and listen for its splash in flooded dark
below.....

Into this simple emotional system, however, is inserted the esoteric and ostensibly haphazard list of "the boon companions who devised the legends for our tombs" by convincing us that their theories were preferable to life itself:

Newman, Ciddy, Plato, Fronny, Pascal, Bowdler, Baudelaire,
Doctor Frommer, Mrs Allan, Freud, the Baron, and Flaubert,

Lured with their compelling logic, charmed with beauty
of their verse,
With their loaded sideboards whispered, 'Better join us,
life is worse', ^{on?} ^①

Freud is the most incongruous entry here, though Auden seems never to have acknowledged a debt to Freud as openly as he does in this same poem to Blake, Lane and Lawrence, the 'healers'. An alternative interpretation of the list would be as deliberately arbitrary and inclusive in order to provoke intellectuals just

(1) The Romantic Survival, p.130

as the landscape details are intended to appeal to more basic sympathies.

A further element in the poem is the issue of class, straightforwardly satirised in the staid, clichés of a public schoolboy defending his parents:

Perfect pater. Marvellous mater. Knock the critic down who
dares.....
Very well, believe it, copy, till your hair is white as
theirs.

The poem's 'diagnosis' is a combination of passionate banality and esoteric psychological allusion⁽¹⁾, though the latter, ("stop behaving like a stone"), is completely overshadowed by the former:

Drop those priggish ways for ever, stop behaving like
a stone:
Throw the bath-chairs right away, and learn to leave
ourselves alone.

III is equally rhetorical. Like XXII it addresses the possessor of the land, the pioneer, "the one whose part it is to lean,/For whom it is not good to be alone" because of his neurosis, evident in the conscious acquisition of staid gestures, a tendency to view love as passive consolation (again behaving "like a stone") and the desire to confess. The poem is really a more elaborate version of themes expounded epigrammatically in XXVII and X, for the speaker is the Life Force or Evolution.

(1) See below, p.125

He gives examples of species and civilisations that have been made extinct by their inability to adapt to change, a fate which comes to all "holders of one position, wrong for years". The poem is remarkable for this personification of the Evolutionary force or rather for the apparent seriousness with which Auden treats it, especially in the statement that:

Your shutting up the house and taking prow
To go into the wilderness to pray,
Means that I wish to leave and to pass on,
Select another form, perhaps your son.

Whilst dramatic effectiveness is obviously at stake, this could be interpreted as belief in some kind of fundamental universal force actually expressing itself through human action.

A better and more effective balance of scientific and imagistic is achieved in XXIX, perhaps the best balanced poem in the volume. John Bayley, in his comprehensive analysis of its effects,⁽¹⁾ locates the poem's excellence in an impassivity conveyed through a camera-like technique, relying on close-up shots. This, though, is only half of the poem's accomplishment, for the film technique also depends on the multiplicity of the scenes it encompasses and the dexterity of their selection. Here the poem's range is wide; the personae complement each other deftly: the helmeted airman, who, as Bayley notes,⁽²⁾ combines ancient and modern eras, has his natural equivalent in the hawk,

(1) The Romantic Survival, p. 158

(2) Ibid., p. 160

and looks down from his elevated position, by contrast to the 'supreme Antagonist' associated with the great northern whale⁽¹⁾ and the 'highborn mining captains' of Cornwall, the Mendips and Pennines, figures of "some mysterious military aristocracy".⁽²⁾ All these exist on the semi-mythological plane. In the real world the contrast is between the international holidaymakers, curiously vulnerable against the modern, sparse efficiency of their temporary accommodation, (all the more so because they seek to give an impression of sophisticated menace):

.... the insufficient units
Dangerous, easy, in furs, in uniform
And constellated at reserved tables.

.... and the farmers in their surroundings: domesticated yet at the mercy of nature. Between the two come the 'handsome and diseased youngsters', potential airmen, perverted by their upbringing, and the women in country parishes organising afternoon contests at which prizes are given to these same 'ruined boys'.

A similar balance exists between symbolism and literal meaning: the Sport Hotel is just an hotel, but the 'leisurely conversation

- (1) John Fuller suggests, (p.47), that the Antagonist is Satan; both the Old English Bestiary and Paradise Lost compare the whale to Satan. It seems equally likely, however, that Auden means an antagonist of a secular kind, that is the neurotic Death-Wish.
- (2) The Romantic Survival, p.160

in the bar/ Within a stone's throw of the sunlit water" has symbolic undertones, as Bayley explains:

Water is always an emblem of liberation, happiness, 'straightening-out', in Auden's poetry, and the juxtaposition of stone is significant--- "stop behaving like a stone". The implication is that the Good Place, the right attitude, are not far away if we want to find them.(1)

The effects here are multifarious. The cigarette-end smouldering on a border is highly evocative visually and typical of a certain kind of filmed sophistication. The Anglo-Saxon, alliterative phrase 'a polar peril' conjures up some beast of the northern latitudes or a world-wide disaster. The scene ends with another image of violence:

Scattering the people, as torn-up paper
Rags and utensils in a sudden gust.

which strikingly resembles the neurotic urban setting of Eliot's 'Preludes'.

The proportion of psychology to description and definition seems precisely judged. The first stanza is purely descriptive; the second introduces, obliquely, the Death-Wish, first establishing its longevity and English ancestry, then addressing it, with devastating familiarity, as a religious leader:

Beckon your chosen out. Summon
Those handsome and diseased youngsters, those women
Your solitary agents in the country parishes.

(1) The Romantic Survival, p. 163

The conjunction of physical attractiveness and disease was, Auden has admitted, intended merely to make the reader examine the paradox⁽¹⁾, and presumably the identity of the spinsterish agents is meant to provide a similar puzzle.

The poem ends with a combination of traditional rhetoric, a complex verbal effect and a particularly banal cliché:

Seekers after happiness, all who follow
The convolutions of your simple wish,
It is later than you think.

The second line is particularly effective. Bayley comments on the "genuine metaphysical richness"⁽²⁾ of the phrase whose effect is akin to a Wordsworthian polysyllabic blaze, 'convolutions' echoing the sense of its own complexity and hence the complexity of motive giving rise to the simple wish and also the myriad implications issuing from it.

The deliberately arbitrary collocation of the guilty⁽³⁾.... the game is up for the financier working in a room "where money is made but not spent" and for the others:

- (1) See Howard Griffin, 'A Dialogue with W.H.Auden', Partisan Review, XX,I, (1953), p.81
- (2) The Romantic Survival, p.162
- (3) This section was omitted in the version in Collected Shorter Poems, (1966) perhaps because what had first seemed arbitrary and stimulating later seemed arbitrary and silly.

Who, thinking, pace in slippers on the lawns
Of College Quad or Cathedral Close,
Who are born nurses, who live in shorts
Sleeping with people and playing fives.

....is matched by the esoteric nature of the illnesses with which
they will be afflicted:

.....the prey to fugues,
Irregular breathing and alternate ascendancies
After some haunted migratory years
To disintegrate on an instant in the explosion of mania
Or lapse for ever into a classic fatigue.

Fuller notes⁽¹⁾ that all these symptoms can be found in William
McDougall's An Outline of Abnormal Psychology, (London, 1926)
and it is questionable whether the first three conditions make
any sense at all without reference to this source.

It is, however, the verbal effects produced in this poem that
give it its distinction. The anxious holidaymakers are characterised
as 'units', impersonal, operative groups, and are 'constellated'
at tables, fixed, like planets in a certain relation to the centre
of the group, all the groups together comprising a kind of solar system.
The conjunction of 'ancient' and 'sorry', applied to the supreme
Antagonist, produces a kind of mutual abrasion between the two
adjectives modifying 'ancient' to include 'experienced' (expecting no
better) and 'sorry' to connote the sense of responsibility he feels.

(1) Fuller, pp. 47-8.

Death's rumour is "soft/But horrifying in its capacity to disgust", a description whose effect, like that of "immeasurable neurotic dread", lies in its cold, prosaic assessment, the first amounting almost to a kind of ponderous circumlocution, the second gaining its hyperbolic force from the precision of 'immeasurable'. Into this scheme of accurate, at times pedantic, expression, fit phrases reminiscent of the 'telegraphese' style. Their effect now is to suggest biblical profundity as in "nearer that day/Far other than that distant afternoon", or straightforward Saga-finality as in the laconic epitaph on the mining captains afflicted by the Death-Wish:

Found they no answer, made them wish to die.

Three poems stand apart from those already considered as being untypical of the volume and yet more striking or complete achievements than more representative poems.

II⁽¹⁾ is the apogee of the 'telegraphese' style, charting the exile's progress through his spiritual desert:

But ever that man goes
Through place-keepers, through forest trees,
A stranger to strangers over undried sea,
Houses for fishes, suffocating water,
Or lonely on fell as chat,
By pot-holed becks
A bird stone-haunting, an unquiet bird.

(1) In Poems 1933.

Auden's kennings create an impression of novel, almost surreal spatial confinement and substantiality, and a sense of nature's antithetical relationship with man, neither pure anthropomorphism nor mere symbolism.

The opposed attractions of familiarity and adventure are deftly characterised:

...dreams of home,
Waving from window, spread of welcome,
Kissing of wife under single sheet;
But waking sees
Bird-flocks nameless to him, through doorway voices
Of new men making another love.

Affection, eroticism and excitement coalesce in the last phrase which depends on the simplest of adjectives crucially placed.

Among the hazards facing the exile the "sudden tiger's spring at corner" embodies a particularly striking facet of surprise, the exotic and incongruous. By contrast, the simile "gradual ruin spreading like a stain" connotes disaster which is insidious because it is mundane. The poem's conclusion emphasises its double function of prayer as well as simple character study:

Bring joy, bring day of his returning,
Lucky with day approaching, with leaning dawn.

The sentiments are pagan and vague, the god unspecified, yet the supplicatory impulse seems to be enhanced rather than lessened by this

vagueness, which corresponds to the lyrical tenor of the poem.

XXX is also cast as a prayer but is the opposite of lyrical. It has claims to being Auden's best adaptation of 'telegraphese' to exhortation, and indeed, to being one of his best 'clinical' poems. The sonnet form is virtually nullified by prominent half-rhymes, the grammar and syntax are remarkably contorted and the language is a mixture of obscure psychology, biblical-sounding phrases and pure rhetoric. The poem is short, compressed and important enough to warrant quotation in full:

Sir, no man's enemy, forgiving all
But will its negative inversion, be prodigal:
Send to us power and light, a sovereign touch
Curing the intolerable neural itch,
The exhaustion of weaning, the liar's quinsy,
And the distortions of ingrown virginity.
Prohibit sharply the rehearsed response
And gradually correct the coward's stance;
Cover in time with beams those in retreat
That, spotted, they turn though the reverse were great;
Publish each healer that in city lives
Or country houses at the end of drives;
Harrow the house of the dead; look shining at
New styles of architecture, a change of heart.

Addressed as 'sir' the Life Force acquires the disciplining authority of a schoolmaster; the title brings to mind Hopkins's appeal to God in a poem like 'Thou art indeed just, Lord'⁽¹⁾ combination of literary and religious allusion appropriate to Auden's poem. The first sentence contains two parentheses, (or merely subordinate clauses), the major one being between the

(1) The Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins , edit. W.H.Gardner & N.H.MacKenzie, (4th edition, London, 1970), p. 106

subject, 'Sir' and its verb and complement, 'be prodigal'. This clause contains the archaic and heavily prosaic method of indicating possession, 'will its negative inversion', a kind of parenthesis whose distortion mirrors that of the will itself.

The will's inversion manifests itself in a series of psychologically-based conditions of similar effect but drawn from widely different sources. Most specific of all is 'the liar's quinsy' mentioned by Groddeck⁽¹⁾ as an example of the teleological nature of physical symptoms. The 'intolerable neural itch' seems deliberately vague, gaining thereby a universality already suggested by applying the physical sensation of itching to the whole nervous system. Sex poses its particular problems both of physical necessity (especially the demands of motherhood) and of morality, which eventually become innate. The sovereign's supposed power to cure certain diseases is incongruous both chronologically and scientifically, introducing an element of magic into the prayer.

The following couplet recalls a sense of authority of the rather brusque, schoolmasterly kind and adds another associated feature,

(1) See below, p. 129 Isherwood explained the tonsillitis he always suffered when visiting Auden by the same theory: Lions and Shadows, p. 217

correction, half treating cowardice as if it had a physical manifestation. The next image, of spotlighting the deserters, is a similar combination of pertinence and incongruity. Though necessarily an unpleasant exposure, (the biblical clause, weighed down by its subjunctive verb, suggests just how painful), it is in the ultimate interest of the individual in retreat that he be stopped. 'Spotted' suggests, however, not only 'noticed' but also 'positively marked', and in a rather crude way, perhaps!

The notion of healers introduced in XXII is returned to but the reference is ambiguous because it appears to connect one healing faction with the middle-class country house. The airman of 'Journal of an Airman',⁽¹⁾ steals from just such a house, The Hollies, in a subconscious attempt to recover the love denied him.⁽²⁾ Auden seems to be suggesting that even if they are themselves paralysed as far as love itself is concerned, members of the middle-class may at least supply a theoretical basis for revivifying it.

'Harrowing the house of the dead' recalls not only Christ's harrowing of hell but also the deadness of contemporary life which needs 'turning over'. The poem's final appeal brings together in parallel, as it were, rather than in

(1) The Orators, p.60

(2) See below, pp.159-60

sequence, the psychological and the social resolutions. Here is the first and perhaps most memorable appearance of the phrase 'a change of heart'. It seems to gain its power from being a revived cliché introducing a curious, banal sentiment into this dense poem. Its 'parallelism' with the new styles of architecture is powerful as a piece of rhetoric but obviously leaves unanswered the vital ideological question of which comes first.⁽¹⁾

This lack of causal connection may appear an abdication of responsibility by the poet and may also be seen to highlight the real limitation of Auden's use of landscape details in the volume. For while the physical signs of decay provide a brilliant, ready-made metaphor for psychological disorder, the substitution will not work in reverse: put crudely, war and economic depression are not the simple and direct outcome of psychological illness, and to attribute the anxiety of the unemployed to a spiritual malaise relying on the diagnosis of an American 'progressive' educationalist, an English 'Ideologue' (the word Auden later uses to describe the polemical D.H. Lawrence)⁽²⁾

(1) In his 'Foreword' to Collected Shorter Poems (1966) Auden illustrates his definition of a dishonest poem as follows:
"I once expressed a desire for 'New styles of architecture'; but I have never liked modern architecture. I prefer old styles, and one must be honest even about one's prejudices." (p. 15)

(2) See the 'Foreword' to The Orators, (3rd edition, 1966), p. 7

and various German psychological experimenters, may seem less than commonly decent. At least this criticism would be fair if Art and Life reflected each other directly.

Least typical of all the poems of the volume is XVI, firstly because it is the only one in which Auden seems to be speaking autobiographically and, secondly, because of its length, (165 lines). Its four parts correspond to the four seasons, the first of which, Easter, provides the occasion of the poem's theme in so far as it incorporates one overriding idea, death.

The personal tone is prominent in the first section in the semi-lyrical characterisation of Spring as the season when "lovers and writers find / An altering speech for altering things", and in the violent, contrasting despair of an actual human being:

....solitary man sat weeping on a bench,
Hanging his head down, with his mouth distorted
Helpless and ugly as an embryo chicken.

As John Bayley observes, the deliberate baldness of these lines makes them "as ugly and clumsy as the scene they describe"⁽¹⁾; the absence of an article before 'solitary man' makes the description

(1) The Romantic Survival, p. 167

convincingly universal. Bayley wonders if this baldness is a little too contrived in a poet of Auden's versatility and love of technique, but this, surely, is the very reason for its effectiveness since in the context of the whole work it adds a vital humanising note.

The naivety does, perhaps, reach unartistic proportions when real people are introduced, Auden's German friends. By contrast to Poems 1928 and The Orators, both of which include veiled Christian or nick-name allusions to individuals (presumably real), the allusion here is transparent but, paradoxically and intentionally much less illuminating. Gerhart Meyer is given the title of the 'Truly Strong Man' in Auden's first reference in poetry to the mythical role created apparently by a homicidal paranoiac whose self-diagnosis Isherwood quotes from the psychologist Bleuler:

The feeling of impotence brings forth the strong words, the bold sounds to battle are emitted by the trumpet called persecution insanity. The signs of the truly strong are repose and good-will..... the strong individuals are those who without any fuss do their duty. These have neither the time nor the occasion to throw themselves into a pose and try to be something great.(1)

(1) Lions and Shadows, p. 207

Section One ends with linguistic elaboration more characteristic of Auden's writing in the 1940s:

Nor the swept gown ends of a gesture stirred
The sessile hush, until a sudden shower
Fell willing into grass and closed the day,
Making choice seem a necessary error.

While the gown image recalls Laura Riding and the metaphysical willingness of the shower to fall and the day to close revives the curious personifications of Poems 1928, the word 'sessile' ⁽¹⁾ (the word means 'growing directly from the stem, without a foot-stalk') disproves the idea that Auden only became interested in obscure philology after 1940. Similarly, the final epigrammatic statement about choice is the first of many versions of Engels's axiom: 'Freedom is the recognition of necessity.' The question of choice itself will occupy Auden almost exclusively for a decade from 1934 onwards.

Section Two opens with an important self-assessment, Auden's admission of his own intellectualism (in spite of the allegiance suggested elsewhere to D.H. Lawrence's anti-intellectual theories):

Coming out of me living is always thinking,
Thinking changing and changing living.

(1) Fuller suggests, p. 41, that Auden may have got the word from Alexander Hume's poem 'Of The Day Estivall', stanza 22.

Equally convincing is Auden's response to idealistic dreams of a "final war/ Of proletariat against police" when they are seen to involve violence:

That one shot girl of nineteen through the knees
They threw that one down concrete stair—
Till I was angry, said I was pleased.

Spender cites this line as evidence that Auden's indifference, in the political and social realm at least, is a pose: in the face of suffering he over-asserts his lack of concern.⁽¹⁾

Actually, in a poem distinguished by its success in conveying the impression of honesty, this sort of confession is convincingly awkward and unnecessarily self-critical.

The poet now identifies himself, with new poetic unselfconsciousness allied to convincing awareness of his insignificance, as "tiny observer of enormous world". There follows a soliloquy, kept decorous and given stream-of-consciousness authenticity by being cast in the 'telegraphese' style (revealing, perhaps, the true innovation and ingenuity of the style better than any other poem) tracing the child's growth, his parting from the mother and developing awareness of other people, the origin of anxiety. He realises that forgiving and forgetting are essential to mental and moral sanity, but actually manages neither, especially where love is involved:

(1) World within World, p. 55

Body reminds in him to loving,
Reminds but takes no further part,
Perfunctorily affectionate in hired room
But takes no part and is unloving
But loving death.

Auden clearly agrees with Lawrence that love has lost its meaning because its physical side has been suppressed , and with Freud that the failure of the erotic instincts leaves the psyche at the mercy of the Death-Wish.

Part Three sees the poet returned home and attempting to rediscover himself in a life "of sheep and hay". He is again prompted to reflect on his own insecurity and that of mankind. Love has become a panacea:

So, insecure, he loves and love
Is insecure, gives less than he expects.

His bewilderment as to love's real nature is well conveyed in terms whose vagueness and menace imply the fear felt at discovering that a 'universal property' --- love, God, death --- must be absorbed into the individual's personality. The result is simple sadness:

Moving along the track which is himself,
He loves what he hopes will last, which gone,
Begins the difficult work of mourning.

In fashion and language reminiscent of Wordsworth, Auden 'discovers'

that despair may itself yield "independent delight". The season, Autumn, is however, conducive to thoughts of death which are now welcomed resignedly as a kind of spiritual purgation:

A forethought of death that we may find ourselves
at death
Not helplessly strange to the new conditions.

This, taken with the poem's conclusion that love:

Needs death, death of the grain, our death,
Death of the old gang:

W.A. casts new light on the Death-Wish as Auden views it. Is this the poet succumbing to its influence? The fact that the 'old gang' includes "the hard bitch and the riding master" leads Fuller to think that the gang in question are "die-hard Tories", identifiable from "these beautifully selected representatives of their social class."⁽¹⁾ He explains the "lolling bridegroom" as "a periphrasis for the dead Christ (the bride of the Church), who is particularly not 'forgotten in the spring'"⁽²⁾, and whose death is, in that sense, the "necessary condition of the season's setting forth." He does not explain the close proximity of the gang and Christ 'underground' and 'in clear lake'.

(1) Fuller, p.43

(2) Loc. cit.

Fuller also ignores the much greater relevance of the bridegroom as a partner of the formal declaration and legalisation of a love relationship, 'lolling' because he is sexually lackadaisical; still water in Auden is associated with stultification, (c.f. "a music stultified across the water", I (f), Poems 1928). Similarly, the bitch and the riding-master seem more appropriate as symbols of sexual or emotional rigidity and the death envisaged, a symbolic sexual death, (c.f. the 'little death', the sexual climax, in 'Love had him fast but though he fought for breath', (V of Five Poems, New Verse, 5 (1933), p. 17) rather than the biblical death of the seed. The forethought of death is merely that suggested by the onset of winter and the consequent death of vegetation, (c.f. 'The world turns over; our side feels the cold', New Verse, 7 (1934), pp. 6-7).

Such an interpretation does not, however, seem to be supported by the opening of Part Four, one of Auden's most effective declamatory passages:

It is time for the destruction of error.
The chairs are being brought in from the garden,
The summer talk stopped on that savage coast
Before the storms, after the guests and birds:
In sanatoriums they laugh less and less,
Less certain of cure; and the loud madman
> Sinks now into a more terrible calm,
> The falling children know it, the children,
At play on the fuming alkali-tip
Or by the flooded football ground, know it --
This is the dragon's day, the devourer's:

The destruction of error establishes the mood as one of ambivalence: the elimination of error would be desirable were it possible for human beings to achieve perfection without the assistance of a dictator and his secret police. Unease communicates itself in the way 'summer' jars against 'savage' and in the fact that the moment specified lies between the relaxed atmosphere of holiday and the breaking of the storm. So too, laughter in sanitoriums (institutions which differ from ordinary hospitals by specialising in chronic or infectious diseases) may arise from the hope of recovery or may signal mental degeneration, approaching the condition of the madman's 'loudness' (the word connotes middle-class aesthetics with deft incongruity) which has itself given way to silence, the most terrifying of all responses in these tense circumstances. The 'fuming alkali-tip' illustrates very well the difference between Auden's urban settings which aspire naturally to scientific precision and Eliot's which do not. The rhetoric culminates in a creation of religious crudity and power:

This is the dragon's day, the devourer's.

What follows reveals, however, the true tenor of the section;

orders are given to the enemy:

To haunt the poisoned in his shunned house,
To destroy the efflorescence of the flesh,
The intricate play of the mind, enforce
Conformity with the orthodox bone.

While "haunting the poisoned, with its echo of Blake⁽¹⁾, seems appropriate, destroying the potential flowering of the body is as contrary to the substance of Blake's idea as to extirpate the complexity of the mind. What is being proposed here, the reader suddenly realises, is totalitarian, ruthless and demonically scientific, an approach easy to put forward under the guise of stoicism or extreme social utility. The technique is not satire but a calculated overstatement sufficient to alert the reader to the obsessive state of the mind behind it. The crux comes with the proposal of suicide, sounding so determined and conscious of itself in its biblical, incantatory rhetoric. It is, however, the conviction of finality, of fatal self-sacrifice to make an end, that produces totalitarianism in society and in the individual, just as the completeness of art makes it an ideal vehicle for propaganda.

It now remains to consider the specific debts of Poems 1930 to Lawrence, Blake, Lane, Groddeck and Freud.

Lawrence was, apparently, the strongest influence on Auden not only theoretically but in the messianic quality of his ideas

(1) See below, p. 125

and the very spontaneity of his personality:

The would-be young writer of my generation in Europe grew up under the aesthetic shadow of nineteenth-century France. The serious writer was a solitary 'esprit'; writing was an extremely difficult and exhausting sacred task; between the artist's working life and his personal life there could never be anything but antagonism. To encounter a writer who wrote as naturally as he breathed or slept was for us a great liberation.(1)

Signs of Lawrence's stridency as well as his philosophy appear at the end of XXII:

Drop those priggish ways for ever, stop behaving like a stone:
Throw the bath-chairs right away, and learn to leave ourselves
alone.

If we really want to live, we'd better start at once to try:
If we don't, it doesn't matter, but we'd better start to die.

The first stanza may be an adaptation of two passages, the first from 'Pornography and Obscenity',(2):

We have to be sufficiently conscious, and self-conscious, to know our own limits and to be aware of the greater urge within us and beyond us. Then we cease to be primarily interested in ourselves. Then we learn to leave ourselves alone....

The second stanza echoes one of Lawrence's most passionate appeals:

But still --- we might live, mightn't we ?
For heaven's sake answer plainly "No", if you feel
like it. No good temporising.(3)

(1) 'Some Notes of D.H.Lawrence', The Nation, CLXIV, 17 (1947), p.482

(2) First published in This Quarter, (July-September, 1929), reprinted in D.H.Lawrence: Selected Literary Criticism, edit. A.Beal, (2nd edition, London, 1964), p.49

(3) Fantasia of the Unconscious, (3rd edition, London, 1931), p.176

Expression of Auden's sympathy with Lane's, Blake's and Lawrence's belief in the primary value of instincts as opposed to the intellect is much in evidence at this time in relation to personal, political and artistic matters. For example, he writes in 1932, apparently with approval:

In his passionate nature man wants lordship, to live in a relation of power with others, to obey and to command, to strut and to swagger.(1)

Clearly, such needs can only be catered for, socially, by dictatorship with hierarchical distribution of power. Liberalism, which abhors power because of the possibility of its misuse, must seem in this light, pallid and restrictive:

Liberals...hate aristocracy and would substitute bureaucracy, since they hate personal power because of its frequent cruelty. The danger is, though, that destroying it, man will grow dingy, society a collection of rentiers governed by an intellectual watch committee; instead of the terror, the spiritual bully.(2)

Even more indicative of Lawrence's influence both on style and content, is a letter to John Cornford, a young poet, probably written in December, 1932, about the difficulties facing writers:

- (1) 'Problems of Education', New Statesman & Nation, IV, (1932), p. x.
- (2) Loc.cit.

The real problem though for you as for every other writer, but particularly for people like yourself who come of literary stock, and are intelligent and well-read, i.e. certainly developed, is that of the Daemon and the Prig. Real Poetry originates in the guts and only flowers in the head. But one is always trying to reverse the process and work one's guts from one's head. Just when the Daemon is going to speak, the Prig claps his hand over his mouth and edits it. (1)

The allusions to Lawrence's theories in Poems 1930 are, generally, both indirect and apparently of variable seriousness. IV implies that "song, the varied action of the blood" would overwhelm and obliterate the socialite's compulsory adherence to the strict etiquette which enables him to retain his status. XXI and XXV mention gamekeepers in connection with possible routes of escape from a sterile and decayed society. In XXVII Auden writes, apparently oblivious of its resemblance to the circumstances of the Oedipus complex, of the desirability of recovering "what has been dark and rich and warm all over."

Of the two most direct references to Lawrence, one occurs in the opening of XIII:

What's in your mind, my dove, my coney;
Do thoughts grow like feathers, the dead end of life?

- (1) Quoted in Peter Stansky and William Abrahams, Journey to the Frontier: Julian Bell and John Cornford, their lives and the 1930s, (London, 1966), p. 174

While this is a direct versification of Lawrence's idea that "the mind is the dead end of life" and ideas are "thrown off from life as feathers are shed....as feathers fall from a bird"⁽¹⁾, its tone seems distinctly satirical, a satire which the mockingly blatant use of Freudian sexual symbolism in the last stanza of the poem ---"Rise in the wind my great big serpent"---surely confirms.

Significantly, the other specific allusion to Lawrence appears in the only poem in the volume to share with XIII the style which imitates cabaret song, IX:

In my spine there was a base;
And I knew the general's face:
But they've severed all the wires,
And I can't tell what the general desires.

Lawrence held that:

In the adult human body the first nucleus of independence, first-born from the great original nucleus of our conception, lies always established in the lumbar ganglion. Here we have our positive centre of independence, in a multifarious universe.⁽²⁾

It seems as inconceivable that Auden could accept such an alchemistic theory as that, having written "Coming out of me

(1) Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious, (3rd edition, London, 1961), p. 246

(2) Fantasia of the Unconscious, p. 30

Fuller suggests (p. 38) that 'the North' in X may allude to the same theory of the four poles of the dynamic psyche, expounded by Lawrence in Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious, p. 216 ff. The same might be suggested of the 'poles' circumnavigator' in IV.

living is always thinking"⁽¹⁾, he could accept that ideas are the dead end of life. Lawrence, in fact, forces him, albeit unconsciously, to discriminate between the personal and the 'public' implications of an ideology, a discrimination which becomes more obvious, especially as far as Lawrence is concerned, in The Orators.

Like Lawrence, Blake criticises society and intellectualism though not for the same reasons as Lawrence. For Blake, society is heartless and repressive, ignoring those in material need and silencing dissenting intellectual voices, particularly when they question the basis of its prosperity and inequality. His remedy is more radical and less mystical than Lawrence's. His terminology is that of mind and body, indeed, as Auden observes⁽²⁾, he prefigures Freud in the relation he believes to hold between them.

Blake's presence in Poems 1930 is much less obvious than Lawrence's, its chief manifestation being the image of spiritual

(1) XVI

(2) 'Psychology and Art Today', The Arts Today, edit. G. Grigson, (London, 1935), p. 12

petrification which arises from egocentricity:

That which desires life to itself, to arrest
growth, is behaving like a stone and casts itself
like Lucifer out of heaven.(1)

'Stop behaving like a stone' in XXII and 'Relax in your darling's
arms like a stone' in III are the poetic versions of this idea.

Richard Hoggart suggests that Blake is also echoed in the
reference to 'the poisoned in his shunned house' in XVI,
for example in a sentence from 'The Marriage of Heaven and Hell':

For man has closed himself up till he sees all
through narrow chinks of his cavern.(2)

...combined, perhaps with: "He who desires and acts not breeds
pestilence." (3) He also sees a resemblance to Blake's belief that
vice is contagious in III, where a victim of the Death-Wish is
told:

And your conviction shall help none to fly,
Cause rather a perversion on next floor.

The principal and crucial difference between Blake and Lawrence is
that Blake realised that the problem of self-consciousness cannot

- (1) Fuller notes, (p.40) that this is quoted in an early notebook
of Auden's: British Museum, Add. MS. 52430, fols, 11-12
- (2) Auden: an introductory essay, (London, 1951), p. 119
- (3) 'The Marriage of Heaven and Hell', The Complete Writings
of William Blake, edit. G. Keynes, (London, 1966), p. 151

be circumvented, that any appeal based on the value of instinct must be made through the conscious mind. The Truly Strong Man mentioned in XVI indicates Auden's awareness of this problem, for the Truly Strong Man is an attempt to be supremely conscious yet free from the inhibitions which such ultra-consciousness usually entails.

Paradoxically, the Strong Man's strength lies in the exercise of the faculty regarded by Blake as most pernicious, the will. Hence, in XXX, the deity addressed is expected to forgive anything but 'will his negative inversion', and in XXVII the illusion of simplicity means that the will is not functioning properly:

To ask the hard question is simple
The simple act of the confused will.

The strongest appeal of all made to the will is implicit in the conclusion (quoted above, p. 99) of XXII, for while priggishness and bathchairs may be held, on the authority of Lawrence and Blake themselves, as symptomatic of neurosis and inertia, dispensing with them demands of the sufferer no self-therapy more sophisticated than simple will-power.

Lane's theory has in common with Lawrence's the belief that the restriction of instincts results in neurosis, and with

Groddeck's, the belief that illness is a positive attempt to resolve this conflict. Thus, according to Lane:

If you refused to make use of your creative powers, you produced a cancer, instead; excessive obstinacy --- a refusal to 'bend the knee' --- found expression in rheumatism of the joints; deafness and short sight were attempts to shut out the exterior world..... deformities, producing a lop-sided body, were the result of a struggle between instinct and the will; consumption represented a desire to return to early childhood, because the lungs are the first organs used by the new-born baby; epilepsy went even farther back --- it was an attempt to become an angel, and fly.(1)

(Hence the significance of 'stork-legged heaven-reachers' in I.)

Lane conceives of the mind as altogether more vital than either Blake or Lawrence. He goes so far as to say, for example, that "mind is dynamic: its energy cannot be destroyed."⁽²⁾ Like both, however, he recognises the corruption of false sentimentality, especially pity:

Pity, consciously induced, loveless and sterile, is never a healer, always a destroyer. Pity frustrates every attempted cure.(3)

- (1) Auden's report of life in Berlin as Isherwood records it: Lions and Shadows, p.303
- (2) Talks to Parents and Teachers, p.30
- (3) Lions and Shadows, p.301

Thus, in the territory of the sick:

Disaster stammered over wires,
And pity flashed.⁽¹⁾

Auden's main divergence from Lane is over the matter of love.

Lane's view is that "no man can be compelled to love, for love is itself the highest form of compulsion."⁽²⁾ Auden is not yet ready either to regard love as an entity beyond analysis or to propound it as a panacea.

Lane's most pervasive influence on Auden, however, was perhaps on his poetic theory. In acknowledging his debt to Lane, Lawrence and Gide, he says:

They taught me to express my deep abhorrence
If I caught anyone preferring Art
To Life and Love and being Pure-in-Heart.⁽³⁾

Equally, Lane's practice of never giving direct advice, merely telling parables, "stories about other people which you could apply to your own problems, if you liked"⁽⁴⁾, perhaps supplied the basis of Auden's later distinction between Escape and Parable Art,

(1) XXV

(2) Talks to Parents and Teachers, p.178

(3) 'Letter to Lord Byron', Letters from Iceland, (1937), p.210

(4) Lions and Shadows, p.304

which in turn gave way to the belief that Art and Life are irreconcilably different, the fundamental tenet of his later poetry.⁽¹⁾

That the psychosomatic theory Auden acquired from Lane derives ultimately from Groddeck is confirmed by the reference in XXX to 'the liar's quinsy', explained by Isherwood as Auden's diagnosis of the tonsillitis Isherwood always suffered whenever he and Auden met⁽²⁾. Groddeck describes this condition in detail; in order to prevent unwelcome stimuli reaching the "belly-mind" the organism "often seeks to transform the mental poison into a bodily ill such as tonsillitis or quinsy."⁽³⁾

Groddeck's theory is more eccentric than those of Freud, Blake, Lawrence and Lane. His basic concept of mind is radically different from theirs, being based on the idea of the It:

The It is not the Unconscious, but conscious and unconscious combined; it holds absolute sway over the activities of the brain, over consciousness. There is no opposition between the ego and the It, rather is the ego a phenomenon of the It.⁽⁴⁾

(1) See below, pp.206-7

(2) See Lions and Shadows, p. 217

(3) Georg Groddeck, Exploring the Unconscious, transl, by V.M.E. Collins, (London, 1950), p. 77

(4) The Unknown Self, transl. by V. M. E. Collins, (London, 1951) p. 84.

While not adopting the It by name, Auden seems to agree with Groddeck's indivisible psyche, the only duality he admits being that "between the whole self at different stages of development."⁽¹⁾

The main extension of Freud's influence from Poems 1928 is in respect of the Death-Wish. Whereas in the earlier work death was treated in saga fashion as a noble fate to be borne bravely, it now appears as the craven wish of those inhabiting bathchairs, the permanent valetudinarians, taunted in I with their perversity:

Will you wheel death anywhere
In his invalid chair,
With no affectionate instant
But his attendant ?

The scorn is driven home by an elaboration of Death's appeal to immaturity:

For to be held as friend
By an undeveloped mind,
To be joke for children is
Death's happiness.

Herbert Greenberg suggests that Auden's concern here is not so much with the Death-Wish according to Freud's usage, as with the more general comment on the unconscious made by Lawrence that

(1) A review of Instinct and Intuition, by G.B.Dibblee, The Criterion, IX (1930), p. 569

" it is all the time moving forward, beyond the range of its own fixed laws and habits."⁽¹⁾ This interpretation is supported by the conclusion of III which identifies the 'holders of one position, wrong for years' as the real culprits for the present situation. Auden sees their recalcitrance in historical as well as personal terms: they have tried, like others before them, 'to finish that which they did not begin.'

The attempt to oppose the force of evolution is also characteristic of the protagonists of XXVII who are afraid "to remember what the fish ignored,/How the bird escaped, or if the sheep obeyed", that is, their obligation to adapt to a new environment. The bewildered participant of IX, however, is all too aware that evolution has made him obsolete:

In my veins there is a wish,
And a memory of a fish.

Indeed, the sense of having missed or ignored some crucial cosmic movement is ubiquitous in Poems 1930 : it accounts for the 'backward love' of the former landowner for his property and authority in XVIII , and in XXI, where a community harks back to the legendary

(1) Greenberg, p. 25

exploits of its former masters, and is obviously the basis of Auden's explicit denunciations.

In so far as evolution applies to the growth of civilised society it is encompassed by Freud's description of the conflict between Eros and Death, "between the instinct of life and the instinct of destruction, as it works itself out in the human species."⁽¹⁾

Noticeably, however, Auden does not yet emphasise or present any definition of Eros: he merely indicates the deficiencies of current attitudes to love in Lawrence's terms.

Two references are made to the Oedipus complex. The first, in IX is blatant:

A long time ago I told my mother
I was leaving home to find another;
I never answered her letter
But I never found a better.

In XXI the complex is treated a little more subtly from the mother's point of view, as the distortion of reality attendant on motherhood:

Wish to give suck
Enforces make-believe.

Little development occurs in psychologically-based symbolism

(1) 'Civilisation and Its Discontents', Freud, vol. XXI, p. 122

in the volume, indeed, the only specifically Freudian symbolisation, 'rise in the wind, my great big serpent', (XIII), seems so blatantly used as to be satirical.

Within the context of generally clear syntax, the sole imitation of dream-like association stands out more clearly than it did in I(b) of Poems 1928 and by the same token, its symbolisms announce themselves as such and are also more carefully chosen than in the earlier volume:

The horns of the dark squadron
Converging to attack;
The sound behind our back
Of glaciers calving.

(XXIII)

'Horns' implies something like a monster, with the additional suggestion of phallic 'attack'; 'dark squadron' modifies this impression to include air force with its associations, developed in The Orators⁽¹⁾, of power, unique and uncanny since the air is not man's natural medium. Glaciers, literally agencies of enormous natural force are here 'crossed' with the procreative activity of a domestic animal, producing a complex effect of power of an evolutionary magnitude.

(1) See below, pp. 156-7

A more direct associational technique is employed later in the same poem, when Death's:

..... anecdotes betray
His favourite colour as blue,
Colour of distant bells
And boy's overalls. (1)

The bells suggest the death knell of an old order and the heralding of a new, whilst the overalls belong to the young factory workers who will bring about the revolution. Blue is traditionally the colour signifying constancy and, popularly, sadness, both appropriate to the operation of the Death-Wish.

Auden may be referring to Freud's 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle' in XXVII, in relation to the process of evolution which has made bird, fish and sheep 'ghostly', that is, subordinate to higher species precisely because they lost consciousness of their own 'role'. This loss of 'consciousness' forces them to "do again/ What gives them pain":

Cowardice cries
For windy skies
Coldness for water,
Obedience for a master.

This process of deliberately reconstructed suffering is explained by Freud as the attempt "to master the stimulus retrospectively, by

(1) I

developing the anxiety whose omission was the cause of the traumatic neurosis."⁽¹⁾

Perhaps the most important comment on Freud is one of apparent disagreement upon a crucial issue, that of cure by bringing-to-consciousness. The 'prima facie' evidence is contained in VIII where frank conversation makes the voice "nearer/ But no clearer", and in the attack on the habit of confession in X. Clearly, neither refers to the clinical process of psychotherapy but both implicitly challenge its assumption that deliberately opening up the unconscious mind is an automatic source of relief. Put more 'clinically':

Dual conceptions, of higher and lower self, of instinct and reason, are only too apt to lead to the inhibition rather than the development of desires, to their underground survival in immature forms, the cause of disease, crime, and permanent fatigue.⁽²⁾

This amounts to no less than a criticism of psychology as a

(1) 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle', Freud, vol. XVIII, p. 32

(2) A review of Instinct and Intuition, by G.B.Dibblee, The Criterion, IX (1930), p. 569

method of treatment because it provokes in the patient an awareness of neurosis, the very condition responsible for his illness. In Jung's words, "the unconscious has a strong attraction not only for the sick, but for the healthy, constructive minds as well--- and this in spite of its alarming aspect."⁽¹⁾

The psychologically based illness-industrial-and-class-decay metaphor must, therefore, finally be assessed as ambiguous. Day/Lewis comments approvingly on its originality and value in translating the idea of wickedness in society to the idea of sickness⁽²⁾, presumably because sickness is susceptible of cure whereas evil is not. As a liberal attitude this is vulnerable to the customary encroachments of liberalism: "whenever relativism is taken as a fundamental and final principle it has a destructive effect."⁽³⁾ For Auden the destruction was of a belief in fundamental values, but it will be almost a decade before he recognises the fact.

Poetry, however, retains an obvious relativism, that balance between the attention demanded by its style and that paid to its subject. In Poems 1930 a uniquely stimulating equilibrium was based on the very principle of paradox so that "an apparently denunciatory poem....in fact makes its impact.... by a use —how conscious a use one cannot say— of the attitudes and images of adolescence."⁽⁴⁾ Such extremes of contrast

(1) 'The Spiritual Problem of Modern Man', Modern Man in Search of a Soul, (London, 1941), p. 248

(2) A Hope for Poetry, (Oxford, 1934), p. 46

(3) 'The Spiritual Problem of Modern Man', p. 248

(4) The Romantic Survival, p. 134

must have a limited life, both aesthetically and as the material of didacticism. Development may take place at both extremes: making didacticism itself a subject of analysis and trying to free social aims from the ambiguities of language and medium. Auden attempts the former in The Orators and the latter in a series of plays.

CHAPTER II

(1932-1939)

The ideological and stylistic developments of this period are conditioned mainly by Auden's growing awareness of the implications of writing poetry, especially of a didactic kind, in a political climate of increasing menace.

Ideologically, the result is that psychological analysis is replaced to some extent by that based on theories of social organisation, particularly Marxism.⁽¹⁾ Stylistically, the poetry --- The Orators (1932), Look Stranger! (1936), Spain (1937), Letters from Iceland (1937), and Journey to a War (1939) --- increases in range and subtlety especially in the metaphorical presentation of abstract ideas, and now incorporates drama --- The Dance of Death (1933), written alone, The Dog Beneath the Skin (1934), The Ascent of F6 (1936) and On the Frontier (1938) in collaboration with Christopher Isherwood. Ideology and style are substantiated by statements of belief in articles and reviews, which together constitute a theory of poetry.

The most powerful and seminal coincidence of ideology and style of this period occurs in The Orators.

(1) Since Auden appears not to discriminate between them, the terms 'Marxist', 'Communist' and 'Socialist' are taken as synonymous.

The radical difficulty which The Orators (1932) presents is matched by its provocative nature. Two criticisms attest this; John Hayward, writing in 1932, considered it "the most valuable contribution to English poetry since The Waste Land"⁽¹⁾ and G.S.Fraser writes in retrospect:

It stirred the conscience of intelligent young men in a bad time. That, in modern times, is what we expect a prophet to do.⁽²⁾

The charge usually levelled against The Orators is that of obscurity, the term being applied to the excessive privacy, distracting buffoonery and lack of unity of style and organization that together produce a tantalizing incoherence, so that, according to Spears, "one feels constantly on the verge of discovering the key that will make the whole thing clear".⁽³⁾ But, he continues, "since thirty years have failed to reveal anything of the sort, one must conclude that the feeling is illusory".⁽⁴⁾ There is in the very naivety of Spears's statement a clue to the radical nature of the difficulty in The Orators, and his subsequent deduction is equally provocative. "Riddle interest," he asserts, is itself, "one of the primitive and legitimate foundations of poetry",⁽⁵⁾ and one Auden is known to approve, therefore it follows that:

The obscurity is meaningful in itself, as a way of

(1) The Criterion, XII (1932), p.134

(2) Vision and Rhetoric , (London, 1959), p.155

(3) Spears, p. 45

(4) Loc. cit.

(5) Loc. cit.

saying that the present state of things doesn't make sense.....a means of expressing revolt against the rational mind.(1)

Barbara Everett agrees that "at least part of the meaning lies in its effect"(2) but, like Spears, ascribes to Auden a surprisingly negative intention when she adds that the effect is "of a mad game of procedure divorced from apparent meaning".(3) The issue is complicated by Auden's own dismissal of the book as "one of the good ideas which incompetence or impatience prevented from coming to much", an example of "the fair notion fatally marred".(4) This apparently lends weight to those criticisms which treat it as the product of a somewhat adolescent sense of humour, egocentrically indulged, devoid of serious purpose and consequently full of inconsistencies. In fact Auden's comment not only confirms the presence of a 'theme', but emphasises its relevance, since the 'notion' actually proved too difficult for successful execution. A clue to the identity of this notion may be found in the very vagueness of the word itself, suggestive of innovation more radical than mere changes of ideology or literary form alone. To the nature of this innovation chronology gives the most direct guide.

The Orators was preceded by Poems 1930 in which the criterion

(1) Spears, p.45

(2) Auden, (London,1964), p.28

(3) Loc. cit.

(4) Preface to Collected Shorter Poems 1930-1944 , (London, 1950), p.9

of analysis is psychological, and followed by The Dance of Death, (1933), in which it is Marxist. It seems a reasonable 'a priori' hypothesis, therefore, that The Orators represents this crucial change of ideology. Herbert Greenberg implies as much when he argues that Auden is rejecting the view "that health can be grasped in defiance of upbringing and environment"⁽¹⁾ but vitiates this insight by his further interpretation that "only the healed can trust their impulses....that, as things stand, to encourage the expression of repressed desires is to encourage, not health, but a more violent form of illness".⁽²⁾ This assumes, however, that the terms of analysis here are psychological, hence that a conclusion which entails the inadequacy of psychologically-based didacticism can be expressed, without contradiction, in psychological terms. In fact, interpretation of The Orators depends precisely on understanding this relation of ideology to didactic method.

The most prominent axiom of the psychological vocabulary Auden uses seems to be 'a change of heart'.⁽³⁾ It was chosen, presumably, for its air of biblical conviction, since its passive connotation, suggestive of an experience to be undergone rather than a state consciously achieved, makes it inept psychologically. As such it well illustrates the logical irrelevance of

(1) Greenberg, p.60

(2) Ibid., p.42

(3) The phrase does occur once in a Marxist context, see Auden's review 'Lowes Dickinson', Scrutiny, 3, (1934), p.306

psychological didacticism, of advocating as an object of will what can only be accomplished with the help of an analyst, and hence the total absurdity of attempting to transpose psychology from its true status as a process of therapy to a set of crude exhortations on the page. This travesty is the more lamentable because Auden seems never to have doubted the efficacy of psycho-analysis, as indeed, the context of the following definition shows:

Psychology, like Christianity, is pacifist, with a pacifism that enjoins abstention not only from physical violence, but also from all kinds of dogmatic generalisation and propaganda...from spiritual coercion. The only method of teaching it recognises is parabolic.(1)

The juxtaposition of physical violence and propaganda in the setting of the early 1930s inevitably connotes the emergence of Fascism in Germany. This, it is assumed, was the origin of Auden's change of didactic heart, his turn to Marxism as the diametrically opposed ideology. It is arguable though that Marxism was not an automatic alternative to Fascism, and that since psychology was rejected on literary grounds, Marxism may

- (1) 'The Good Life', Christianity and the Social Revolution, (London, 1935), p. 38 Auden acknowledges his own awareness of this travesty when he rejects psychology as a criterion of artistic judgement, by saying:
- '...psychology, considered in isolation from other fields, is either a descriptive account of the result of introspection, or a practical science whose values are pragmatic i.e., that is valuable which achieves most successfully a predetermined end.'
- 'Criticism in a Mass Society', The Intent of the Critic, edit. D. Stauffer, (New Jersey, 1941), p. 139

have been accepted on the same literary grounds, there being nothing intrinsically coercive about an ideology which could form the basis of The Dance of Death.

But the problem confronted in The Orators is not restricted to establishing a legitimate base for didacticism: it extends to the status of writing itself, to recognition of the autonomy of Art and Life, a fundamental tenet of Auden's theory. The contemporary need for this recognition has become acute since "for better or worse, we who live in this age not only feel but are critically conscious of our emotions."⁽¹⁾ This increased self-consciousness must be accompanied by a commensurate increase of activity for "it is only in action that reason can realize itself, and only through reason that action can become free. Consciousness necessitates more action not less."⁽²⁾ Narcissism and Fascist-style coercion are the two extremes which symptomize imbalance of action and reason. The literary consequence of asserting this autonomy is that "a naive rhetoric, one that is not confessedly 'theatrical' is now impossible in poetry. The honest manly style is today suited to Iago."⁽³⁾ Writing this in 1947 Auden seems to regret the loss of innocence which the reader's new sophistication has inevitably occasioned. In 1932, however, this sort of disillusion seemed essential,

(1) Introduction to John Betjeman's Slick but not Streamlined, (Garden City, 1947), p. 15

(2) 'T.E. Lawrence', Then and Now: A Selection....1921-35, (London, 1935), p. 22

(3) Introduction to Slick but not Streamlined, p. 15

hence in The Orators the theatrical accompanies the parabolic as a vital part of the book's effect.

This definition of its theme supplies the principle of unity in the structure of the book. Book One gives four examples of the disparity of action and reason in individuals; Book Two is a parable, exemplifying as well as stating the correct form of didacticism; Book Three, comprising six Odes, embodies personal, autobiographical writing in its legitimate public manner. Clearly the meaning of The Orators is the sum of all these parts, yet at the same time each section, especially the divisions of the first two books, retains its autonomy: Book One characterized by the extreme differentiation of its styles, Book Two by the repetition of ideas in a kind of 'leitmotiv'. The object of this 'counterpointing' of style and arrangement seems to have been simply a desire to circumvent the superficial, reflexive response, a principle apparently stated in 'Journal of an Airman':

Continuity and Discontinuity.

Both true. Continuity in that the existence of the whole results from the sum of its parts.

Discontinuity in that its nature cannot be inferred from theirs.(1)

The title of the work itself, The Orators, may be said to

(1) The Orators (1932), p. ~~51~~⁵⁷. (For the sake of brevity future references to this work are by page number only.) 60

refer literally to the kind of public speaking which occurs in 'Address for a Prize-day' and, by extension, to the modern propensity to prefer, with morbid self-interest or paranoia, the secondary role of commentator to the primary one of actor.

The subtitle, 'An English Study', obviously delimits the scope of enquiry but has the more important meaning of 'a study executed in the English manner', prefiguring that part of the book's meaning which lies in its effect. Title and subtitle are accompanied by a dedication to Stephen Spender, epigrammatic and, it could be said, equivocal:

Private faces in public places
Are wiser and nicer
Than public faces in private places.

Spears interprets this as "an oblique apology for private references, and perhaps also for differing with Spender's view of the propaganda function of poetry."⁽¹⁾ The accusation of writing about and for his friends, thereby evading the responsibility of communicating with a wider audience, is traditionally levelled at Auden's early work, and the unique complexity of The Orators makes it especially vulnerable to accepted opinion. If, however, Auden's friends are the 'private faces in public places'--- the public place being the book itself--- 'wiser' and 'nicer' must mean 'more knowing and cosier', attitudes straight out of 'Letter to a Wound'. The

(1) Spears, p. 45

question therefore arises as to what the opposite condition consists of, the "public faces in private places" : celebrities in their private moments, the man behind the image, perhaps ? That this interpretation is possible points to the equivocal use of 'private' in the dedication. In the first case it refers simply to private individuals but in the second to the intrusion of propaganda, in the hands of politicians, into the personal affairs of the individual which most strikingly constitutes "public faces in private places." To prevent the development of a totalitarian hierarchy each person must involve himself in social and political matters, the ideal of Marxism: "private faces in public places." By so doing he ensures not only his freedom but, paradoxically, his privacy; "for democracy demands unconditionally and all the time of everyone that he or she become a conscious, responsible individual."⁽¹⁾

The appearance of Auden's friends in 'Odes' and a section of 'Journal of an Airman' is, in fact, explained by the context and the manner of their appearance.⁽²⁾ The principle of both is actually the reverse of what Spears suggests. In 'Journal of an Airman' one symptom of self-regard is "the treating of news as a private poem."⁽³⁾ On this criterion, recognizing the

(1) 'In Praise of the Brothers Grimm', New York Times, (12th November, 1944), p. 1

(2) This section of the Journal and the names in Ode I are among the predictable excisions of the 1966 edition.

(3) p. 42

irony of the example, since a poem is surely among the most susceptible of forms to personal appropriation, the most effective way of demonstrating the public, impersonal character of a literary production would be to include in it a deliberately, even exaggeratedly, esoteric episode. Hence the interlude in 'Journal of an Airman' where "the 'I' has a long conversation with an imaginary critic who asks him what conceivable interest an accumulation of private fantasies and illusions, a myth and an ethos derived from the shared experience of the 'small group' can have."⁽¹⁾ Whether or not this 'interest' betokens "a small group's self-flattering delusion"⁽²⁾, as Fraser goes on to conclude, is irrelevant; his own testimony to the success of the device proves as much:

What may....annoy readers now, though it was very stimulating in 1932, is the insolently ostentatious privacy of many of the references.⁽³⁾

It remains to consider the sections of The Orators individually in relation to the book's theme. Book One is entitled 'The Initiates' which, Spears says, identifies those "who have been initiated into capitalist society"⁽⁴⁾ and Fraser sees as that initiation into an all-male society which is supplied for the upper middle-classes by public schools, and for the rest by Baden-Powell or a World War. Both readings

(1) G.S.Fraser, Vision and Rhetoric, p. 153

(2) Loc. cit.

(3) Loc. cit.

(4) Spears, p. 48

are too specific, for neither politics nor class is directly involved. The title is surely ironic, connoting the spurious sense of integration felt by those lacking self-knowledge, such a sense of security being impossible for anyone at all responsive to the conditions of the early 1930s.

'Address for a Prize-day',⁽¹⁾ illustrates the most direct kind of spiritual coercion: the influence of a speaker on an audience. The difficulty of interpreting it arises from the juxtaposition of ostensibly serious diagnoses of imperfect lovers and the fantastic nature of the remedies proposed, a difficulty which Spears's analysis inadvertently shows to be the key to the piece. He distinguishes the 'tone and manner' of the speech from its 'main content'; the former, he believes, is intended as a parody of such oratorical styles, the latter is seriously meant. Hence, "the ridiculous framework contains a real sermon; the irony and absurdity are intended to take away the curse of seriousness, and break down one's usual defenses against sermons".⁽²⁾ The tenuity of this argument appears in the initial distinction, for where does 'tone and manner' end and 'content' begin? It is not the intrinsic character of the speaker's proposals which makes them pernicious but the fact

(1) This, the only part of The Orators to have been published previously, appeared as 'Speech for a Prize-day' in The Criterion, XI? (1931), pp.60-4

(2) Spears, p.48

that they are propounded by him and not by the individuals themselves. 'Address for a Prize-day' represents, in fact, the evil extreme of psychological didacticism in its realistic form. Its fundamental error of logic declares itself throughout, particularly clearly in the case of "excessive lovers of their neighbours" who are to be cured by "inviting them down in the holidays to a calm house. You can do most for them in summer. They need love."⁽¹⁾ Such a therapy must, surely, induce even greater love of one's neighbour.

That the reader may not notice this contradiction in passing is attributable first, to the persuasiveness of the speaker's manner, the "rhetorician's lie"⁽²⁾ and, second, to the fact that the speech, like Auden's psychology, has been transposed, to its detriment, from its natural medium. If 'Address for a Prize-day' were heard rather than read, the argument would gain credibility. Reading exposes the emotive base of the speaker's reasoning, a quality to which Auden seems always to have been averse:

What we find rousing or touching
Tells us little and confuses us much.⁽³⁾

Another device endemic to oratory is the tendency to categorize people according to types in the belief that it is possible

(1) p. 14

(2) The phrase occurs in 'Rimbaud', Another Time (1940), p. 18

(3) 'Music is International', Nones (1951), p. 64

to interpret "traits easily misunderstood or dismissed."⁽¹⁾
The symptoms adduced here are patently eccentric, symptoms merely by virtue of being attributed to a defective type, and as such reflect the falsity of oratory, the potency of both deriving from the accumulation of contents which taken singly would be insignificant. The clearest criticism implicit in this kind of symptomising is of the method of psychology as both conducive to narcissism and as a means to the kind of witch-hunting practised by Fascists.

The difficulty, perhaps, of recognising the criticism intended in this grouping of symptoms is that the same generic perspective is a prominent feature of Auden's own writing. The presence of autobiographical reference consistent with self-criticism seems to be confirmed by the identification in 'Address for a Prize-day' of school with tyranny, a combination derived from Auden's own experience of the Honour system used at Gresham's. Its basis in blackmail is clear to Auden:

Everyone knows that the only emotion that is fully developed in a boy of fourteen is the emotion of loyalty and honour. By appealing to it, you can do almost anything you choose, you can suppress the expression of all those emotions, particularly the sexual, which are still undeveloped.⁽²⁾

(1) p. 15

(2) '"Honour": Gresham's School, Holt', The Old School, edit. G.Greene, (London, 1934), pp. 16-7

The result of appealing to honour and loyalty was "that the whole of our moral life was based on fear, on fear of the community, not to mention the temptation it offered to the natural informer", with the consequence that the individual became "furtive and dishonest and unadventurous."⁽¹⁾ His final remark dramatizes the similarity of this system to the larger political one:

The best reason I have for opposing Fascism is that at school I lived in a Fascist state.⁽²⁾

The disjunction of action and reason exemplified in 'Letter to a Wound' is the opposite of that dealt with in 'Address for a Prize-day', namely, narcissism, which results from and promotes an unwillingness to love. Auden associates its operation with the Death-Wish, the connection itself and the actual, extreme perversion which self-regard involves being dramatized in the conceit of the wound. The idea itself may derive from a concept of Freud's:

When a psychical organization like an illness has lasted for some time, it behaves eventually like an independent organism; it manifests something like a self-preservative instinct; it establishes a kind of 'modus vivendi' between itself and other parts of the mind, even with those which are at bottom hostile to it; and there can scarcely fail to be occasions when it proves once again useful and expedient and acquires, as it were, a secondary function which strengthens its stability afresh.⁽³⁾

(1) '"Honour": Gresham's School Holt', p. 17

(2) Loc. cit.

(3) 'Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis', Freud, vol. XVI, p. 384

Clearly, writing a letter to oneself is evidence of extreme introversion since the normally external effort of communication is entirely absent. Spiritually, this state is moribund and the sense of stability and initiation so induced is plainly an illusion.

A comparison of 'Address for a Prize-day' and 'Letter to a Wound' with the two other sections of Book One reveals another connection between the former: their "confident and brisk styles that parody the manner of relatively mature speakers."⁽¹⁾ By contrast 'Argument' and 'Statement', "each spoken by one of a group of followers, have styles and preoccupations that are compulsive, uncertain and adolescent."⁽²⁾ The maturity or allegiance of the speakers is incidental to the fundamental difference between them which the manner of their communication indicates, namely that in 'Address for a Prize-day' and 'Letter to a Wound' the principals are the finished products of their respective perversions and what they exhibit is its effects. In 'Argument' and 'Statement' however, the process of initiation is explored and its consequences predicted.

This said, two problems in interpreting 'Argument' and 'Statement' remain: the first of determining what aspect of

(1) Edward Mendelson, 'The Coherence of Auden's The Orators', English Literary History, 35 (1968), p. 123

(2) Loc. cit.

the dichotomy between action and reason they exhibit, the second of identifying the specific features of argument and statement. The most notable component of 'Argument' is its cryptic, 'telegraphese' style appropriate to the military campaign which seems to be going on, as described by a participant. A leader is established for whom all the followers wish to immolate themselves:

...wearing His cloak receive the mistaken stab,
deliver his message, fall at his feet. He gripping ,
our moribund hands, smiling.(1) ^

The leader himself is described in a way which leaves the illegitimacy of the followers' allegiance and his own impotence in no doubt, as the speaker recalls:

His ability to smell a wet knife at a distance of
half a mile. His refusal to wear anything but silk
next to His skin. His reverent stories of the
underpaid drunken usher who taught Him all. (2)

This parody of the eccentricities of the popular hero confirms that the issue here is hero-worship, wrong because it demands self-abasement and living at second-hand in admiration of another person. The latter state of dependence is one that must ultimately result in disillusion, the followers' admiration turning to envy, the leader's death and "a witless generation, plant-like in beauty." (3)

- (1) p. 202
- (2) p. 268
- (3) p. 279

The importance of understanding Auden's attitude to the leader figure is that it acts as a signpost to his ideological development, particularly in relation to D.H.Lawrence's political philosophy. His rejection of Lawrence is apparent since 'Argument' alone makes it impossible to sympathize with Auden's retrospective view of the whole work in his Foreword to the 1966 edition:

My name on the title-page seems a pseudonym for someone else, someone talented but near the border of sanity, who might well, in a year or two, become a Nazi.

The 'unit' which complements the leader figure is the group, and Auden's attitude to it seems ambivalent. As a bridge between "the immense bat-shadow of home"⁽¹⁾ and society, corresponding to his own transition from Freud to Marx, it ought to receive his approval. The evidence of the group in 'Argument', however, seems to belie this:

Walking in the mountains we were persons unknown to our parents, awarded them little, had a word of our own for our better shadow. Crossing ourselves under the arch of a bridge we crucified fear.⁽²⁾

The naivety of banishing fear by such crude ritual is self-evident and, surely, confirms the speciousness of group activity.

The subject of 'Argument', then, is hero-worship, but to conclude with Spears that "its chief effect is to ridicule both

(1) p. 24

(2) p. 20

the search for a political leader (and the adolescent hero-worship upon which it is partly based)"⁽¹⁾ is to ignore the authenticity of the romantic excitement which the code-like privacy of style creates around "the small group of a chosen few.....drawn together by its sense of sharing a vital secret."⁽²⁾ This excitement, the 'effective world' of the piece, is in "complete opposition to (its) apparent 'raison d'être'",⁽³⁾ in this case intentionally. Herein lies the quality of argument or ambivalence denoted by the title of the section.

The quality of 'statement' is obvious in the method of cataloguing derived, perhaps, from St. John Perse's Anabase.⁽⁴⁾ 'Statement' contains one list of variously talented individuals, a second list in which examples of good fortune are set against examples of bad, a shorter list which seems to have the function of stressing man's animal origins, and finally, a list of predictions, some serious others flippant, the whole series being interspersed with expressions of the cyclical nature of existence. Perversely, the sum of this bird's-eye view is non-existence symbolised by the telegram of death:

Have seen the red bicycle leaning on porches and the
cancelling out was complete.⁽⁵⁾

'Statement' actually demonstrates the entirely objective

(1) Spears, p. 49

(2) Barbara Everett, Auden, p. 30

(3) John Bayley, The Romantic Survival, p. 131

(4) Transl. by T.S. Eliot in 1930

(5) p. 33

position of the commentator which is the converse of the subjective view of a participant, as illustrated in 'Argument' (the hero can only exist in the mind of his worshipper). Commentary, since it is logically ancillary to the event, actually distorts the original by the very force of categorization. This is best expressed in Wittgenstein's concept of the net, which an observer superimposes upon any irregular object he wishes to describe. However, "the possibility of describing a picture ... with a net of a given form tells us nothing about the picture".⁽¹⁾ The resemblance of this method to Auden's habit of categorization cannot escape the reader, and it may be assumed, in view of other apparent self-criticisms elsewhere in The Orators, did not escape Auden himself.

As Book One exemplifies various disjunctions of action and reason, Book Two, 'Journal of an Airman', in indication of the correct relation, is a parable, since:

You must never tell people what to do ... only tell them particular stories of particular people with whom they may voluntarily identify themselves, and from which they voluntarily draw conclusions.⁽²⁾

In the figure of the airman, therefore, the key to its meaning resides, and of the connotations which attach to him, the

- (1) Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus, translated by D. F. Pears and B. F. McGuinness (London, 1961), p. 139.
- (2) 'The Good Life', in Christianity and the Social Revolution, p. 39.

relevant one is by no means self-evident. He appeared in Poems 1930 as the exponent of the high, detached view.⁽¹⁾ Freud , in his interpretation of dreams, identifies flying with the sexual act. Neither of these symbolisms, however, seems appropriate to the airman's concomitant, the Enemy, or to his own homosexuality and kleptomania. In fact, the airman's status in 'Journal of an Airman' derives from his actual role at the time of writing, that of an heroic pioneer, the modern equivalent of a Saga hero. He symbolises the individual's public face, more specifically, his image of himself, which encourages heroic self-projection on the one hand and demands obedience to social convention on the other. The choice of the airman to embody this self-projecting attitude may also owe something to an idea derived from Homer Lane to the effect that flight, the imitation of a bird, is a sign of man's hubris:

You are a man, or haven't you heard
That you keep on trying to be a bird?⁽²⁾

His propensity to live according to his self-created, public image acts as the strongest deterrent to admitting his real perversion, homosexuality, and thus repressed it gives rise to guilt and fear which are objectified in the figure of the Enemy.

(1) The originator of this idea was D.H.Lawrence, see Fantasia of the Unconscious, p. 58

(2) p. 45 Isherwood recounts this connection, see Lions and Shadows, p. 303

The airman's salvation, therefore, depends on recognising the Enemy as his own creation, as he finally does:

The power of the enemy is a function of our resistance.(1)

The dichotomy of the airman and the Enemy is symbolic neither of Auden's hostility to the middle-classes (too literal an interpretation) nor of a Lawrentian truth-to-impulse asserting itself against conventional restrictiveness (homosexuality involves for the airman truth-to-self as opposed to truth-to-image). It could be argued, however, that since the guilt which creates the Enemy is due to established mores which prevent the airman publicly admitting his perversion, the Enemy does stand for all that is intransigent in society. (The choice of homosexuality as symbol of individual freedom is, of course, significant both as it reflects on Auden and his friends and on the progress of 'liberalisation' generally, of which sex is, perhaps, the ultimate norm.)

The airman's dilemma is complicated by the influence of his Uncle, his sexual ancestor who is responsible for making him aware of his own perversion. The airman cannot reconcile his suicide, brought about, presumably, by the persecution he attracted as a homosexual, either with the hero he had created of his Uncle, or, more importantly, with the

logical outcome of his perversion. The process of avenging his Uncle is therefore the process of avenging homosexuality, and is set out in the rudimentary symbolism of his dream. In it E⁽¹⁾ is being executed by society, presumably, for sabotaging its sexual conventions in some way. She is tied to the artificial, rigid 'track' of man-made rules; the 'large old-fashioned fob' wielded by the engine driver is, in Auden's 'mythology', a powerful symbol of conformity. The airman could save E by renouncing his perversion, relying on his status as a popular hero. He must cross the river⁽²⁾, that natural, spontaneous agency, but is unable to attract the attention of the ferryman (clearly the lover of his dreams) because the crowd's acclaim (his own unconscious love of public esteem and fear of violating its rules) drowns his voice. The words 'I have crossed it' beneath his Uncle's photograph obviously refer to the latter's venturing, pioneer-like, beyond conventional bounds and the sacrifice of respectability which this entailed.

It is his kleptomania that eventually makes the airman aware of his mistake. This condition must be understood,

- (1) In the 1966 edition E becomes masculine, a fact which seems to limit the relevance of this dream. Auden's image of rigidity may owe something to Lawrence's idea that "we have made a mistake, laying down love like the permanent way of a great emotional transport system." Fantasia of the Unconscious, p. 122
- (2) Not, surely, the river of death, since suicide is hardly a suitable message to, or end for, the airman.

according to Auden's interpretation of Freud, as "the attempt to recover the lost or stolen treasure, love."⁽¹⁾ The objectifying of his hands, the refusal to accept them as his responsibility, clearly parallels his creation of the Enemy, and both demand the same treatment:

Conquest can only proceed by absorption of, i.e.
infection by, the conquered.⁽²⁾

The principle of absorption as the means to happiness derives from T.E.Lawrence and Auden equates it, in Blake's terminology, with "the continuous annihilation of the Self by the Identity"⁽³⁾, that is, the elimination of those "dual conceptions of higher and lower self, instinct and reason" which "are apt to lead to the inhibition rather than the development of desires, to their underground survival in immature forms, the cause of disease, crime and permanent fatigue."⁽⁴⁾ This is precisely what has happened to the airman. The supreme paradox of bringing repressed desires to consciousness by destroying the censorship which opposed them, is that they disappear. Hence the airman's confidence in the air again and, accepting Freud's view of homosexuality as the product of "a certain arrest of sexual

(1) Review of The Prisoner's Soul and our Own, by E.Berggrav, The Criterion, XI (1932), p. 752

(2) p. 75

(3) 'T.E.Lawrence', Then and Now: A Selection....1921-35, (London, 1935), p. 22

(4) Review of Instinct and Intuition, by G.B.Dibblee, The Criterion, IX (1930), p. 569

development"⁽¹⁾ his parting from E since his new-found maturity makes their relationship obsolete.

The meaning of 'Journal of an Airman' is not, however, restricted to this literal and symbolic level but extends to the method of meaning-in-effect. The object in this case is partly the surrealist one of shocking the reader, but mainly to reinforce the autonomy of Art and Life, a fundamental tenet of didacticism. The surrealist motive is behind the introduction of practical jokes as weapons to be used against the Enemy. It will upset the private associations upon which his humour is based by being "in every sense contradictory and public."⁽²⁾ (Being contradictory it makes no dogmatic assertion: being public it cannot be mistaken for a 'private poem'.) Since both characteristics underlie The Orators as a whole its form might be called the literary equivalent of a practical joke. In fact, to emphasise the separateness of Art and Life Auden adopts the method of a writer also bent on clarifying their relation, but perhaps, for the opposite reason, to achieve a kind of super-realism--- Sterne in Tristram Shandy. If The Hollies is not self-evidently suspect as a stronghold of health (the name connotes middle-class cosiness) one

(1) Freud, quoted in Ernest Jones's The Life and Work of Sigmund Freud, edit. & abridged by L. Trilling and S. Marcus, (London, 1961), p. 624

(2) p. 47

description makes it so:

Here a home, rather than name which the enemy will
employ any circumlocution.(1)

a circumlocution worthy of Sterne himself! A less subtle
variation of the same device, a kind of litotes, occurs in
the same part of 'Journal of an Airman' :

So far I have said nothing to E. How could she
understand a danger more remote from her than the
crouching of a sabre-tooth tiger for a Bronze-Age
hunter, or the unsheathing of a knife in a
Shanghai bar ?(2)

Obviously the danger to E is imminent.

The limitation of this method, for Sterne as for Auden, is
that, in Gilbert Ryle's words, "the operation which is the
commenting is not, and cannot be, the step on which that
commentary is being made. Nor can an act of ridiculing be its
own butt."(3) Not only 'Journal of an Airman' but the whole
of The Orators is to some extent vitiated by this "category
error"(4) and exposed, as the dissidence of critical opinion
proves, to a variety of radical misinterpretation. His own
remarks in the Preface to Collected Shorter Poems (1950)
suggest that Auden himself did not realise the intrinsic
fault in his approach, rather than his competence of execution,
was responsible for the failure (if failure it is) of the book.

(1) p. 56 9

(2) p. 57 9

(3) The Concept of Mind, (London, 1949), p. 195

(4) The phrase is Ryle's.

Book Three comprises six Odes⁽¹⁾, a literal indication in itself of that autonomy which in conjunction with an extremely stylized manner, characterises impersonality in a public production. 'Odes', in fact, demonstrates the correct decorous garb in which autobiographical details may appear, their look of authentic revelation contradicted thereby. As such it complements the parable as well as supplying an oblique explanation of Auden's reason for writing The Orators in the first place.

Ode I, perhaps the most revealingly personal, discusses failures public and private in terms of the absence of a leader, a paradox (in the light both of 'Mussolini, Pilsudski and Hitler' mentioned in Ode IV, and 'all the healers' referred to cryptically in the present ode, including 'loony Layard') which seems to be half-acknowledged in the incongruous alliance of 'telegraphese' and a compulsive rhythm, especially evident in the last stanza.⁽²⁾ With fitting stoicism, salvation is conveyed by a pun on the word 'arrête' :

Neither in the bed nor on the arrête was there shown
me One with power.⁽³⁾

Here 'arrête' refers to the sharp ridge on a mountainside, but its other meaning of courage or decision, the quality traditionally

(1) This was the original number; Ode II was omitted from the 1966 edition.

(2) Lawrence's death, whilst it is primarily mentioned as one of the important losses of 1930, may also signify the end of Lawrence as an influence on Auden.

(3) p. 85 7

possessed by a hero, is obviously relevant.⁽¹⁾ It is not so much a leader that is needed to be the nucleus of a group, perhaps, but someone who will exemplify 'arrête', a sort of Charles Williams, a figure of grace, the living parable.⁽²⁾

In Ode II Auden seems more optimistic that health can be achieved, if only in the young. That this poem parodies the style of Hopkins is secondary to the purpose of its vigorous movement as a reflection of that energy for which Auden petitions the Life Force on behalf of the rugby team. Whether by the simple, vicarious pleasure of physical activity or the aura of team spirit, an infectious enthusiasm is generated involving what might be called legitimate, naive hero-worship:

Strangers smiled at each other, off their English guard
And watching weak from hospital ward,
Propped-up cases felt ever so well when he dropped that
goal.⁽³⁾

Although apparently written in the Spring of 1927 the poem is appropriate ideologically, since it approves neither the leader nor the individual and so produces an uncertainty which is itself creative.

By contrast, Ode III appears pessimistic : we, secluded in a hospital-cum-boarding-house (modelled, perhaps, on the convalescent home for neurasthenics run by Rivers at

(1) Auden uses the word in discussing types of Quest hero; see The Dyer's Hand, pp. 159-167

(2) See below, p. 232

(3) p. 87 91

Craiglockhart) are doomed to degeneration. Whether this is as a result of infection by the Death-Wish or of isolation itself, seems the crucial issue of the piece. Like the landscape, desolate and remote, the acquiescence of the participants seems rather the correlative of their state than its origin. The Ode then, might almost be a parody of the somewhat egocentric desolation and prophecy of Poems 1930 , and in that sense, personal.

The private occasion of Ode IV is obvious (from the Envoi it may be assumed that the poem was actually sent to the Warners) and the mood of gay greeting is pervasive, a fact which makes Auden's later apology for it all the more odd:

I express all the sentiments with which his followers hailed the advent of Hitler , but these are rendered, I hope, innocuous by the fact that the Führer so hailed is a new-born baby and the son of a friend.(1)

This, by implying the mutual independence of style and subject, merely emphasises, in the context Auden here chooses for it, the latter's potential malevolence: how easily both rhetoric and poetry place themselves at the disposal of tyrants. This remains a pertinent observation but as self-criticism it is positively disingenuous in its inaccuracy by ignoring the principles of ambivalence, wide contemporary allusion and sheer gusto by which the Ode works (and of which it is the best example in The Orators). Castigation of the working class is set against

(1) 'Foreword' to the 1966 edition, p. 8

similar vituperation of the aristocracy; condemnation of youth's Oedipus complex is accompanied by the abnegation of Mortmere, and Lawrence's dogma of compulsory physical labour for the masses is civilised by an adaptation of Eliot in the poem's serene conclusion:

A birthday, a birth
On English earth
Restores, restore will, has restored
To England's story
The directed calm, the actual glory.(1)

Ode V is addressed to Auden's pupils and illustrates the principle of duality, elaborating its most disastrous consequence and the one most relevant to someone growing up in 1932---war:

What have we all been doing to have made from Fear
That laconic war-bitten captain addressing them now ?(2)

The young must be aware of this process, of their elders' attempt to keep them in ignorance, suppressing their idealism, of the economic pressures continually brought to bear on them and, finally, of the Seven Deadly Sins. Though in citing the latter the poem may seem to be descending to an inappropriately homilistic level, it is, as a whole, remarkable for its ability to sustain both interest and theme, never allowing the aura of camaraderie to eclipse the stark truth beneath it, nor the whole to lapse into direct preaching. If Ode V

(1) p. 101 105
(2) p. 106 110

exposes the ease with which traditional attitudes of isolation can be perpetuated, Ode VI points, in the figure of an implacable God, to that involution which is hardest to detach from tradition, the involution of religion. As it parodies the contortions of hymn syntax, Ode VI parodies both implicitly and in the self-contradictions it states, a masochism, in Freud's terms, which the petition of the last stanza cannot repudiate either ideologically or aesthetically. The Ode, indeed, confirms that whatever of Christianity is latent in Auden at this period, he is consciously hostile to the religious view.

The significance of the 'Epilogue' is, of course, guaranteed by its very status as conclusion, and this fact throws into greater relief the simplicity of its antitheses and the overt-ness of their symbolisation: the secondary pursuits of commentary and neurosis are rejected for action and decision. Auden's eye is now directed away from the individual and towards the world, both as the subject of writing and as a method of analysis, in clear contrast to the subject and method of the 'Prologue', whose flaccid, Oedipal imagery suggests, as well as the perversion of that particular condition, the element of indulgent fantasy and egocentric symmetry psychology entails.

What becomes clear from any study of The Orators is that it cannot be fully explained according to definitions and principles since criticism is finally curtailed by the paradox,

amounting to self-contradiction, inherent in its method, which in turn, derives from the tautology of the underlying thesis: the dissociation of Art and Life:

For poetry makes nothing happen: it survives
In the valley of its own saying... (1)

The most important consequence of this for Auden, is that it vetoes the reader's tendency to use Art as a way of escaping from Life. The ramifications of this theory and the extent to which Auden's writing depends upon it, guarantees the significance of The Orators. This is especially true since much of the book, a certain ambivalence in 'Address for a Prize-day' in particular, suggests that, far from being written as illustration of a thesis already conceived, it actually originated as an attempt to substantiate didacticism, to inject it with new effectiveness on the surrealist model.

Having identified psychologically-based didacticism with fascist coercion by means of the technique of meaning-in-effect, Auden adopts the diametrically opposed ideology, Marxism, his task being not only to justify it as a viable social alternative to psycho-analysis but to equate any didacticism based on it with the parabolic principle established in 'Journal of an Airman'.

His most direct initial approach to Marxism is to explain

(1) 'In Memory of W. B. Yeats' (Another Time, London, 1940)
p. 93.

its attraction in psychological terms as representing a call for self-surrender "for those individuals who, isolated, feel themselves emotionally at sea".⁽¹⁾ Socially, it counteracts the depredations of nationalism, bad "not because the nation is too small a group but because it is too large."⁽²⁾ This belief in the efficacy of the group is strongly and personally held by Auden. In a letter to John Pudney he writes:

The problem is particularly bad in a city like London, which is so large that the only group you can find is living with your own kind, those mentally like you. This is disastrous. You end up hating each other. The whole value of a group is that its constituents are as diverse as possible, with little consciously in common, Plurality in unity.⁽³⁾

So important does he consider the group to be, indeed, that he establishes it as the positive, therapeutic component in the present dichotomy:

I think there are two great desires which we are always confusing, the desire to be one of a group, building the dam, or facing the charging tiger. This is largely unconscious, impersonal and sexual though it demands physical contact. And the personal conscious desire to come into a particular woman and have a child by her. If you can't get one, you intensify the other. We're all sex-obsessed today because there isn't any decent group life left hardly; we try to get its kick out of sex, which is one reason why we are so promiscuous.⁽⁴⁾

As well as being applicable primarily to one like Auden

(1) 'Problems of Education', New Statesman & Nation, IV, (1932), p. viii-x.

(2) Ibid. p. viii.

(3) John Pudney, Home and Away, (London, 1960), p. 206. The letter seems to have been written in about 1935.

(4) Loc. cit.

"committed before his choice to a life of understanding"⁽¹⁾, this analysis, violating the strict Freudian categories of diagnosis and therapy perhaps explains his effective reversal of the belief expressed two years earlier that man's nature is not dual, that the concept of higher and lower self is pernicious because it encourages "the inhibition rather than the development of desires, (to) their underground survival in immature forms."⁽²⁾ Whereas the earlier view implies the inefficacy of the Freudian method of therapy based on recognising contrary impulses in the psyche, his present position assumes the division of impulses but seems to regard the breach as unhealable:

In his passionate nature man wants lordship, to live in a relation of power with others, to obey and to command, to strut and to swagger. He desires mystery and glory. In his cerebral nature he cares for none of these things. He wants to know and be gentle; he feels his other passionate nature is frightening and cruel.⁽³⁾

Chiefly responsible for the denial of man's passionate nature are liberalism and big business; to the former all power is anathema. Significantly, however, Auden's criticism of the liberal aversion to violence is not made, as might be thought, as a result of the threat represented by the rise of Nazism in Germany, but rather in the somewhat solipsistic terms of the need

(1) 'Lowes Dickinson', Scrutiny, III,3 (1934), p. 305

(2) Review of Instinct and Intuition, by G.B.Dibblee, The Criterion, IX, 36 (1930), p. 569

(3) 'Problems of Education', New Statesman & Nation, IV (1932), p. x

of gratifying the kind of instinctive needs Nazism itself satisfied, as suggested in the quotation above. Thus, the danger of liberal methods of education is that "man will grow dingy, society a collection of rentiers governed by an intellectual watch committee; instead of the terror, the spiritual bully."⁽¹⁾

Big business is equally anxious to suppress personality since "for its trivial but exhausting tasks of mass production, an intermediate pert adolescent type is the most suitable."⁽²⁾ But while industry may encourage the tendency of a large number of "nervous and unhappy people who are incapable of any intimate faithful relationship at all, in whom sensation has remained at or regressed to the infantile level as an end in itself (Lawrence's Aphrodite of the Foam), and to whom, therefore, the object is really non-existent"⁽³⁾, its removal would not, presumably result in psychic harmony. In

(1) 'Problems of Education', New Statesman & Nation, IV, (1932), p. x.

(2) Review of The Evolution of Sex by G. Maranon, and The Biological Tragedy of Women, by A. Nemilov, The Criterion, XII, 47 (1933), p. 288.

Auden later explains the effects of industrialism as being conducive to escapism: "Romanticism grew with Industrialism: for that very day of work and money which is essentially the domain of conscious and willed acts, has, with the growth of centralisation, specialisation, and mechanisation, taken on more and more, for the vast majority, the arbitrary determined aspect of the night and the dream, and not a pleasant dream either. For how many millions is their free individual life thrown back into a Personal Unconscious....? 'Jacob and the Angel', The New Republic, CI, 1308, (1939), p. 292-293.

(3) Ibid., p. 288-289.

this respect education is in a somewhat equivocal position. Auden's basic assumption is that education "whatever it pretend, can do nothing for the individual; it is always social",⁽¹⁾ so that from this and the more conservative standpoint which regards education as responsible for the production of "useful citizens" it follows that "education succeeds social revolution, not precedes."⁽²⁾

The expression of Marxist views occurs in two poems: 'I have a handsome profile',⁽³⁾ and 'A Communist to others'.⁽⁴⁾ The former is distinguished by its deliberately trite metre, the last line of each stanza being a variation on the theme of "a world that has had its day", and its portrayal of the bourgeois as someone anxious to escape from the doom threatening him, even to the extent of becoming a worker himself:

I'll get a job in a factory
I'll live with the working boys
I'll play them at darts in the public house
I'll share their sorrows and joys
Not live in a world that has had its day.⁽⁵⁾

Auden's most famous Marxist poem, 'A Communist to others', identifies more subtly the same middle-class vices as 'I

- (1) 'Problems of Education', New Statesman & Nation, IV (1932), p. x
- (2) Review of The Evolution of Sex and The Biological Tragedy of Women, The Criterion, XII, 47 (1933), p. 289
- (3) New Verse, 1 (1933), pp. 3-5
- (4) Twentieth Century, IV, 19 (1932), pp. 7-8
- (5) 'I have a handsome profile', p. 3

have a handsome profile', but does so from a perspective of involvement which acquires in the third stanza a distinctly ambivalent tone, as the workers are addressed:

We cannot put on airs with you
The fears that hurt you hurt us too
 Only we say
That like all nightmares these are fake
If you would help us we could make
Our eyes to open, and awake
 Shall find night day.

Even if 'we' are assumed to be workers' organisers, this approach is unpleasantly patronising but if, as may reasonably be assumed, it identifies sympathisers of Auden's class, even more so. In any case, the four stanzas which contain this address are followed by ten more identifying the corruptions of the bourgeoisie who are addressed like the workers with the impersonal 'you', so that the total effect of the poem is of denunciation of the middle-class rather than praise of, or constructive support for, the working-class. This, rather than any exaggerated vituperation, casts doubt on the extent of Auden's actual Communist commitment.

This doubt is implicitly increased by the nature of the other poems of this period which revert to the earlier panacea, love. 'O love, the interest itself in thoughtless Heaven',⁽¹⁾ is typical. It begins by invoking love as "the interest itself in thoughtless Heaven", a title which endows it with a fine

(1) New Statesman & Nation, IV, n.s. 73 (1932), p. 69.

but rather involved ambiguity (Auden currently holds⁽¹⁾ that thought is born of frustration of the instincts so that "perfect satisfaction would be complete unconsciousness"⁽²⁾, the only fruitful ratiocination being that contained in love itself) and proceeds to attribute the present failure of human relationships ("the ladies and gentlemen apart, too much alone") to the legacy of the Industrial Revolution, not so much its physical effects ("the flotsam at which Dumbarton gapes and hungers") as the way it has encouraged a habit of morbid retrospection, "of uniting the dead into a splendid empire." The cure, half prayed for, half predicted, involves two apparently antithetical forces, love and discipline : love through the bond of marriage, and discipline through the sense of control latent in history, the dream "long coiled in the ammonite's slumber", now preparing:

....to lay on our talk and kindness
Its military silence, its surgeon's idea of pain.

Fertilising and catalytic amid these extremes is patriotism, symbolised, indeed virtually punned, in the gravitational

- (1) Reviewing Bertrand Russell's Education and the Social Order he asks: "Does Mr. Russell never contemplate the possibility that intellectual curiosity is neurotic, a compensation for those isolated from a social group, sexually starved, or physically weak?" 'Problems of Education', New Statesman & Nation, IV (1932), pp. viii-x
- (2) 'Psychology and Art Today', The Arts Today, edit. G.Grigson, (London, 1935), p. 5

connection Newton discovered between himself and England.

The period up to 1935 is dominated ideologically by this antithesis of love and discipline and, just as in 'O love, the interest itself in thoughtless Heaven', the relation between the terms is vague but provoking (the love appears to be as spontaneous, as universal and as detached from the lovers as the discipline). Its most extreme form, which also embodies the most involved theoretical justification, is asceticism, put forward as perhaps the only remedy for the sick state of personal relations due to our inherited conception of romantic love⁽¹⁾, and, in 'Our hunting fathers told the story'⁽²⁾ as a remarkable yet inevitable development of animal passivity. Both sources allude to Lenin's dictum that the revolutionary must be prepared to "go hungry, work illegally and be anonymous", and both are equivocal as to the exact connection between the ascetic stance and "the intricate ways of guilt"⁽³⁾, that is, love.

(1) See 'T.E.Lawrence', Then and Now: A Selection....1921-35, (London, 1935), p.22 ; see above, p. 55

(2) The Listener, XI (1934), p. 911

(3) Auden's theory is made more ambiguous by the invocation to the 'Lords of limit' in 'The Witnesses', The Listener, X (1933), pp. ii-iii, visualised as Lawrentian gamekeepers "whose sleepless presences endear /Our peace to us with a perpetual threat." This office is especially important in relation to love, for:

....to your discipline the heart
Submits when we have fallen apart
Into the isolated personal life.

The context in which the phrase "disciplined love" is coined⁽¹⁾ apparently presents it as the correct response to industrialisation, and implies that overconfidence in the machine was man's downfall:

...pompous, we assumed their power to be our own,
Believed machines to be our hearts' spontaneous fruit,
Taking our premises as shoppers take a tram.

While the disciplined love which alone could have
employed these engines
Seemed far too difficult and dull, and when hatred
promised
An immediate dividend, all of us hated.

While the same poem confidently and accurately criticises Lawrence's trust in the instincts⁽²⁾ (for the instincts are themselves corrupt "deformed and imbecile") the implied alternative of machine-like discipline seems just as mindless. Though the self-indulgent but real satisfaction of love may be characterised as "love gave the power, but took the will",⁽³⁾ its seemingly perverse dependence on the individual's 'co-operation' conveyed as "love has one wish and that is, not to be"⁽⁴⁾ and, most significantly, love itself be identified with that "hopeful falsehood"⁽⁵⁾ by means of which man attempts to

(1) 'The Malverns', New Oxford Outlook, 1, 2, (1933), pp.148-152.

(2) Is Auden's feeling of guilt as he glances towards Nottingham the result of shame at betraying Lawrence or at trusting him in the first place?

(3) 'Fleeing the short-haired mad executives', New Oxford Outlook, 1, 2, (1933), p. 153.

(4) 'At the far end of the enormous room', III of Five Poems, New Verse, 5, (1933), p. 15.

(5) 'Love had him fast: but though he caught his breath', V of Five Poems, New Verse, 5 (1933), p. 17.

stem "the flood on which all move and wish to move"⁽¹⁾, that is, history, neither the force of will-power, nor the tide of history can convincingly replace it in Auden's hierarchy.

The ambivalence of his attitude to the power of love is revealed in the slogan "men are changed by what they do"⁽²⁾ and by a clear divergence of theme between those poems which advocate generally civic virtues and those which celebrate love with a new intensity. Among the former 'Hearing of harvests rotting in the valleys',⁽³⁾ is significant for introducing the City as symbolically antithetical to the Islands of escape (the sestina form increases this sense of antithesis). To "rebuild our cities, not dream of islands" is not only a way to assuage the sorrow brought about by pursuit of illusory freedom but also the honour owed to those founders of our present civilisation who overcame the same temptation of escapism. 'Love had him fast: but though he caught his breath',⁽⁴⁾ implies that love (the erotic instinct rather than purely personal affection) can 'simplify' all sorrow, though almost all this sorrow will have reasserted itself when the cities to which it gave birth have proliferated. The poem's ambiguous resolution qualifies this:

(1) 'Love had him fast: but though he caught his breath', V of Five Poems, New Verse, 5 (1933), p. 17

(2) 'The Malverns', New Oxford Outlook, 1,2, (1933), pp. 148-152

(3) The Criterion, XII, 49, (1933), pp. 605-7

(4) V of Five Poems, New Verse, 5, (1933), p. 17

Yet clearly in that 'almost' all his hope
That hopeful falsehood cannot stem with love
The flood on which all move and wish to move.

The idea that love is incompatible with falsehood implies that the lover cannot be entirely wrong in his hope, that love itself cannot depend on hopefulness alone, nor can love be automatically dissociated from falsehood, that love cannot stem the flood of history but that history, to be conceived at all, requires the imaginative, creative impulse peculiar to love. That these meanings are far from obvious at first reading may explain the later title given to the poem of 'Meiosis',⁽¹⁾ that is, rhetorical understatement for effect. The poem's actual effect seems to be to imply Auden's uncertainty as to how love's undoubted power can be channelled into city building. Again his conclusion takes the form of a slogan more remarkable for its epigrammatic quality than its usefulness as a working guide: love "through our private stuff must work / His public spirit".⁽²⁾

This equivocation of romantic love and the need to civilise is reflected in the characteristic technique of the poems of this period.⁽³⁾ Typically, the poet looks down from some elevated point, "the cropped grass on the narrow ridge", for example, (a

(1) It acquired the title in Collected Poetry, (New York, 1945).

(2) 'A bride in the '30s' ', The Listener, XIII, 319, (1935), p. 317

(3) The intrinsically romantic connotations of 'flood' are confirmed by its appearance in the title of Auden's book on the Romantic Iconography of the Sea, The Enchafèd Flood.

position contrasted with that of the hawk who now "looks down on us all; he is not in this."⁽¹⁾ This view is panoramic not only in the spatial sense, though this is strikingly localised yet picturesque:

England below me:
Eastward across the Midland plains
An express is leaving for a sailor's country;
Where on clear evenings the retired and rich
From the french windows of their sheltered mansions
See the Sugarloaf standing, an upright sentinel
Over Abergavenny.⁽²⁾

∧...but also in the historical, evoked generally in a mythical fashion:

As when Merlin, tamer of horses, and his lords to whom
Stonehenge was still a thought, the Pillars passed

And into the undared ocean swung north their prow,
[Drives through the night and star-concealing dawn
For the virgin roadsteads of our hearts an unwavering keel.]⁽³⁾

The present situation is similarly dramatised; those enjoying their freedom in an English house "do not care to know,/ Where Poland draws her Eastern bow."⁽⁴⁾ Into this plangent setting the poet's entrance acquires a new intimacy, (reminiscent of XVI of Poems 1930):

Equal with colleagues in a ring
I sit on each calm evening.⁽⁵⁾

- (1) 'The chimneys are smoking, the crocus is out in the border', New Country, edit. M. Roberts, (London, 1933), p. 214
- (2) 'The Malverns', New Oxford Outlook, 1,2, (1933), p. 148
- (3) 'O love, the interest itself in thoughtless Heaven', New Statesman & Nation, IV, n.s. 73 (1932), p. 69
- (4) 'Summer night', The Listener, XI, 269 (1934), p. 421
- (5) Loc. cit.

Auden's technique now produces its own kind of sinister mood. The poems are typically in long lines where language of conversational directness and rhetoric of prose-like complexity never quite escape from the insistent rhythm imposed on them. A new kind of simile is introduced, sinister and strikingly apt: "Desire like a police-dog is unfastened"⁽¹⁾ and the personification of abstractions achieves greater subtlety and power, a development particularly noticeable when Auden is reiterating earlier ideas:

Fear gave his watch no look;
The lion griefs loped from the shade
And on our knees their muzzles laid,
And Death put down his book.⁽²⁾

Having evoked a powerful but essentially personal impression of the ambivalence of the present situation with emphasis on the role of love therein, Auden now adopts the radically different technique of drama to treat Communism in a manner commensurate with popular didacticism. The Dance of Death and The Dog Beneath the Skin reveal not only Auden's ideas of contemporary theatre but his ambivalence towards Communism. This is especially apparent in The Dance of Death.

Auden's programme note for the first performance, 'I want the

(1) 'A Happy New Year', New Country, edit. Michael Roberts, (London, 1933), p. 205.

(2) 'Summer night', p. 421.

theatre to be,⁽¹⁾ explains the dramatic principles on which the play is based, the intention being to depart from traditional techniques especially the fundamental convention which separates the players from the audience. (Theoretically every member of the audience should feel like an understudy.) Thus speech, characterisation, plot and action are all overtly 'theatrical' for "drama....deals with the general and universal, not with the particular and local."⁽²⁾

This overt theatricality is crucial in interpreting the play, especially since Auden's programme note describes the features of this new drama without giving any reason, apart from the implied virtue of novelty itself, for their adoption. Psychologically the violation of tradition may, as Auden has already indicated,⁽³⁾ produce a beneficial if brief sense of freedom, provided that the convention in question is not in itself essential to the security of the participants. In this respect, the theatre is in an ambiguous position having two sets of participants: actors and audience. Since The Dance of Death

- (1) Programme Note to the first production on October 1st, 1935 at the Westminster Theatre, London by the Group Theatre; published in 1933 it is dedicated to Robert Medley and Rupert Doone, Auden's co-founder of the Group.
- (2) Auden adds "it is probable that drama can only deal, at any rate directly, with the relations of human beings with each other, not with the relation of man to the rest of nature." In fact, the extreme stylisation of the former has the effect of presenting them as if they were in the category of the latter.
- (3) 'The Group Movement and the Middle Classes', p. 97

presents not merely the decline of the bourgeoisie but their overthrow by the working-class, it seems possible that the very people the play was written for would be most disturbed by the absence of the trappings of realistic production, and vice versa. Since the play's effect is largely satirical it also seems likely that dramatic innovation may contradict rather than complement the satire.

In any case, a crucial defect is the imperfect system of allegory, most obvious in the case of the Dancer himself. His symbolisation as the Death-Wish which the bourgeoisie mistakenly greet as a "vital young man"⁽¹⁾ (his removal of their silk dressing-gowns indicates their disposition, through decadent pleasure seeking, to be infected by the Wish) is confused by his association with the workers themselves. He enters through the audience and is admired by them ---" 'E's a bit of orlright, ain't 'e Bill?"⁽²⁾ It may seem that Auden is identifying the Death-Wish with the Marxist Wave of the Future until the workers too accuse the Dancer of stealing the clothes of the bourgeoisie and the latter declare their intention to liquidate the capitalist state. They have been persuaded by the workers that the Dancer is responsible for forcing them to put on military uniforms, an act seen by the workers as warlike and directed against themselves.

(1) The Dance of Death, p. 11 (For brevity further references to this work are by page number only.)

(2) p. 10

As the middle-class ship of state founders on the rocks of the proletariat, the Dancer himself has an epileptic fit. The middle-class Chorus complain that they cannot go on without him and the doctor is persuaded against his better judgement to give him a reviving injection, by Sir Edward, the aristocrat wielding his traditional power of bribery over the professional man.⁽¹⁾

Finally, the Dancer, now referred to as The Pilot, a variation of his earlier role as Demagogue and the equivalent of Auden's own earlier appeals to a leader-healer, collapses in the middle of his performance, paralysed. He reappears in a wheelchair with one of the bourgeois as his attendant, a situation which recalls the scathing rhetorical question of I, Poems 1930 :

Will you wheel death anywhere
In his invalid chair,
With no affectionate instant
But his attendant ?

In the play, however, the Dancer's appearance is accompanied by the intermingling of bourgeois and worker (the former adopting the peculiar 'folk-speech' of the latter).⁽²⁾ The Dancer provides drink and cigarettes and whilst his will, leaving everything to the workers, is read out, the Chorus enumerate instances of the collapse of social and religious systems, implying that society is a continuous development but without specifying

(1) The doctor may also represent the artist, always vulnerable to economic and social coercion, an analogy Auden draws in the Prologue to The Dyer's Hand, p. 27

(2) p. 32

whether the new proletarian order will be liable to the same fate.

The Dancer dies and Karl Marx pronounces his epitaph:

The instruments of production have been too much for him. He is liquidated.(1)

This statement makes the political significance of The Dance of Death ambiguous to the end, for it seems to have been the combined wishes of the bourgeoisie and the proletariat that have killed the Dancer, and expressed thus (with Mendelssohn's 'Wedding March' introducing Marx and a Dead March accompanying the demise of the Dancer) the statement seems to acquire a sardonic humour akin to that implied in the enunciation of "the bones of war" in a poem of the same year:(2)

Know then, cousin, the major cause of our collapse
Was a distortion in the human plastic by luxury produced.

The equal guilt of the workers and bourgeoisie is matched by equal degrees of satire applied to both. The latter are seen to be unprincipled and egocentric: they respond to the Announcer's call for racial purity by beating up the Jewish manager and when their ship founders they appeal with equal vigour to God and mother. Their attitude to the proletariat reveals a complacent faith in their own mores of health: they advise "What you're needing/ S' a revolution within"(3) and

(1) p. 36

(2) 'Here on the cropped grass of the narrow ridge I stand',
New Oxford Outlook, 1,2 (1933), p. 151

(3) p. 26

advocate Lawrentian forms of recreation:

Be true
To the inner self. Retire to a wood
The will of the blood is the only good.(1)

They are themselves persuaded by the Announcer to adopt Lawrence's attitude to women ("man must be the leader whom women must obey")⁽²⁾ only to discover from one of their own number that to "fly alone/ To the Alone" is the kind of mystical experience best understood by women.

The most obvious criticism of the working-class is that which is crudely implied by their Cockney accents and by the obvious slowness of 'Arry to realise what Ma is saying about the Dancer's responsibility for stealing the clothes of the Chorus. Like the bourgeois, the worker suffers from an Oedipus complex and is berated by his mother for allowing the Dancer to insult her.

The characters of the Announcer and the Manager are also ambiguous. The former would seem to be the misleading voice of public communication, like Cox and Box of the B.B.C. except that at the onset he issues a clear and perceptive warning against taking the Dancer at face value:

The young people turn to him now in their green desire
Perhaps they imagine he'll set their hearts on fire.
Will touch them alive as he touches the barley seed---
Perhaps they'll find they've been very mistaken indeed.(3)

- (1) p. 24
- (2) p. 12
- (3) Loc. cit.

It seems difficult not to accuse Auden of racial prejudice if his portrait of the subservient, mercenary Jew is taken literally. Yet even if this is the case, conversion of the theatre into the Alma Mater club obviously fulfills a real need for both bourgeois and worker, albeit as a sop to a debased nostalgia for tradition and patriotism perversely characteristic of society's aliens. On the whole, therefore, The Dance of Death, whether in reading or performance, seems ambiguous mainly because dramatic innovation and satire react against each other so that either technique as well as content seems to be satirised or the satire like the technique is made to appear deliberately overt and blunted.

Auden's second play, The Dog Beneath the Skin, or Where is Francis?⁽¹⁾ was based on an earlier work, The Chase. Fuller concludes⁽²⁾ that with its involved interrelation of plots The

(1) Published in 1935 and first performed by the Group Theatre in January 1936, it was written in collaboration with Isherwood whose contribution was limited to "Act I, scene ii, with the exception of the song, about half of Act II, scene i, and the Destructive Desmond episode." B.C.Bloomfield, Op. cit., p. 14

(2) Fuller concludes that the typescript (held in Exeter College Library, Oxford) dates from after May 1934 when the vicar's sermon, not typed out in the script but merely referred to as 'the sermon from Life and Letters' appeared in that magazine under the title 'Sermon by an Armament Manufacturer', Life and Letters, X, 53 (1934), pp. 164-7

Also published previously were:

'The Witnesses', The Listener, X (1933), pp. ii-iii (A longer version of what appears in the play)

The First Mad Lady's Song, 'Seen when night was silent', is based on 'I see it often since you've been away', New Verse, 5 (1933), p. 15

.....Continued over.....

Chase is "a politically more ambitious play than Dog, but it has a far less interesting dramatic texture and range, even though it similarly bulges with theatrical devices."⁽¹⁾

Dramatically The Dog Beneath the Skin is less innovatory than The Dance of Death; the audience is not involved (though Alan and Francis descend into the auditorium in Act III, scene vi) and ideological allegory is replaced by more obvious symbolisation and satire making considerable use of pantomime techniques such as dressing up and scene changing. (Auden has said that the pantomime was "the most important single influence" on the play)⁽²⁾ The function of the Chorus is the traditional one of providing a general commentary on the action at the beginning of each scene, the mood they set being serious and reflective by contrast with the lightness of the scenes themselves. The Choruses display Auden's 'panoramic' style evoking the sinister and depressing in the manner characteristic of Poems 1930, whereas the Semi-Choruses and the speech of the characters themselves are written in short lines, rhymed like music-hall or limerick verses. (In Act I, scene i, for example, the characters introduce themselves and are

(2) Continued from previous page.....

'Love, loath to enter', New Oxford Outlook, II (1934), pp. 82-4

'Enter with him these legends', The New Republic, LXXX, (1934), p.267

'Speech from a play', New Verse, 13 (1935), p. 10-11

'The Dog Beneath the Skin' opening chorus', Left Review, 1 (1935), pp. 289-90

(1) Fuller, p. 82

(2) Breon Mitchell, quoted by Fuller, p. 264 (note one to Chpt.4)

then commented upon in a way reminiscent of songs by Gilbert and Sullivan. Somewhat obscure rhyming slang appears in Act III, scene i.)

The Dog Beneath the Skin contains Auden's first use of the device of the Quest, in its fairy tale form, the characteristics of which he defines as follows:

In the traditional Quest, the goal - a Princess, the Fountain of Life, etc., - is known to the hero before he starts. The goal is far distant and he usually does not know in advance the way thither nor the dangers which beset it, but there are other beings who know both and give him accurate directions and warnings. Moreover the goal is publicly recognisable as desirable. Everyone would like to achieve it, but it can only be reached by the Predestined Hero. When three brothers attempt the Quest in turn, the first two are found wanting and fail because of their arrogance and self-conceit, while the youngest succeeds, thanks to his humility and kindness of heart.⁽¹⁾

Alan Norman clearly has these qualities of humility and patience and succeeds in finding Francis, though unlike the traditional quest object, Francis only leaves Pressan Ambo when Alan sets out to look for him and, as a dog, chooses Alan as his master in preference to the other villagers. Significantly, Alan calls the dog 'Francis' "for luck"⁽²⁾, luck being the essential predestined co-operation of contingency which the hero automatically enjoys. Luck, in fact, is what distinguishes the Quest hero from the figure of the exile who must take:

(1) The Dyer's Hand, p. 162

(2) The Dog Beneath the Skin, p. 29 (Further quotations from this work are given by page number only.)

.... the empty
Selfish journey
Between the needless risk
And the endless safety.(1)

The quester rather than the exile fulfills the role society
(according to the poet whose dog formerly inhabited the skin) and
in particular "the sedentary and learned"(2) allot him:

We have conjured up all the vigours and all the splendours,
skilfully transferred our envy into an image of the
universal mother, for which the lad of seventeen whom
we have always sent and will send again against our
terrors, gladly immolates himself.(3)

This applies to Alan in so far as Francis is the 'bête noire' of
the villagers but not in the sense that he himself gives any
definite reason for undertaking the mission: the good of the
community is the only ideal held up to him.

The Quest in The Dog Beneath the Skin results in the
discovery of self rather than of any prized object. In these
terms the real achievement seems to be Francis's though its nature
is confused by the symbolic meaning of the skin. Having donned it
after a row with his father, Francis has remained in the skin for
ten years during which time his main observation seems to have been
how "obscene, cruel, hypocritical, mean (and) vulgar"(4) human
beings are and "with what a mixture of fear, bullying, and
condescending kindness you treat those whom you consider your

(1) pp. 14-5
(2) p. 146
(3) Loc. cit.
(4) p. 173

inferiors, but on whom you are dependent for your pleasures."⁽¹⁾
By implication this criticism of human nature extends to himself though his verdict on the value of overhearing the villagers' real views of him --- "perhaps it did me good, too"⁽²⁾--- seems rather casual.

The meaning of the play as a whole also depends crucially on the symbolic significance of the dog skin. In Act III, scene iv it establishes its own identity, independent of its former owner and of its present inhabitant, in opposition to the clock. The audience is said to associate the latter with "an immensely complicated system of awards and punishments"⁽³⁾ whereas when the dog appears "they start sighing, thinking of spring, meadows and goodness knows what else."⁽⁴⁾ Even more revealing is the villagers' reaction as the dog sniffs round them:

Isn't he sweet
Here is some meat.
If he were to choose
Me, I couldn't refuse.
If he'd come to me
I'd give him cake for tea.⁽⁵⁾

This very banality guarantees that its object is at once highly valued yet open to 'popularisation', that it is, in fact, love. The symbolisation may derive from Lane's view of traditional methods of education, summarised by Auden thus:

- (1) p. 173
- (2) p. 172
- (3) p. 147
- (4) Loc. cit.
- (5) p. 29

Our way of bringing up children, by a combination of moral commands, forgiveness, penances and punishments -- the Pharisaic law-- implants in the unconscious a guilty hatred of God as he is consciously presented to us.(1)

The Dog, therefore, is the real source of salvation and the reverse of the unconscious's notion of God. The same sort of reversal accounts for the play's title: The Man Beneath the Dogskin would be literally accurate. By contrast, the clock retains its usual connotation in Auden's work as the arbiter of authority, dramatised in the sinister song of the Leaders of Semi-Chorus I as "the Two", by which Auden seems to mean the Ego and Superego. As such it is the natural recourse for those, like Mildred Luce and, above all, the established church, who seek in authority revenge for their frustration and bitterness. (That the Vicar's sermon in Act III, scene vi first appeared under the title 'Sermon by an Armament Manufacturer' has obvious significance.)

Love, then, is implicitly associated with the instinctual life⁽²⁾ rather than with traditional mores, though such a conclusion is modified by the action of the play, especially

- (1) 'To Unravel Unhappiness', The Listener, XII, 307 (1934), p. xi Fuller notes (p. 265, note 10) that the idea of Francis's diary may have come from this review in which Auden praises Joanna Field's attempts to analyse herself by keeping a diary.
- (2) Spears quotes (p. 95) Groddeck's comment on "the curious role played by dogs in the secret life of man....which throw a bright light on man's pharisaical abhorrence of perverse feelings and practices."

those satirical incidents which make up Alan's journey, the satire being generally applied either to political or psychological situations. Socialism is implicitly recommended as an alternative to the behaviour of the Ostnian monarchy, typified by the apparent seriousness of the tyrant king's rhetorical question "Are we not all socialists nowadays?"⁽¹⁾ The satirical 'bite' of the scene is, perhaps, dissipated by the very exaggeration of the king's concern for those he is about to execute, producing an effect of grotesque fantasy similar to that of Alice in Wonderland.⁽²⁾ Similarly, the satirical presentation of Westland, the fascist state, as a lunatic asylum is undermined, not because the Nazis were not mad but because the lunatics' madness is first of all comedy of a sort, involving the tying up of Alan, into which Nazi ideas are introduced through the loudspeaker, ideas which lunatics cannot be blamed for accepting though sane men would be.

The Red Light district is less obviously the product of capitalism (in spite of the claim of the boss of the Cosy Corner, which caters for homosexuality, that "every English Lord come here")⁽³⁾

- (1) In this context the dialogue in Act II, scene vi between Alan's feet, the right upper, the left lower class seems an unwarranted sacrifice of seriousness. The stage direction virtually recommending the omission of this scene from a production of the play suggests that it was not written for its dramatic effectiveness either.
- (2) The executing and oblivious king presumably owes something to Lewis Carroll's work.
- (3) p. 60

Similarly, Grabstein, the financier, whilst his every response is mercenary,⁽¹⁾ recognises Alan's honesty and seems pathetically loveless rather than manifestly evil. His materialistic attitude to art --- "I've nothing against poets, provided they make good"⁽²⁾ seems much less culpable than either Destructive Desmond's incitement of middle-class philistinism or the behaviour of Grabstein's own son, "the Poundian egotist"⁽³⁾, who believes he is the "only real person in the whole world."⁽⁴⁾

Nor is the exact nature of Auden's social criticism made clear elsewhere in the play. The dedication calls upon the revolutionary to become aware of "the power of the genteel dragon", presumably the bourgeoisie, and clearly the principal villagers come into this class. Yet Francis's final indictment and the successive criticisms of the Chorus seem directed at human nature in general rather than at a specific class. Indeed, the first speech of the Chorus introduces a vital qualification of Auden's earlier Marxist belief that "men are changed by what they do"⁽⁵⁾ when it states that "man is changed by his living; but not fast enough."⁽⁶⁾

(1) His name and behaviour constitute an even more blatant example of anti-semitic, exaggerated satire than does the treatment of the Manager of the Alma Mater club in The Dance of Death.

(2) p. 87

(3) Fuller, p. 86

(4) p. 95

(5) 'Here on the cropped grass of the narrow ridge I stand', New Oxford Outlook, 1,2 (1933), pp. 148-52

(6) p. 13

The theory of psychosomatic illness dominates the psychological analysis of the play, its features being stated more directly than anywhere else in Auden's writing:

You who are amorous and active, pause here an instant.
See passion transformed into rheumatism; rebellion
into paralysis; power into a tumour.
That which was hated, became hateful; that which was
creative, a stalking destruction; that which was
loving, a tormenting flame
For those who reject their gifts: choose here their
punishment.(1)

But if the theory is clear, its illustration is not, for while it adds point to the satire on surgery, the performance of which has acquired for the participants the status of a religious rite, it is, as Fuller observes, difficult to apply the psychosomatic interpretation to the bullet in Chimp Eagle's bowel, or, indeed, to see the relevance of the surgeon's tendency to speak of the operation in the terminology of a cricket match.(2)

More important than any strict psychological theorising are the indications of the state love is in. The grossly narcissistic nature of romance is abundantly apparent from the behaviour of the husband and wife in Paradise Park, declaring

(1) p. 102

(2) Fuller, p. 87 He also notes details in the Chorus of Act III, scene v, drawn from Groddeck's Exploring the Unconscious, identifying the connection of the first sins with the rectal area and the idea that mental energy is expended on warding off pain from the lower water-logged areas of the body. As Fuller says, the Chorus is really directing its remarks to all kinds of escapism and the Groddeckian symptoms do no more than testify to Auden's memory for such peculiarities.

that they are going to be lovers all their lives and, more crucially, from Alan's making love to a shop window dummy in the belief that it is Miss Lou Vipond (her name suggests 'viper'). Making Alan reply to his own questions falsetto may seem to exaggerate his narcissism but even this episode is rendered somewhat equivocal by the subsequent Waiters' Chorus whose praise of love as the means to all kinds of fulfilment ("the landlocked state shall get its port today")⁽¹⁾ is reminiscent of the exuberance of Ode III of The Orators and something Auden clearly delights in.

The truest love seen in the play is that invoked by the Semi-Choruses and the Chorus to help Alan on his journey. It is essentially the 'arête'⁽²⁾ demanded of all who go on quest, which is indistinguishable from the luck that inevitably accompanies them. The Quest over, the quester returns to his former, normal self, and to do so must sever his connection with the luck of the Quest, resuming, as it were, contingent relations with reality and discovering thereby that the faithfulness of love itself depends on its propagation by both parties:

But when at last
These dangers past
His grown desire
Of legends tire
O then, love, standing
At legends' ending,
Claim your reward

(1) p. 143

(2) See The Dyer's Hand, p. 163

Submit your neck
To the ungrateful stroke
Of his reluctant sword
That starting back
His eyes may look
Amazed as you
Find what he wanted
Is faithful too
But disenchanted
Your simplest love.(1)

The issue of the play does not depend on love, however, nor upon social or psychological theories which are found to be equally inadequate:

Do not speak of a change of heart, meaning five hundred
a year and a room of one's own,
As if that were all that is necessary. In these islands
alone there are some forty-seven million hearts, each
of four chambers:
You cannot avoid the issue by becoming simply a community
digger,
O you who prattle about the wonderful Middle Ages:
You who expect the millenium after a few trifling
adjustments.(2)

Neither this negative assessment nor the Marxist slogan "To each his need: from each his power"(3) contains the play's final message. The premium is now on choice; Chimp Eagle explains his condition in the phrase "I forgot /My choice and lot"(4) and drugs have obviously deprived Sorbo Lamb of his capacity to choose. Health is still the objective but its achievement is

(1) pp. 27-8

(2) p. 155

(3) p. 180 It is not necessary to assume, surely, that Alan and Francis join the Communist party, for there is no direct suggestion that they do so.

(4) p. 109

now dependent on a conscious act of will. "Choose therefore that you may recover"⁽¹⁾ implies that the main error is indecisiveness, that is, the abdication of conscious control of the instincts. As he later says:

The daemonic powers are helpless by themselves, since it is the day life that must not only find the means to the ends they desire, but even discover the ends themselves.⁽²⁾

The operation of the will may be said to be the subject of The Ascent of F.6 . Clearly the play's main interest lies in the person of Ransom himself, though marginal comment is made on the propensity of 'ordinary people' to adopt public heroes as relief from squalid, boring lives, personified in the anonymous existence of Mr. and Mrs. A., and on the arcane patriotism and pursuit of vested interest in the characters of James Ransom, Lord Stagnantle, General Dellaby-Couch and Lady Isabel. Since Mrs. Ransom shares Auden's view that one of the most persistent regressions is the Oedipal attachment, she has deliberately deprived Michael of love, lavishing it instead on his elder brother, James. As a result Michael has become an ascetic, classically eccentric and

(1) p. 179

(2) 'Jacob and the Angel', The New Republic, CI, 1308 (1939), p. 292

(3) It was written with Isherwood who claims responsibility for the plot and says that it was based on a play Auden had already completed called 'The Search'; 'A Conversation on Tape', London Magazine, vol. I (1961), p. 51. The Ascent of F.6 was published in 1936 and revised for its first production on 26th February, 1937. For details of this revision, see B.C.Bloomfield, Op. cit., p. 11

a famous mountaineer.

Michael regards F.6 as his 'fate',⁽¹⁾ and yet must be persuaded to undertake the climb on behalf of the British government. His success will not only quell the native uprising and make him a national hero but, according to legend, as the first white man to reach the summit, he will rule both British and Ostnian Sudoland. Climbing itself has an ambiguous meaning. To Ransom it is a way of working out his sensuality without inviting the self-gratification of a loving response; he receives, he says, "such vigour as the impassive embraces of this sullen rock afford, from which no mastery can elicit a gratifying response, nor defeat sighs capable of despairing misinterpretation."⁽²⁾ It is also a unique combination of end and means: Blavek and his party are clearly debasing the art by merely wanting to get to the top, "hauling each other up like sacks."⁽³⁾ Ransom does not seem to realise its further function as a means of escape (though he is overwhelmed with disgust at the prospect of the publicity they will receive afterwards) and apparently excepts himself from the list of great climbers "to whom a mountain is a mother."⁽⁴⁾

(1) The Ascent of F.6, p. 43 (Further quotations from this work are given by page number only.)

(2) p. 15

(3) p. 78

(4) p. 86 In this respect the dedication of the play to Auden's elder brother, the geologist and mountaineer, John Bicknell Auden, must seem strange. The cryptic dedicatory verse appears to express regret for the severing of friendship in "foolish battle" and the resemblance of Ransom's climb to the struggle of the artist may suggest that the play has some autobiographical basis. Such a basis is, in any case substantially irrelevant to the play as a whole.

While, therefore, the climb may be "a symbol of the 'geste'..... a symbol of the act of aggression"⁽¹⁾, it is not consciously realised as such by Ransom.

Equally suggestive are Ransom's relations with his four companions, whose status is itself in doubt. Fuller thinks they represent the four faculties: the Doctor is Intuition, Shawcross Feeling, Gunn Sensation, and the botanist, Lamp Thought. Ransom is the will governing all four.⁽²⁾ This allegory is substantiated in part by the additional significance of Shawcross's name. Shaw was the name under which T.E. Lawrence enlisted in the R.A.F. in an attempt to throw off his Arabian fame, Lawrence being the acknowledged model for Ransom.⁽³⁾ Thus Shawcross is opposed in attitude and temperament to his leader and, in the passion of hero-worship, constitutes Ransom's greatest practical burden, both in the personal attention Shawcross demands and in so far that his arguments with Gunn jeopardize the expedition. This aside, however, the allegory is far less conspicuous than the personalities of the characters themselves, especially Ransom.

(1) Howard Griffin, 'A dialogue with W.H.Auden', Hudson Review, III 4 (1951), p. 575

(2) Fuller also notes, p. 92, the similarities between the details of Ransom's expedition and the 1924 expedition to Everest, and Scott's journey to the South Pole.

(3) See 'A dialogue with W.H.Auden', p. 583

Ransom's own name is puzzling. To see him primarily as the price to be paid for national security, as, in fact, "the lad of seventeen whom we have always sent and will send again against our terrors",⁽¹⁾ implies that the terrors are ours rather than his, whereas it seems essential to Ransom's individualism that the contest should be his alone. Equally paradoxical is Ransom's exercise of will power itself, the dominant characteristic of the Truly Strong Man. The Abbot makes clear that the spiritual leadership of the masses which Ransom feels called to, necessitates the exercise of the will and "the human will is from the Demon",⁽²⁾ that is, the Mother (presumably because she inhibits the son's instinctual life). But Ransom has apparently superannuated his instincts by the self-denial he practises and seems heroic for that very reason. Equally, the vague issue of saving the masses seems quite unconnected with Ransom's actual preoccupations on the mountain; in fact, his general attitude is typified by his first autocratic remark:

Under I cannot tell how many of these green slate roofs,
the stupid peasants are making their stupid children.⁽³⁾

Indeed, his expressed view, as quoted by his brother, is that by comparison with the history of the earth and of man "the life of the individual has no real existence or importance apart from the great whole."⁽⁴⁾

(1) The Dog Beneath the Skin, p. 146

(2) p. 58

(3) p. 14

(4) p. 90

These paradoxes are accentuated in the play's finale. After their chess match James dies apparently as a result of the Demon's shake of the head. Michael is accused by the Chorus of killing him but protests that the Demon "gave the sign". Though James's realisation that his life has been directed towards power not virtue or knowledge (does he really seem to be the kind of character who could honestly have believed his own motives to be 'pure' ?) may be thought to emphasise his depth as a character in his own right, his death symbolises Michael's conquest of his own unconscious desire for power. It is his subsequent and conscious attempt to deny responsibility for the death by blaming it on the Demon that calls forth the victims of his 'pride' to testify against him. Allegorically this means that the will cannot expect support from the faculties, a thesis opposed to the Freudian precept underlying the play that the psyche itself demands power rather than virtue or knowledge.

Ransom appeals to the crystal, the reflection of his unconscious wishes, which reveals Mr. and Mrs. A. still appealing to him as a saviour. This revelation leads the Abbot to confess that he has misunderstood Ransom's temptation:

The temptation is not the Demon. If there were no Demon, there would be no temptation.(1)

(1) p. 119

Since the Demon turns out, to Ransom's obvious surprise, to be his own mother (dressed as a young woman to emphasise the incestuous element in the Oedipus complex), this is tantamount to saying merely that the Oedipus relationship is not an end in itself (a somewhat superfluous reflection since it could hardly be visualised as such). Ransom withdraws his charge against the Demon and indeed seeks to protect it, an action which can be no more than a gesture of self-abnegation which nonetheless cannot save him (though it may be assumed that he dies contentedly--- the Oedipal attachment does bring peace).⁽¹⁾ The final Hidden Chorus imply that his death is actually due to those who "have power exerted,/ In one convulsive throe"⁽²⁾ and who in turn "to dissolution go". The introduction of such anonymous agents leaves Ransom's death a matter of final confusion.

The Ascent of F.6 may be said to illustrate the ambivalent nature of consciousness and its relation to neurosis, itself an ambivalent one. The more one is conscious, the greater the danger of developing neurotic traits: the consciousness which gives rise to neurosis may equally be instrumental in dispersing it. The status of the will reflects this ambivalence for, while

- (1) Significantly Auden reverts to Homer Lane's indictment of education which associates mother-love with morality in the child's mind. Compare Mrs. Ransom's:

A saint am I and a saint are you
It's perfectly, perfectly, perfectly true.

...with Lane's view that "to regress in imagination to the womb, and to postpone real life till heaven, are merely two ways of escape from the same responsibility," Talks to Parents and Teachers, (New York, 1949), p. 127

- (2) p. 97

the individual's sense of his own will power depends on his believing it to be independent of unconscious influences, this very belief must be undermined by one conscious of it.

Auden presents his views of Communism, psychology and Christianity in less equivocal form in three essays which comprise one of his main prose statements of this period: 'The Group Movement and the Middle Classes', Oxford and the Groups, edit. by R.H.S. Crossman, (London, 1934), 'The Good Life', Christianity and the Social Revolution, edit. by J.Lewis, (London, 1935), and 'Psychology and Art Today', The Arts Today, edit. by G.Grigson, (London, 1935).

The political situation in Germany leaves him in no doubt that any relevant ideology must propose social solutions. It is the lack of such a programme that finally debars D.H.Lawrence from serious consideration⁽¹⁾, a deficiency which Auden now explains by adopting a quasi-Jungian⁽²⁾ distinction between the personal and the impersonal unconscious. Lawrence's advocacy of instinctual freedom applies to the impersonal unconscious:

....a piece of advice like 'Anger is just. Justice is never just' which in private life is a plea for

- (1) " The Plumed Serpent is a day-dream. It is noteworthy that his hero, the gypsy or gamekeeper, is dependent, even in a sense parasitic, on the middle class." 'The Group Movement and the Middle Classes', p. 96
- (2) The fact that "the difference between them is expressed symbolically in dreams, e.g. motor-cars and manufactured things express the personal unconscious, horses etc., the impersonal", 'Psychology and Art Today', p. 16, suggests a resemblance to Jung's distinction between the private images of the personal unconscious and the archetypal images of the Collective Unconscious.

emotional honesty is rotten political advice, where it means "beat up those who disagree with you." (1)

Whilst Auden still believes that "what can be loved can be cured", (2) he is readier to acknowledge the human weaknesses of ignorance, impatience and fear which, in practice, prevent cure from being effective. Just as ignorance "begets the moralistic censor as the only means of control" (3) so that "impulses which are denied expression remain undeveloped in the personal unconscious" (4), so impatience prevents the absorption of life-hostile forces. The two real dangers, indeed, are that "for those brought up on repression the mere release of the unconscious is sufficient to give a sense of value and meaning in life" (5) and, as it were, conversely, that the psyche is particularly susceptible to ideals "because they keep it in good conceit with itself." (6) Not surprisingly, war, which exhibits both characteristics, has fulfilled this role best. Auden now expresses doubt as to whether the group movement is, in practice, free from erosion by competing loyalty between groups or the likelihood that their missionary success will produce groups too large for effective therapy to occur.

His faith in psychology and Communism is now seen to be mutually conditioned. He emphasises that both allow the

(1) 'Psychology and Art Today', p. 17

(2) 'The Good Life', p. 39

(3) Ibid., p. 38

(4) Loc. cit.

(5) 'The Group Movement and the Middle Classes', p. 97

(6) Ibid., p. 101

individual the full exercise of free will⁽¹⁾ and individuality but accuses psychology of failing to credit the neurotic with having a real grievance:

It should say to him, "Your phantasies are just, but powerless, and a distorted version of something which, if you choose to act, you can alter."⁽²⁾

On the other hand Communism implicitly disregards the principle of parabolic didacticism which enjoins abstention "not only from physical violence, but also from all kinds of dogmatic generalisation and propaganda--- from spiritual coercion":⁽³⁾

- (1) Auden later criticises psychology precisely because it measures normality statistically; see 'Criticism in a Mass Society', The Intent of the Critic, edit. D.A. Stauffer, (Princeton, 1941), p. 139
- (2) 'The Good Life', p. 47. The consistency and indeed seriousness of Auden's appreciation of psychology are held to question by his review of Joanna Field's attempt to discover why she was unhappy; 'To Unravel Unhappiness', The Listener, XII, 307 (1934), pp. viii, xi. He is very enthusiastic about her attempt which he thinks particularly important because "nine-tenths of the people one knows do not consciously realise that they are unhappy". Her methods of self-analysis seem preferable to psycho-analysis by a doctor, he thinks, because "few people have the time or money for it, and one ought to be able to discover a method which one can work oneself, taking the forgotten incidents of childhood as given, and working from the present."
- (3) Ibid., p. 38

The only method of teaching it recognises is parabolic. You cannot convince anyone of anything until they have reached the stage of development when they can relate it to their personal experience--- i.e., until they can convince themselves.(1)

(He admits, and cites as a weakness of psychology, that the process of transference necessitates the psychologist's making an authoritarian claim on the patient "in the name of something greater.")⁽²⁾ Practically, it may be said that whereas Communism seems attractive as the solution of England's social inequality, psychology is still necessary to explain the appeal of fascism.⁽³⁾

At this point the claims of art bias Auden's thinking. He refutes Freud's claim that art is merely fantasy and a method of compensating for deficiencies in life, by comparing the struggle shared by psychology and poetry to "reconcile the unwilling subject and object"⁽⁴⁾; "since psychological truth depends so largely on context, poetry, the parabolic approach, is the only adequate medium for psychology."⁽⁵⁾ Though this may be too exclusive a claim to make for poetry, Auden's observation that art has more in common with dreams than with fantasy since

(1) 'The Good Life', p.38

(2) Ibid., p.45

(3) Auden's most eccentric attempt to compare psychology and Communism is his statement that "there is a rough and ready parallelism between the Conscious and the Unconscious, and the Masses and the Communist Party"; 'Honest Doubt', New Verse, 21 (1936), p.16. His point is, presumably, that the unconscious depends, like the masses, on being organised to release its full potential.

(4) Introduction to The Poet's Tongue, edit. Auden & J.Garrett, (London, 1935), p.ix.

(5) Loc. cit.

it is symbolic and purposeful,⁽¹⁾ and that the artist shares with the scientist a desire to "understand the mechanism of the trap"⁽²⁾ (as opposed to the neurotic who merely wishes to escape it) seems perceptive and valid. While insisting that art is mainly a conscious process and therefore not available to psychoanalysis, Auden's final categorisation may be seen as conceding psychology's case that art, if its origin is not escapist, does fulfil this human need uniquely:

There must always be two kinds of art, escape-art, for man needs escape as he needs food and deep sleep, and parable-art, that art which shall teach man to unlearn hatred and learn love.⁽³⁾

Fittingly, the summary of his psychological thesis is itself equivocal, the individual's ideal driving force being conceptualised as "'The unconscious directed by reason'"⁽⁴⁾

Theoretically, therefore, psychology and Communism impinge to approximately the same extent upon the freedom and autonomy of art, so judgement by its criterion leaves them still equally viable. There are, however, noticeable attempts in the essays quoted to find in favour of Communism, the first, at least, being notably spurious. Auden argues, apparently seriously, that since nutrition is, biologically, anterior to reproduction, the

(1) 'Psychology and Art Today', p. 9

(2) Ibid., p. 6

(3) Ibid., p. 19

(4) This is part of the table at the end of 'Psychology and Art Today' to illustrate three periods of history, this entry appearing under the heading 'Personal Driving Forces' in the Twentieth Century.

Communist approach is the more basic one. He also quotes Malinowski's discovery that the Oedipus complex is peculiar to patriarchal communities as evidence that social structure is important in influencing character formation.⁽¹⁾

A striking feature of 'The Good Life' is the prominence it gives to Christianity. Auden seems positively anxious to 'square' both psychology and Communism with Christian principles. He compares the Christian belief that man is fallen with the psychology of neurosis, concluding that the balance of conscious and unconscious impulses in the "ideally cured patient" is only deterministic in the sense of "'in his will is our peace'"⁽²⁾, an equation which suggests that the biblical definition of freedom is fundamentally important to him.

All three dogmas accredit the equal potential value of every individual, Communism being, Auden thinks, the only political theory that accommodates this view. Accepted that no political movement is truly Christian, it must be asked whether Communism is not the least hostile and whether Christianity should not, therefore, accept it more readily.

After 1936 Auden's poetry gives the impression of considerable diversification. Letters from Iceland⁽³⁾ combines detailed

- (1) Both observations are made in 'The Good Life', p. 46 and p. 47 respectively.
- (2) Ibid., p. 39
- (3) Auden went to Iceland with Louis MacNeice and Michael Roberts in the summer of 1936; Letters from Iceland, dedicated to Auden's father was published in 1937. The only unsigned section, 'Hetty to Nancy' was written by MacNeice; see New Verse, 26-7 (1937), p. 36

prose sections on the geography, history and culture of Iceland with Auden's most sustained example of light verse, the 'Letter to Lord Byron', while the 'Last Will and Testament' of Auden and MacNeice provides the added interest of esoteric jokes. The rehabilitation of light verse (she is, poor girl, "under a sad weather")⁽¹⁾ is not only desirable in itself but because Auden regards it as a barometer of social health, "for poetry which is at the same time light and adult can only be written in a society which is both integrated and free."⁽²⁾

In ideology Letters from Iceland advances both political and psychological theory in brief but dogmatic terms. Auden's acceptance of the benefits of neurosis leads to modification of his educational theory, expressed in the couplet:

'Let each child have that's in our care
As much neurosis as the child can bear.'⁽³⁾

The designation of man as "sole author of his terror and his content"⁽⁴⁾ is less significant than either Auden's apparently flippant description of himself as a "selfish pink old Liberal"⁽⁵⁾ or his pessimism as to the likelihood of any social revolution relying on the average Englishman who "dreads the ogre, but

- (1) 'Letter to Lord Byron', part one, Letters from Iceland, p. 22
The equally famous ballads 'Miss Gee' and 'Victor', both published in 1937, seem to exploit a taste for the macabre not obviously conducive to or derived from the kind of social maturity here advocated.
- (2) Introduction to The Oxford Book of Light Verse, (1938), p. xx
- (3) 'Letter to Lord Byron', part four, p. 206
- (4) 'Auden and MacNeice; Their Last Will and Testament', p. 236
- (5) 'Letter to Lord Byron', part two, p. 203

(he) dreads yet more /Those who conceivably might set him free".⁽¹⁾

The overall impression and design of the book, however, is almost anti-intellectual. It is our "vulgar error"⁽²⁾ to intellectualise, especially in moral matters, to observe only "the formal interdiction from the garden"⁽³⁾ while forgetting "the rusting apple core we're clutching still."⁽⁴⁾ Auden now condemns both the impersonality and vulgarity of modern life, whose "antiseptic objects"⁽⁵⁾ make dandruff, night-starvation and B.O. issues of crucial moment, and art which panders to it. The motif of Letters from Iceland might, in fact, be said to be friendship:

Art, if it doesn't start there, at least ends,
Whether aesthetics like the thought or not,
In an attempt to entertain our friends;⁽⁶⁾

The most valuable bequest of the 'Last Will and Testament' is "the quite considerable spark /Of private love and goodness which never leaves /An age, however awful, in the utter dark."⁽⁷⁾ It indeed seems likely that the book would have brought its contemporary readers a sense of "the common faith from which we've all dissented, /Back to the hands, the feet, the faces."⁽⁸⁾

(1) 'Letter to Lord Byron', part two, p. 56.

(2) 'Letter to R. H. S. Crossman, Esq.', p. 93.

(3) Loc. cit.

(4) Loc. cit.

(5) Letter to Lord Byron', part two, p. 51.

(6) Ibid., part three, p. 103.

(7) 'Auden and MacNeice: Their Last Will and Testament', p. 257.

(8) 'Letter to R. H. S. Crossman, Esq.', p. 91.

By contrast, 'Spain',⁽¹⁾ is Auden's most directly political work. Its effectiveness (it remains the only memorable poem about the Spanish Civil War) lies in its apocalyptic, incantatory manner and technique of dramatising the principle of choice by personifying the Life Force, only to make it disclaim its apparent independence of man --- "I am your choice, your decision. Yes, I am Spain". This technique has been criticised for giving the impression of detachment and a greater interest in rhetoric than in the conflict itself. Orwell attacked the poet's apparent acceptance of "guilt in the necessary murder", saying that the line could only have been written "by a person to whom murder is at most a word."⁽²⁾ This accusation is effectively answered in Auden's essay of two years later in which he explains his view. "It is always wrong in the absolute sense to kill , but all killing is not equally bad; it does matter who is

- (1) Auden was in Spain from January to March, 1937; 'Spain' appeared in April of that year, printed with 'Madrid' by Raul Gonzales Tunon in edition no. five of a pamphlet series, 'Les Poètes du Monde défendent le Peuple Espagnol'. 'Spain 1937' was published by Faber and Faber in May of the same year. Quotation is from the earlier edition.

Conflicting accounts are given of Auden's activities in Spain; Spender says he acted as an ambulance driver ('W.H. Auden and His Poetry', The Atlantic Monthly, CXCLII (1953)) but Claud Cockburn suggests that he first tried to walk to the front, gave up and then did nothing particularly 'committed' or constructive ('Conversation with Claud Cockburn,' The Review, 11-12 (1964), p. 51)

- (2) 'Inside the Whale', Such, Such Were the Joys, (New York, 1953), p. 184

killed."⁽¹⁾ The poet's implied impatience with the trivia of party organisation, "the flat ephemeral pamphlet and the boring meeting", is less easy to refute. (The republication of 'A Communist to Others',⁽²⁾ with "brothers" substituted for "comrades" in the first line may be taken as further evidence of decreasing interest in Marxism.) Most damning of all is the effective equation of victory with justice in the poem's conclusion:

History to the defeated
May say 'Alas' but cannot help nor pardon.

Fittingly, the critic to identify this travesty was Auden himself, writing:

To say this is to equate goodness with success. It would have been bad enough if I had ever held this wicked doctrine, but that I should have stated it simply because it sounded to me rhetorically effective is quite inexcusable.⁽³⁾

If the poem is vindicated overall by the rightness of its cause, its strict, artistic justification seems to depend on understanding the attitude to writing about war Auden puts forward ten years later using another historic example:

- (1) Untitled essay in I Believe, edit. Clifton Fadiman, (London, 1939), p. 30. See also Auden's letter to M. K. Spears, Spears, p. 157, note 10.

Significantly, however, Auden altered the line to :

"The conscious acceptance of guilt in the fact of murder". Fuller, (p.259), defending the poem, reminds us that Auden's subject is not Marxist revolution but the defence of Spain.)

- (2) First published in 1932, it appears, untitled, as XIV in Look, Stranger! (1937).

- (3) 'Foreword' to Collected Shorter Poems, (1966), p. 15.

If one reads through the mass of versified trash inspired, for instance, by the Lidice Massacre, one cannot avoid the conclusion that what was really bothering the versifiers was a feeling of guilt at not feeling horrorstruck enough. Could a good poem have been written on the subject? Possibly. One that revealed this lack of feeling, that told how when he read the news, the poet, like you and I, dear reader, went on thinking about his fame or his lunch, and how glad he was that he was not one of the victims.(1)

This is honesty of an exaggerated kind and its application to 'Spain' is better understood in the light of the prayer which the artist is said, in Letters from Iceland, to pray "ever so gently":

'Let me find pure all that can happen.
Only uniqueness is success! For instance,
Let me perceive the images of history,
All that I push away with doubt and travel,
Today's and yesterday's, alike like bodies.'(2)

'Spain' then, mirrors the ambiguous position of the artist in relation to real issues. Significantly, it is Auden's last directly political work. Spender records that when he asked Auden in 1949 why he had ceased to be concerned with politics he replied that the failure to stop Fascism in Spain had made him realise that nothing else he could do would be effective.(3)

Auden's uncertainty as to the role of art is reflected in two pieces of 1937 and 1938 respectively: The Sportsmen: A parable(4)

(1) 'Squares and Oblongs', in Poets at Work, edit. C. D. Abbot, (New York, 1948), p. 174.

(2) 'Letter to R. H. S. Crossman, Esq.', Letters from Iceland, p. 92.

(3) 'W. H. Auden and his Poetry', The Atlantic Monthly, CXCI, (1953), pp. 74 - 79.

(4) New Verse, 31 - 2, (1938), pp. 2 - 4.

and his review of Christopher Caudwell's book Illusion and Reality.⁽¹⁾ The former vies with The Dance of Death as Auden's crudest fabrication of a political allegory, lacking the depth of meaning usually found in a parable. It traces the changes in the historical status of the artist (the sportsman) from his unchallenged role as bard through the highly-skilled versifier of the eighteenth century supported by a patron, to the modern writer, the paucity of whose subjects led him to make poetry a matter of arbitrary and stringent rules. News comes from Russia of a society in which the writer regains his bardic position and among varied reactions the dignified withdrawal of Eliot (the student of eagles) is most prominent. The remainder react with disdain to the villagers' (working classes) suggestion that they should help build their own socialist state. They eventually abandon their art to crude imitation of what the villagers want, a deception which is successful only with the youngest of them. If Auden is condemning his own generation of poets either for aestheticism or hack work, he stands condemned himself, not merely as one of them, but through the oversimplification, amounting to complacency, of this piece.

Illusion and Reality is described by Auden as "a Marxist book on the aesthetics of poetry".⁽²⁾ His review of it is significant for its concentration on Caudwell's refutation of the Freudian

(1) New Verse, 25, (1937), pp. 20 - 22.
(2) Ibid., p. 20.

view of art as the product of neurosis. What redeems art is its essential social content, since communication itself arose from the necessity of achieving organisation in communities. Thus, in Caudwell's potent expression, quoted by Auden, "although there is a similar psychological mechanism at work, art is no more neurosis than thought is dream."⁽¹⁾ Auden also quotes from Caudwell's explanation of the complementary working of art and science, reasoning which clearly appeals to his scientific bent and further emphasises the objective value of art. The review, in fact, is more concerned with saving art from psychological reduction than in making it, as Illusion and Reality does, a facet of Marxist theory as a whole.

In any of these contexts On the Frontier⁽²⁾ must seem incongruous. The play deals with the hostility between Ostnia, the decadent monarchy, and Westland, the fascist dictatorship, the countries which form the "two sides" of all the plays written by Auden and Isherwood. Most of the action is between two families, the pseudo-academic, liberal Thorvalds of Westland and the reactionary, bourgeois Vrodny of Ostnia. This is

(1) New Verse, 25, (1937), p. 21.

(2) Written with Isherwood, and dedicated to Benjamin Britten, it was published in 1938. Auden's contribution is greater than in any of the other plays since "he not only wrote all the poetry but also a big share of the prose"; Christopher Isherwood, 'A Conversation on Tape', London Magazine, vol.I, 3 (1961), p.51

managed dramatically by placing each family on opposite sides of the stage, though as if in a single room. (A stage direction requires that "the concentration of lighting should heighten the impression of an invisible barrier between the two halves of the stage.")⁽¹⁾ Each family is oblivious of the other with the exception of their children, Eric Thorvald and Anna Vrodney, who enjoy a kind of telepathic relationship which brings them together in the centre of the stage at the end of Act II, scene i, and in the play's finale. The other main characters are Valerian, the Westland industrialist, described in the 'Notes on the Characters' (a feature unique in the Auden-Isherwood plays) as "tall, suave, courteous, sardonic"⁽²⁾, and the Leader, Westland's ailing overlord.

The play is designated a melodrama, a form which seems to have been chosen for the development it allows of crude political allegory and absurdly inflated personalities. There are three political 'targets', the main one being simply all those who perpetuate the hatred which caused the war, that is, everyone in the play except Anna and Eric. This very breadth of moral responsibility (in Eric's rather prim view "none are innocent, none"⁽³⁾) dissipates its force especially when the identically tyrannous techniques of warmongering and hostile

(1) On the Frontier, p. 43 (Further quotations from this work are given by page number only.)

(2) p. 12

(3) p. 120

attitudes of both sides are presented with such exact symmetry, for example, during most of the family discussions of the war and whilst the leaders of both countries speak on the radio.

The other two 'targets', largely unrelated to the first, are industrialism (personified in Valerian) which supplies both the machine of war and the means of peace-time government in both countries, and the redress of the Leftist prisoners and workers who are oppressed by capitalist society and presumably looked to as an alternative to it. The case against capitalism is weakened considerably by the fact that Valerian is the most interesting, in fact the only, 'character' of any depth in the play. He may be said to be the logical culmination of the Truly Strong Man and it seems clear that Auden and Isherwood take pleasure in demonstrating his extreme coolness, first in exposing his servant, Lessep, as an Ostnian spy, and later, in the face of storm-trooper Grimm's hysterical attacks. In addition Valerian is cynically aware of the extent to which he exploits both workers and governments. But far from making him more contemptible, this percipience lends him stature, not merely because it represents a kind of gaiety-in-defiance but because it is true! His observations on the social class from which the governors come effectively transcends the simplistic opposition of working-class to bourgeoisie that underlies four

of the five pre-curtain episodes:⁽¹⁾

The world has never been governed by the People or by the merely Rich, and it never will be. It is governed by men like myself ---though, in practice, we are usually rich and often come from the People.⁽²⁾

The Choruses of workers, prisoners, leftists and soldiers express their hatred of their oppressors in terms too crude to carry much weight ("Stoke up the fires in furnace number three;/ The day is coming, brother, when we shall all be free!")⁽³⁾ and even the fraternising of the soldiers of the two sides⁽⁴⁾ is undermined by the same patronising imitation of the ideas and conversation of the uneducated that characterised the audience of The Dance of Death.

The positive forces in the play are similarly rudimentary. The concept of the Leader as a mere mouthpiece for those like Valerian who provide him with his power (an interesting if not original idea) is vitiated by exhibitions of the Leader's actual hysteria.⁽⁵⁾ The satire only 'bites', in fact, when Valerian reveals that his concern is not that these attacks are increasing but that they are becoming less frequent!

(1) pp. 17-8; pp. 42-3; pp. 72-5; pp. 97-100 and pp. 116-8.

The last episode, preceding Act III, scene iii, in which five typical readers of English newspapers exchange headlines, is more concerned with international, ideological matters than with the class struggle in Britain.

(2) p. 25

(3) p. 18

(4) Before Act II, scene ii.

(5) The same hysteria makes the portrait of Grimm as the archetypal wronged individual equivocal.

More significantly, the love of Eric and Anna is unconvincing because, having no political manifestation (apart from Eric's conscientious objection and Anna's war work as a nurse) it finds itself in a context which demands just such a manifestation. A love which merely establishes "the good place"⁽¹⁾ for itself alone must seem not merely thwarted but egocentric. Hence the intended lyricism of their final meeting devolves into idealistic vaguery and banal, negative (and ungrammatical) conclusions:

We cannot choose our world,
Our time, our class. None are innocent, none.
Causes of violence lie so deep in all our lives
It touches every act.⁽²⁾

In the circumstances they can hardly be blamed (nor, perhaps, can Auden) for adopting an attitude which in Michael Ransom was identified as spiritual pride: seeing oneself as a martyr for the world's hatred:

The hatred of our enemies
Is the destructive self-love of the dying,
Our hatred is the price of the world's freedom.⁽³⁾

Their final gesture is one of forgiveness for all who have failed to build "the city where/ The will of love is done"⁽⁴⁾, a gesture which the actual state of Europe at the time of writing makes seem somewhat generous.

(1) Anna uses the phrase, p. 122

(2) The speech is given to Eric, pp. 120-1

(3) p. 121

(4) p. 122

Auden's final documentary political work is Journey to a War⁽¹⁾ of which he wrote the dedicatory poem, the introductory sequence 'London to Hongkong', the sonnet sequence 'In Time of War' and the 'Commentary' which ends the book.

The six poems making up 'London to Hongkong' draw from their respective locations generally pessimistic conclusions : the Sphinx epitomises the mood of the "septic East"⁽²⁾ by its affirmative reply to the question "Am I to suffer always?" and the multiplicity of Hongkong implicitly denies the possibility of any General Will. Just as every amenity seems designed to thwart the traveller's wish to experience a sense of strangeness and isolation, so the sights he sees seem to confirm the illusory sense of discovery that accompanies all journeys. By contrast, the moments when he believes that "maybe the fever shall have a cure, the true journey an end /Where hearts meet and are really true"⁽³⁾ fade into insignificance.

The twenty-seven sonnets of 'In Time of War' may be divided into four groups⁽⁴⁾ according roughly to their subjects.

Sonnets I-III deal with the radical evolutionary development

(1) According to the Foreword, the book was commissioned in the summer of 1937, Auden and Isherwood left England in January 1938 and the work was published in March 1939. The Travel Diary was written up by Isherwood from the notes kept alternately by Auden and him. For this and other details of composition, see Bloomfield, Op. cit., p. 31

(2) 'The Ship', Journey to a War, p. 20 (Further quotations from this work are given by page number only.)

(3) 'The Voyage', p. 18

(4) This division, adopted by Greenberg, p. 88, hardly seems 'symmetrical' enough to be effective of itself.

constituted by man's consciousness exposing him to the 'wild' freedom of choice and the impossibility of regaining childhood innocence. Inevitably, man has become subject to his own creations and, in a sense, his various occupations are attempts to recover real freedom. Sonnets IV-VIII consider the careers of farmer, soldier, philosopher-scientist, artist and manager respectively. The farmer's preservation of a contact with Nature is seen as a kind of imprisonment so that he himself "grew in likeness to his sheep and cattle", becoming merely the object of others' ambition. The soldier apparently came into being to enliven a dull life, to impress girls and draw boys into masculine brotherhood. "But suddenly the earth was full" and he was rejected, in the sense, presumably, that stability requires a silent, acquiescent militia rather than demonstrative knights. The philosopher-scientist's is the most vigorous pursuit of truth and ostensibly the most successful, though it results in an apparently crushing sense of human limitation. The poet's is a case of corruption, betraying his gift to social acclaim, just as the manager's sense of value is finally overwhelmed by his accumulated possessions.

These 'ancestors' are, apparently, distinct from "the kingly and the saintly"⁽¹⁾ whose legacy we betray by failing to live up to their example. The following three sonnets specify

(1) IX, p. 267

examples of this failure, the "Great Disappointments".⁽¹⁾ Here, the basic technique of the sequence, the apostrophised 'he', is a source of confusion, for in X it refers to Christ, in XI to a magister of the Roman Empire and in XII to inhabitants of the post-Imperial age. X exemplifies not so much the failure of "institutionalised Christianity"⁽²⁾ as the inevitable rigidification and remoteness which accompanies institutions, a development seemingly quite reasonable if Christ is conceived of as a child with whom no-one had the time to sit and play. So too, XI deals with the coercion demanded by government as if it led inevitably to violence, as if, in fact, government were synonymous with killing. The post-Imperial phase, annexed by despots, is the most ambiguous of all, the tyrant being characterised, ironically as a 'deliverer' whose death liberates the "vanquished powers" merely to create havoc.

The following fifteen sonnets deal with aspects of the present Sino-Japanese war. XIII sets the dominant tone as oblique and laconic, bordering on the cynical and downright pessimistic: "Certainly praise" but remember that "the will of the Unjust /Has never lost its power", "the good Place has not been." The poem introduces the East as an autonomous culture but finds it as much in error as Europe:

(1) 'Commentary', p. 292

(2) Suggested by Greenberg, p. 89

The quick new West is false; and prodigious, but wrong
This passive flower-like people who for so long
In the Eighteen Provinces have constructed the earth.

It is essentially the ironies of war that this technique emphasises, especially the difference between its theoretical simplicity, both physical and moral, and the reality as it is experienced. For the injured, for example, "truth in their sense is how much they can bear." The cultivated life of the embassy exists side by side with the anonymous dead soldier.

Ultimately, hope depends on the ambiguity of consciousness, consciousness of the Necessity which war merely accentuates: "nothing is given: we must find our law"⁽¹⁾, "we are articulated to error"⁽²⁾:

We live in freedom by necessity,
A mountain people dwelling among mountains.⁽³⁾

If happiness, anger and "the idea of love"⁽⁴⁾ are the only feelings shared by the injured, love remains "the single project that since work began/ Through all the cycle showed a steady profit."⁽⁵⁾ But the exercise of love to produce freedom involves a vicious syllogism:

Only the free have disposition to be truthful,
Only the truthful have the interest to be just,
Only the just possess the will-power to be free.⁽⁶⁾

- (1) XXV, p. 283
- (2) XXVII, p. 285
- (3) Loc. cit.
- (4) XVII, p. 275
- (5) XXVI, p. 284
- (6) 'Commentary', p. 299

This sort of conclusive, argued statement undergoes severe dilution from the profusion of aphoristic, image-dominated formulations which appear, indeed, philosophy, where it does exist, takes the form of rhetorical platitudes: "never before was the Intelligence so fertile,/ The Heart so stunted"⁽¹⁾ or "evil is always personal and spectacular,/ But goodness needs the evidence of all our lives."⁽²⁾

The dominant stylistic feature of 'In Time of War' is the method of making abstractions concrete which Auden derived from Rilke and which, he suggests, is a technical advance unparalleled since the seventeenth century:

While Shakespeare, for example, thought of the non-human world in terms of the human, Rilke thinks of the human in terms of the non-human, of what he calls Things (dinge).⁽³⁾

Auden's adaptation of this technique gives rise to a plethora of similes (in the address of the tyrants in 'Commentary' "like" occurs five times in four three-line stanzas). Typical are the characterisations of the galaxy as being "free for ever to revolve like an enormous biscuit"⁽⁴⁾, the Chinese who "like a cereal have inherited these valleys"⁽⁵⁾, the anonymous dead soldier who nonetheless "added meaning like a comma"⁽⁶⁾ or

(1) 'Commentary', p. 293

(2) Ibid., p. 298

(3) 'Rilke in English', The New Republic, C (1939), p. 135

(4) p. 289

(5) p. 290

(6) XVIII, p. 276

this ambiguous epitaph for a statesman:

Museums stored his learning like a box,
And paper watched his money like a spy.⁽¹⁾

In addition to the Rilkean habits of identifying characters by a pronoun alone and beginning poems with cryptic or surprising lines ("Yes, we are going to suffer"⁽²⁾; "No, not their names. It was the others who built")⁽³⁾ three devices appear: the double adjective, the capitalisation of abstractions, and the use of circumlocution. The first, though intrinsically impressive, achieves no new height of percipience; the "tolerant ironic eye" of the statesman,⁽⁴⁾ "each great coercive avenue and square" of the city⁽⁵⁾ and "the low recessive houses of the poor"⁽⁶⁾ epitomise its effects.

The capitalisation of abstract concepts is more prominent here than anywhere else in Auden's writing but this prominence actually reveals the tendency of this device to sound merely peculiar or pretentious. Thus the "Fairly-Noble unifying Lie",⁽⁷⁾ "Neighbourhood"⁽⁸⁾, "the Real and the Pretended"⁽⁹⁾ and "Jen, the Truly Human"⁽¹⁰⁾ leave the reader uncertain of what is being offered him.

(1) VIII, p. 266

(2) XIV, p. 272

(3) XXIV, p. 282

(4) VIII, p. 266

(5) XXIV, p. 282

(6) XXV, p. 283

(7) XIII, p. 271

(8) XX, p. 278

(9) 'Commentary', p. 281

(10) Loc. cit.

Circumlocution, labelling-by-metaphor, is less likely to sound odd than capitalisation but more likely to sound pretentious. The Chinese, for example, are described as:

This passive flower-like people who for so long
In the Eighteen Provinces have constructed the earth.(1)

Likewise, the Japanese are those "whose paper houses/ Tell of their origin among the coral islands."(2) The technique works best when used to exemplify the historical process to which it adds a kind of lustre. Thus Dante is 'caught' as "the flint-faced exile" who "wrote his three-act comedy".(3) 'Commentary' makes considerable play with such allusions; including Constantine, Galileo, Descartes, Ch'in Shih Huang Ti, Chaka, Genghis Khan, Diocletian, Napoleon, Frederick the Great, Plato, Shang-tzu, Hobbes, Hegel, Bosanquet, Pascal, Spinoza and Kuo Hsi, each with his own brief attribution ("generalising Hegel and quiet Bosanquet").(4) Places are similarly characterised: Germany is that "land without a centre /Where the sad plains are like a sounding rostrum"(5), Italy "these tidy and volcanic summits near us now, /From which the Black Stream hides the Tuscarora Deep."(6) The "Far West" is more epigrammatically evoked, not, surely, without irony, as "absolutely free America", "melancholy Hungary" and "clever France."(7)

(1) XIII, p. 271

(2) 'Commentary', p. 290

(3) Ibid., p. 299

(4) Ibid., p. 295

(5) Loc. cit.

(6) Loc. cit.

(7) Ibid., p. 296

The impression made by Journey to a War is, therefore, as much due to the individuality of its style as to its content or ideology. Since Auden is later to speak of allowing himself to be 'seduced' by Rilke and Yeats into writing poems "which were false to my personal and poetic nature"⁽¹⁾, it seems fair to conclude that this stylisation, or rather, the extreme version of it which occurs in Journey to a War, is idiosyncratic rather than a substantial advance in technique.

The diverse strands of Auden's philosophy are brought together with a new 'fundamentalism' in his contribution to the collection of essays, I Believe.⁽²⁾ His starting point now is nothing less basic than a definition of goodness, a definition whose least unsatisfactory form is to describe anything "discharging its proper function, using its powers to the fullest extent permitted by its environment and its nature."⁽³⁾ He discriminates natural from moral good by applying the former to that state of equilibrium achieved between organism and environment, and the latter to any change which disturbs that equilibrium for the better. It follows, therefore, that since the state of modern man is one of continual and marked changeability, his tendency to moral evil is great. Mankind must unite in choosing democracy, liberty, justice and reason.

(1) Auden's Reply in 'A Symposium on W.H.Auden's "A Change of Air"', Kenyon Review, XXVI (1964), p. 207

(2) Edit. Clifton Fadiman, (New York, 1939).

(3) Ibid., p. 17

The fact that Auden's premises are falsely argued does not vitiate this conclusion. What does vitiate it is the covertly socialistic criteria he is applying. It must be obvious in the first place that he is proposing a natural communality of man and organisms which does not obtain. No difference actually exists between the states of equilibrium and change in nature because to survive at all organisms must maintain a permanent equilibrium with their surroundings. This is doubly true of man who is the product not merely of his interrelation with his environment but also with himself through the process of consciousness. In this section of his argument Auden contradicts himself, stating first that "only man, with his conscious intelligence, has been able to continue his evolution after his biological development ended"⁽¹⁾ and then that "man is an animal and until his immediate material and economic needs are satisfied, he cannot develop further."⁽²⁾ He also confuses society and culture, admitting "the enormous power of a given cultural form to determine the nature of the individuals who live under it"⁽³⁾ as if this were tantamount to the authority and circumscription of a society, yet asserting that "the individual 'in vacuo' is an intellectual abstraction"⁽⁴⁾, that man is only aware of himself as "a thinking, feeling and willing whole"⁽⁵⁾ and that this is the only whole of which he

(1) I Believe, pp. 18-9

(2) Ibid., p. 24

(3) Ibid., p. 20

(4) Ibid., p. 19

(5) Ibid., p. 20

has direct knowledge: all others --- family, class, nation--- are known only in the descriptive sense.

The crucial issue here is, clearly, the nature of consciousness, a nature which might be called 'reflexive', that is, made up of the perpetual polarisation of information between the ego and the self (or whatever terms are to be used). Thus, the individual 'in vacuo' is an abstraction to all but himself and far from having "direct knowledge" of himself as a whole and merely descriptive awareness of others, he is necessarily incapable (if knowledge is taken to be the result or object of consciousness) of knowing himself in terms of any whole at all and only able to know other beings as such. In this respect society occupies a unique place for it may be said to represent the identification of a concept with its physical occurrence, that is, the product of man's idea of what it is and the objective entity itself. It is, in fact, symbolic of the relation of a part to the whole of consciousness and proof that consciousness is itself reflexive.

Having established that the issue is consciousness itself, the nature of morality is definable by Auden's own terms. From the premises "morality is only possible in a world which is constantly changing and presenting a fresh series of choices"⁽¹⁾ and "intelligence and choice can only arise when more than one stimulus is presented at the same time in the same place"⁽²⁾ it must follow

(1) I Believe, p. 23

(2) Ibid., p. 19

that morality depends on intelligence. Why then has Auden avoided confronting consciousness? A clue is provided by the odd practical opinions or recommendations dotted throughout the essay, for example, the adoption of Eric Gill's axiom that "work is what one does to please oneself, leisure the time one has to serve the community"⁽¹⁾, a statement whose blatant reversal of expectation makes it suspiciously similar in intention to what Auden will later call "the conceit of the social worker."⁽²⁾

His motive is, actually, socialistic. Intelligence is the most immediate and indisputably natural agency of discrimination between individuals. It is intrinsically undemocratic. Behaviourist psychology, reducing man to the sum of his stimuli ("everything I do, the hour I go to bed, the literature I read, the temperature at which I take my bath, affects my character for good or bad, and so ultimately, the characters of those with whom I come in contact")⁽³⁾ restores intelligence to the random product of the interaction of the individual and his environment.

Thus around the issue of choice the social and psychological facets of Auden's theory to date are united, a true marriage it might be said, of 'new styles of architecture' and 'a change of heart' which remained as the awkward, isolated incumbents of Poems 1930. They assumed the existence of choice as the logical 'test' of consciousness. From now on consciousness itself will seem defective precisely because the choice it facilitates

(1) I Believe, p. 25

(2) The Dyer's Hand, p. 14

(3) I Believe, p. 29

cannot be infallible. If judgement errs, either because its object or motive was illusory, faith, the calculated belief in the tenuity of all sensory and intellectual data, must seem the only resort of coherence. In that circumstance choice will appear as the inevitable and necessary expression of faith through which belief supercedes consciousness.

CHAPTER THREE

(1939-1948)

This period is marked by Auden's acceptance of Christianity, the stages of acceptance being well defined in four long poems: New Year Letter (1941), For the Time Being (1944), The Sea and the Mirror (1944) and The Age of Anxiety (1947).⁽¹⁾ Since Christian faith is personal and generally inaccessible to analysis⁽²⁾, Auden is faced poetically (and, in view of the logical, categorising trait in his personality, temperamentally) with making his beliefs seem rational and imaginatively convincing. The dominant influence of Kierkegaard complicates as much as simplifies the issue, for while Existentialism provides theory and terminology, it verges at times on mysticism and, incidentally, subjects poetry itself to criticism of a radical kind.

An important condition of the current writing is that America not England provides its background, Auden having emigrated with Isherwood on January 18th, 1939. Whatever his reasons for

- (1) All were first published in New York, New Year Letter appearing under that title in London in the same year as the American version entitled The Double Man. (From now on Auden's writing adopts American spelling in prose at least.)
- (2) Auden records that his conversion was the cumulative effect of seeing the churches closed in Spain during the Civil War, meeting Charles Williams, and undergoing a mystical experience in which he felt himself "the prey of demonic powers, in both the Greek and the Christian sense, stripped of self-control and self-respect, behaving like a ham actor in a Strindberg play": Untitled essay in Modern Canterbury Pilgrims, edit. I. C. J.A. Pike, (New York, 1956), pp. 40-1

leaving Europe—the failure of poets to stop Hitler at the public level, and the burden of a European cultural heritage at the personal, may have been the two principal factors—the effect of life in America was considerable. Auden gives as his reason for calling the experience "one of the most significant of my life"⁽¹⁾ that it taught him the dangers of an ²Open society.⁽²⁾ Equally important though is the necessity enforced by absence from Europe both of resisting "compensating for the sense of guilt that every non-combatant feels....by indulging in an orgy of patriotic hatred all the more violent because it is ineffective"⁽³⁾ and finding an answer to the question Nazism posed: if the Nazis are wrong "what is it that validates our values and invalidates theirs?"⁽⁴⁾

In view of the magnitude of both questions it is hardly surprising that their analysis is among the most abstract of Auden's writing. His real subject is the relation of the individual and society. The two conflicting aims of society, cohesion and individual freedom, are matched by the two kinds of experience available to human beings: objective sensations, independent of the will and governed by causal necessity, and subjective awareness,

(1) 'Romantic or Free?', Smith Alumnae Quarterly, (August, 1940), p. 355

(2) See next page.

(3) 'Poet in Wartime', The New Republic, CIII (1940), p. 59

(4) Untitled essay in Modern Canterbury Pilgrims, edit. J.A.Pike, (New York, 1956), p. 40

accessible to the will and governed by our individual ideas of logical and moral necessity. Similarly there are two classes of events: those unalterable either because they have already occurred or because they are overwhelming, called, after Kierkegaard, Tribulations, and those which can be altered, called Temptations.⁽¹⁾ (Art and science are both concerned primarily with Tribulations: science attempts to convert them into Temptations. If this is impossible because the event has already taken place then art can try to alter our attitude to it.)

The social equivalent of this dichotomy is the Open or Closed Society.⁽²⁾ A society is Open in so far as it offers the maximum freedom to its members and Closed in so far as it does not. All societies begin by being Closed and different classes achieve 'Openness' at different rates, the rulers before those who are ruled.

(1) 'Mimesis and Allegory', English Institute Annual, (1940), p.13

(2) The terms come from Bergson who characterises a Closed society as "fresh from the hands of nature" and an Open society as that "which is deemed in principle to embrace all humanity." Unlike Auden, Bergson conceives of the two as different in kind not degree, that the "individual aspiration" which creates openness inevitably becomes "social pressure; and obligation covers the whole." Bergson agrees, however, that democracy is of all political systems the only one "to transcend, at least in intention, the conditions of the 'closed society'". Henri Bergson, The Two Sources of Morality and Religion, transl. R.Ashley Audra & C.Brereton, (London, 1935), pp.229, 230, Ibid., Ibid., 243 respectively.

Democracy is a completely Open society, as yet not attained on earth, and war is an attempt to regain the completely Closed society because Openness is despaired of.

For the first time, technology has made an Open society physically possible; therefore the failure to bring it about must be a 'metaphysical' one, specifically the loss of our sense of absolute presuppositions, "the monotheistic concept of fate, a common horizon against which even the gods must play their parts".⁽¹⁾ (A simple lack of imagination also seems to be involved, "a failure of totalitarians and democrats alike to realise how open society has physically become"⁽²⁾.)

Both deficiencies are implicitly subsumed beneath the term 'romanticism', used broadly to characterise any attitude which rejects the "paradoxical, dialectic nature of freedom"⁽³⁾ either through laziness or woolly-mindedness: "the impatient romantic sees more clearly, but what he sees is only one side of the paradox"⁽⁴⁾. Expressed as the relation of man to himself and to external reality in terms of the will this becomes:

Imagine you have absolute free will, ignore causal necessity, and your thinking is at its mercy. Imagine you have no will at all, deny logical necessity, and you cannot think at all.⁽⁵⁾

(1) 'Mimesis and Allegory', p. 1.

(2) 'Romantic or Free?' p. 354

(3) Ibid., p. 353 Auden concedes that 'heretic' might be a more accurate term, but wishes to avoid its clerical connotations while emphasising that the attitudes he refers to took shape during the period called the Romantic Revival.

(4) Loc.cit.

(5) Ibid., p. 356.

In terms of the relation between psychology and ethics the dichotomy may be expressed as follows:

One speaks in ethical terms but refuses the psychology that could define them; the other speaks in psychological terms but, by refusing to admit that psychology implies ethics, is incapable of choosing one direction rather than another.(1)

Auden regards the "dominant intellectual romanticism"(2) of this century as being of the second kind, for the influence of Marx and Freud, by revealing "that when we thought we were being perfectly responsible, logical, and loving we were nothing of the kind, has led us to believe that responsibility and logic and love are meaningless words."(3)

Establishing an Open society depends not only on recognising the errors of the past but also on certain assumptions of tolerance, the most fundamental being:

.....that controversy is a form of co-operation, and ultimately the only way of arriving at truth, and that the average man is sufficiently energetic and interested in truth to take his part in looking for it, sufficiently intelligent to recognise logical necessity, and sufficiently humble to obey it.(4)

Were this not in itself a forlorn enough hope, the very principle of discussion is now seen to depend upon the recognition of certain absolute presuppositions or "acts of faith."(5)

(1) 'Romantic or Free?', p.355

(2) Ibid., p.356

(3) 'Democracy is Hard', The Nation, CXLIX, 15 (1939), p.386

(4) 'Mimesis and Allegory', pp. 1-2

(5) 'Romantic or Free?', p.355 For the derivation of this concept from R.G.Collingwood, see below, pp. 293-5

Auden later defines theology itself as "the absolute pre-suppositions which men make about the meaning of their existence and their actions"⁽¹⁾, that is, "a small number of carefully defined general propositions, from which each individual can deduce the right behavior in a particular instance".⁽²⁾ The examples of such presuppositions Auden quotes, for example that "throughout this world there is one set of laws according to which all movements or events, in spite of all differences, agree in happening"⁽³⁾, seem to be laws of thought, matters of epistemology, rather than useful physical laws. In any case they are clearly too general to form an effective basis for moral judgement. (Paradoxically, the very intellectuals indicted for their ethical failure are now assigned the task of revising presuppositions "should fresh knowledge render them no longer absolute in their old form").⁽⁴⁾

The ambivalence of Auden's position, particularly with respect to psychology, reaches its apogee in the assertion that if man does not consciously walk in fear of the Lord, "then his unconscious sees to it that he has something else, airplanes or secret police, to walk in fear of".⁽⁵⁾ Stated thus, Christian belief is tantamount to the threat of psychological illness. Less pernicious but even more ambiguous is his assessment of individual responsibility as follows:

- (1) 'In Poor Shape', Sewanee Review, LII, (1944) p. 594
- (2) 'A Note on Order', The Nation, CLII, 5 (1941) p. 132
- (3) 'Romantic or Free?' p. 356
- (4) Loc.cit.
- (5) 'Tract for the Times,' The Nation , CLII,I (1941) p. 25

.....in the last analysis we do not live our lives, but are lived. What I call I, our little conscious ego, is an instrument of power outside itself. But it is a conscious instrument. To reason and obey logical necessity are its functions.(1)

If this leaves the reader in doubt as to which issue is, in fact the last one, the similarity of the statement to one made a year earlier referring to Groddeck's concept of the It renders the nature of this outside power itself ambiguous. To say that "in the last analysis we are lived, for the night brings forth the day, the unconscious It fashions the conscious fore-brain"(2) implies that Auden retains as strong a belief in this idiosyncratic concept as he might be assumed to put in Christianity.

The habit of imposing a Christian interpretation on phenomena is, however, marked, especially in giving Christian concepts the support of science, logic and history. The tendency is most noticeable in his review of John MacMurray's The Clue to History,⁽³⁾ which also reveals the extent to which Marxism still figures in his thinking. Thus, "the apocalyptic teaching of the Gospels was glossed over until restated by Marx"⁽⁴⁾ and "that freedom which is defined by Dante as 'In his will is our peace'"⁽⁵⁾ is what Engels meant by the axiom 'freedom is th

(1) 'Romantic or Free?' p. 358

(2) 'Jacob and the Angel', The New Republic, CI, 1308 (1939), p. 292

(3) 'Christian on the Left', The Nation, CXLIX, 11 (1939), p. 273

(4) Loc.cit.

(5) Loc.cit. Against this should be set his statement that "There is not the slightest reason to suppose that owning the means of production will create for the people a sudden traditional source of value." 'Tradition and Value', The New Republic, CII, 1311 (1940), p. 90

consciousness of necessity'. Christianity is supported historico-psychologically by MacMurray's conception of the Jewish consciousness as 'monist', that is, preserving the unity of theory and practice, by contrast to the Greek bias towards thought and the Roman towards action. The teaching of Jesus is summed up according to the principle of love which removes the fear that prevents the correct knowledge upon which right action depends.

The obvious omission in this explanation is why man has failed to follow rules which are said to be natural to him. Auden attempts to resolve the problem in a manner which simply involves the transposition of terms from psychology to religion:

Man is aware that his actions do not express his real nature. God is a term for what he imagines that nature to be. Thus man is always making God in his own image. In so far as Jesus was the first person to make the image correspond to the fact, he revealed God to man.⁽¹⁾

The naivety of his final rejection of MacMurray's position strikingly shows how much he is torn between science and faith: he says "I am not convinced that either Jesus or Marx or Professor MacMurray can predict the future with scientific certainty."⁽²⁾ A sense of the genuine problems of logic attached to Christianity is, however, reflected with equal candour in his opinion that "belief in God as a conscious agent outside man seems....a product of dualist thinking."⁽³⁾ (Auden does not commit himself, significantly, as

(1) 'Christian on the Left', p. 273

(2) Loc. cit.

(3) Loc. cit.

to whether the Logos is an external gift of grace or created by the Eros, the question to which he says Hardy gave no answer.)(1)

Auden now approaches the problem of Christian dualism by adopting the basic tenet of Existentialism that "all truths are operative truths, but in all serious matters we ourselves are the operation."(2) This involves modifying the former distinction between causal and logical necessity to take account of the 'doubleness' of the mind, the, as it were, inverting or counter-suggestive effect of consciousness:

To become exceptional—— that is to say, to become reflective—— is to discover that the Necessary itself, to the human vision, appears arbitrary.(3)

The function ascribed to Eros, defined as "the will to self-actualisation"(4), is "to actualize the possible by a series of decisions in which one future possibility is grasped by the present, and the rest thereby rendered impossible."(5) Not only does such a formula beg the question of what is possible (or, alternatively, sanction any creation of the individual's Eros) but, by implying the alternative of wrong choices, necessitates the introduction of a cardinal Christian principle, for to

- (1) 'A Literary Transference', Purpose, XII, 3 & 4 (1940), p. 133
- (2) 'Ambiguous Answers', The New Republic, CIV, 1386 (1941), p. 862
- (3) 'The Wandering Jew', The New Republic, CIV, 1367 (1941), p. 186
- (4) 'Eros and Agape', The Nation, CLII, 26 (1941), p. 757
- (5) Loc. cit.

eliminate the danger of taking a wrong decision is "to dispense with what the Christian believes to be essential, namely, Faith."⁽¹⁾

Just as faith is the essential catalyst for successful choice, so a connection is required between the apparently external character of God's love and law and the human experience of both. Auden effects the relation by regarding Agape, Christian love, as not essentially different from Eros but rather "Eros mutated by Grace, a conversion not an addition, the Law fulfilled, not the Law destroyed."⁽²⁾ The justification of this interpretation is that Christianity must operate on earth where love of God must take the form of obedience to his command to love one another.⁽³⁾

The Existentialist view of art as an impediment to facing reality is, not surprisingly, uncongenial to Auden. As well as rather cheekily pinpointing the logical contradiction of writers who "declare that they are in complete despair,/Yet go on writing"⁽⁴⁾ his analysis of the relation of poetry to belief is so unexceptionably sensible as to defer criticism. He begins by admitting that the problem is a difficult one and confessing his own uncertainty as to its solution:

(1) 'Eros and Agape', The Nation, CLII, 26 (1941), p. 757

(2) Loc. cit.

(3) Loc. cit.

(4) 'Under Which Lyre: A Reactionary Tract for the Times', Harvard Alumni Bulletin, XLVIII, 17 (1946), p. 707

Art is not metaphysics any more than it is conduct, and the artist is usually unwise to insist too directly in his art upon his beliefs; but without an adequate and conscious metaphysics in the background, art's imitation of life inevitably becomes, either a photostatic copy of the accidental details of life without pattern or significance, or a personal allegory of the artist's individual dementia, of interest primarily to the psychologist and the historian.⁽¹⁾

The criterion of judgement implicit here is aesthetic, but, as Auden points out, it cannot strictly speaking be any other since moral discrimination can only be applied to our own conscious choices; "we do not mean that art has no moral effect, but only that the latter depends upon our individual responses."⁽²⁾

Auden's current poetry cannot be said to reflect in any very faithful way the tenor of these arguments. It is of two broad kinds: those poems which continue to deal with social issues in a characteristic manner and those introducing a discernible religious note.

'September 1st 1939,'⁽³⁾ is the best example of the former. It establishes a direct causal connection between war and the egotism fostered by the Western concept of romantic love:

,...the error bred in the bone
Of each woman and each man
Craves what it cannot have,
Not universal love
But to be loved alone.

(1) 'Mimesis and Allegory', pp. 18-9

(2) Ibid., p. 15

(3) The New Republic, LXXXXX (1939), p. 297

The force of this statement of choice is perhaps lessened by the poem's rhetorical conclusion: "We must love one another or die"⁽¹⁾, but the poem's technique of "accurate scholarship", curt rhythm and final personal commitment makes its message convincing ideologically and aesthetically.

'The Prophets',⁽²⁾ apparently Auden's first 'Christian' poem, is notable for its tentative, confessional manner, characterised by the opening: "Perhaps I always knew what they were saying." The poet recalls his early love of machines and concludes:

Love was the word they never said aloud
As something that a picture can't return.

The poet's entrance in 'September 1st 1939', by modestly immersing itself in technicalities and rather ponderous, biblical-sounding phrases, seems to guarantee his sincerity:

May I, composed like them
Of Eros and of dust,
Beleagured by the same
Negation and despair,
Show an affirming flame.

By contrast, however, the close of 'The Prophets' escapes narrowly, if at all, the charge of insincerity:

(1) Auden himself objected to it in 1945: "That's a damned lie! We must die anyway", and subsequently decided that the whole poem was "dishonest"; see 'Foreword' to B.C. Bloomfield, Op. cit., p. viii

(2) The Spectator, CLXIII, 5800 (1939), p. 285

It was true.
For now I have the answer from the face
That never will go back into a book
But asks for all my life, and is the Place
Where all I touch is moved to an embrace,
And there is no such thing as a vain look.

The 'finesse' implied in the double meaning of 'face' (Auden himself will never revert to agnosticism or purely theoretical belief, nor will a book ever again be an adequate substitute for human beings) supplemented by the deliberately incongruous introduction of the concept of place and culminating in an equivocal idealisation of brotherly and romantic love, is, surely, damaging to the impression of sincerity the piece requires, or would be were it not for the comparison the reader tacitly draws between this and poems like 'September 1st 1939'.

Neither 'September 1st 1939' nor 'The Prophets', however, is typical of the works of this period, the former being too 'assured' both technically and ideologically: the latter too tentative in its message. More representative is 'The leaves of life',⁽¹⁾ which unites technical virtuosity and a kind of anti-ideology', concluding:

'All our knowledge comes to this,
That existence is enough,
That in savage solitude
Or the play of love
Every living creature is
Woman, Man and Child.'

(1) The New Republic, LXXXIX (1939), p. 381

The relative claims of art and belief are brilliantly harmonised in the 'genre' of the occasional poem which now becomes prominent in Auden's work. As well as endowing a private event with "symbolic public significance"⁽¹⁾, the occasional poem, taking a person rather than an 'idea' as its subject, requires that the poet gauge his inventiveness not merely according to what is artistically appropriate but also according to what is credible of the subject. Significantly, these poems tend to analyse the quality of poetry itself, again relying on the natural counterpointing of the occasion and any comment made on it.

'The Novelist'⁽²⁾ for example, is necessarily better able to demonstrate the poet's skill to "amaze us like a thunderstorm" than the novelist's more authentic representation of reality. Even when, as is the case in 'In Memory of W.B.Yeats',⁽³⁾ the role of the poet is secure, the drawing of the conclusion that actually "poetry makes nothing happen" is automatically qualified by the overt brilliance of salient detail which makes

(1) 'Yeats as example', Kenyon Review, X,2 (1948), p. 193

(2) New Writing, n.s.2 (1939), p. 5

(3) The New Republic, LXXXVIII (1939), p. 123

up the background to Yeats's death:

...in the importance and noise of tomorrow
When the brokers are roaring like beasts on the floor of the
Bourse,
And the poor have the sufferings to which they are fairly
accustomed,
And each in the cell of himself is almost convinced of his
freedom,
A few thousand will think of this day
As one thinks of a day when one did something slightly unusual.

The most direct and sustained example of the correlation of poetry and belief of this period and of all Auden's writing is New Year Letter.⁽¹⁾ The book comprises the Letter itself--- 1707 lines in octosyllabic couplets, divided into three books, and accompanied by 81 pages of Notes--- followed by 'The Quest', a sequence of 20 sonnets on that theme, the whole being enclosed by a Prologue and Epilogue.

New Year Letter reflects a crucial ambivalence in its author towards Christianity,⁽²⁾ an ambivalence suggested in the two titles the work has. 'New Year Letter' is obviously appropriate to the

- (1) Published under this title in London in May 1941, it had appeared in New York in March of that year, entitled The Double Man. (Quotations are from the London edition.)

Sections previously published were:

'Prologue' as 'Spring in Wartime', Allied Relief Ball Souvenir Program, (New York, May, 1940), pp. iii-iv, and in Horizon, I (1940), pp. 529-30

Part One of the Letter as 'Letter to Elizabeth Mayer, (January 1st, 1940)', Atlantic, CLXVII, pp. 56-63, 185-93

'Anthropos apteros', which forms the note to 1629 as 'The Maze', Vice Versa, I (1940), pp. 6-7

'The Quest' (a series of 20 sonnets, numbered 1-20), The New Republic, CIII (1940), pp. 716-9.

'Epilogue' as 'Autumn 1940', The Nation, CLI (1940), p. 563

- (2) Greenberg sees the book as a last attempt to do without Christianity: Fuller believes it assumes a Christian goal.

sense of revivification associated with the new year, the festival itself having Christian connotations without being specifically religious. 'The Double Man' refers to man's dualistic nature, the perpetual conflict between ego and self which seems at times deliberately self-thwarting.

The 'Prologue',⁽¹⁾ considers war as the result of man's perverse powers of imagination which, Auden suggests, are stimulated by his sense of insecurity:

That last attempt to eliminate the Strange
By uniting us all in a terror
Of something known.

This perversity cannot, though, quell "the Song /That is not a sorrow", that is, the inevitable upsurge of man's sense of beauty and truth which makes him aware of the tragic accident that has occurred to his real self but also implies the possibility of rectifying it.⁽²⁾ The poem is thus an appropriate introduction to the ambivalence of man's nature.

The Letter itself enjoys an obvious double perspective, being both a "private minute for a friend"⁽³⁾ and "under Flying Seal to all /Who wish to read it anywhere."⁽⁴⁾

(1) New Year Letter, pp. 13-4

(2) Auden quotes Dante's definition of Eros as being not a god but "an accident occurring in a substance"; 'A Preface to Kierkegaard', The New Republic, CX, 1537 (1944), p. 684

(3) 313 (Line references are given by number only; 'n' signifies the note to that line.)

(4) 316-7

Its style is clearly chosen to permit ease of discussion and argument. Fuller wonders whether the octosyllabic couplet may be too narrow for this purpose, giving the impression of "continually pushing further and further away from decisive statement"⁽¹⁾, an effect he thinks Auden's habitual categorising and the Notes accentuate. As his recent reviews show, Auden's arguments depending on theological epistemology do demand a particularly tentative approach. The aphoristic element is also strong in the Letter and this, in association with the highly formalised technique of the poems of 'The Quest', where ideas are translated into complex images, serves to balance any tendency merely to versify ideas.

Fuller regards the Notes as complementing the rest of the poem since without them the Letter would be over-burdened not only with explicatory material "but with the necessity to furnish at every point its awareness of the dialectic"⁽²⁾; "the reader's mental energy is better deployed (he is doing more creative work) in interpreting the 'sources' for himself."⁽³⁾ This assumes that the Notes usually supply information which bears directly or indirectly on the text or provide fruitful

(1) Fuller, p. 131

(2) Loc. cit.

(3) Loc. cit. The fact that the Letter appears without the Notes in Collected Longer Poems (1968), suggests, however, that Auden regards it as complete on its own.

perplexity for the reader. The Notes are, in fact, habitually tangential and while none can be called typical, the note to line 1649, "Can live because we're lived", is illustrative both because the idea is one Auden has expressed before and because the anecdote has also appeared previously:⁽¹⁾

A mother was horrified to come upon her small daughter shouting dirty words and spitting at the little girl who lived next door.

'Whatever has come over you, Mary, to behave like that ? The Devil must have gotten into you.'

'The Devil told me the dirty words', said Mary, 'but the spitting was a little idea of my own.'

Here the point at issue (that life is a combination of our ideas and fate) is undermined by the coy, 'New Yorker' tone of the story. Nonetheless, the Notes do draw on a wide range of authorities, especially in the fields of sociology, anthropology and literature, and in that sense of 'dialectic' they may be said to supply one.

The division of the three parts of the Letter has been explained by Edward Callan as corresponding to Kierkegaard's categories of the Aesthetic, Ethical and Religious.⁽²⁾ Thus Part One presents experience from the artist's point of view and analyses the function of art. Part Two considers the dualism inherent in man

(1) In 'Romantic or Free?', Smith Alumnae Quarterly, (August, 1940) p. 358

(2) 'Auden's New Year Letter: A New Style of Architecture', Renascence, XVI (1963), p. 14 ; see below, p. 277

The following analysis preserves the unity of each part of the Letter. A summary of ideological sources, bringing together the main ideas of the whole work is given separately afterwards.

and its effect on his conception of ethical responsibility, both as an individual and socially. Part Three (longer than the first two parts together) cannot be said to have one subject, including as it does history, political theory, reflections on the religious moments of Auden's life and a summary of life in America. Only its conclusion is directly Christian and even there the prayer is to a poeticised God, the "unicorn among the cedars."⁽¹⁾ Though they make useful critical tools (and will be employed in the analysis below) the Kierkegaardian stages do not seem to operate as structural adjuncts.

The theme of Part One is the order which art achieves. Art is "the most difficult game conceivable to man"⁽²⁾, a game being defined as "any action or series of actions that can be done perfectly."⁽³⁾ The corollary of this is that art begins as mimesis but once completed can be nothing more than a formula applicable to the reader's life only if he so chooses. This view is, however, confused by the claims both Auden and Kierkegaard implicitly make on behalf of the artist. Auden still believes in the 'bringing-to-consciousness' principle ("the wild furies of the past,/ Tracked to their origins at last,/ Trapped in a medium's artifice")⁽⁴⁾ and Kierkegaard defines genius, tacitly including the artist, in terms very similar to

- (1) 1651
- (2) 109n
- (3) Loc. cit.
- (4) 113-5

Freud's:

In order really to be a great genius, a man must be an exception. But in order that his being exceptional should be a serious matter he himself must be unfree, forced into the position. There lies the importance of his dementia. Perhaps his dementia has nothing whatsoever to do with his real genius, but it is the pain by which he is nailed out in isolation --- and he must be isolated if he is to be great.(1)

In fact, since truth for the artist is the combined product of content and form, he is the archetypal exponent of the ethical problem--- to establish order and make it effective. The first is difficult because:

....order never can be willed
But is the state of the fulfilled,
For will but wills its opposite.

(64-6)

The second demands an unidealistic and oblique approach: "no words men write can stop the war"(2) but only "through the Janus of a joke"(3) will the "candid psychopompos"(4) be persuaded to reveal itself.

Part Two represents the Ethical order, the sphere of logic and argument. It considers first man's unwillingness to acknowledge his own insignificance ("children of a modest star")(5) or adjust his 'idées fixes' to reality. The difficulty of doing so is shown to be inherent in the Existential view of personality,

- (1) 109n
- (2) 296
- (3) 305
- (4) 306
- (5) 344

whereby:

All real perception, it would seem,
Has shifting contours like a dream,
Nor have our feelings ever known
Any discretion but their own.

(442-5)

Even love, the poet admits, cannot separate cause from effect in our relations with ideas or other people with the same strictness as the semantics of language.

Man's basic dishonesty is seen to arise from the same 'double' nature of consciousness. Its personification as "the Prince of Lies"⁽¹⁾ seems inappropriate since the same "Spirit-that-denies"⁽²⁾ is also defined as:

....only a recurrent state
Of fear and faithlessness and hate,
That takes on from becoming me
A legal personality.

(415-8)

To allow evil such a degree of immanence may encourage the reader to see himself absolved from moral effort altogether or, at least, to adopt a dualistic attitude.

Auden seems, in fact, anxious to prove that the Devil, if he exists, must be a self-contradiction (he cannot be both god and dualist for thus his godhead would be deniable, and if he adopts monism, annihilating love, "there's only hate left to be hated")⁽³⁾

- (1) 383
- (2) 384
- (3) 583

whilst eliminating the charge of dualistic thinking which permits him to conceive of God and the Devil as independent entities. The Notes make clear however, that Auden believes no real dichotomy exists between good and evil. Evil is merely "a state of disharmony between existences"⁽¹⁾ and since everything has an equal right and obligation to be and become:

Pure evil would be pure passivity, a denial by an existence of any relation with any other existence; this is impossible because it would also mean a denial of its own existence.⁽²⁾

Hence, an act is evil "in so far as it is misdirected and therefore fails to achieve its primal intention directly, but, instead, achieves it only by a roundabout series of mutually negating collisions and reactions,"⁽³⁾ so that "to do evil is to act contrary to self-interest."⁽⁴⁾ Sin, by contrast, involves consciousness though Auden is equivocal about their relation. Defined initially as "to act consciously / Against what seems necessity"⁽⁵⁾, sin is made to seem inevitable when man is regarded as comprising not one self but a number of selves, each one having a separate and false sense of its own self-interest. As a result, "we can rarely act in such a way that the false self-interests of all our different 'selves' are satisfied."⁽⁶⁾

- (1) 563n
- (2) 563n
- (3) 605n
- (4) 607n
- (5) 608-9
- (6) 607n

That this argument depends on a fallacious view of consciousness is revealed by its corollary that if our 'selves' had true self-knowledge of their interests we should become not only unable to sin but "an undivided consciousness with a true knowledge of itself, and therefore unable to do evil."⁽¹⁾ Clearly true knowledge of oneself is a meaningless concept unless consciousness is regarded as a divided, reflexive operation, nor, surely, can sin retain its usual status unless the individual could have chosen otherwise.

This confusion of the role of consciousness in the ethical system seems to be reflected in the way the diabolical 'tricks' are presented. Attentiveness, flattery, fostering the illusion that intellect should be abandoned, using favourite quotations against one, the association of falsehood and truth---are not merely illustrated, but their respective principles are almost obliterated in the wealth of exemplary material. Alternatively, the illustration is specious. Can Wordsworth's 'volte-face' following his experience of the French Revolution be considered an example of the Devil's strategy of inducing us "to associate/ Truth with a lie, then demonstrate/ The lie"⁽²⁾ so that truth is rejected along with falsehood ? Surely it better reflects the perils of idealism.

(1) 607n

(2) 633-635

Reference is now made to the Russian Revolution and Marx, who is, ironically, analysed in Jungian terms and primarily acclaimed not for his contribution to economic theory but for his courage in overcoming his own psychological problems. His refutation of Rousseau's theories is portrayed, somewhat romantically, in the images of overthrowing a pagan god and ousting a witch. The most significant aspect of Marx's analysis, apparently, is its reflection on man's creative powers as the producer of goods. In this context man's love of money is actually a sign that:

..... in his heart of hearts he knows
His love is not determined by
A personal or tribal tie
Or colour, neighbourhood, or creed,
But universal, mutual need:

(728-732)

Thus while "great sedentary Caesars"⁽¹⁾ of the past may be credited with significant theoretical advances, we must resist the temptation to regard any propositions as absolutely true. The relevant note, taken from Collingwood, shows the philosopher differentiating between the absoluteness open to mathematics and the "intricacy and restlessness" of metaphysical propositions, an equivocation which Auden's definition of Natural Law reflects. Natural Law, as opposed to Human Law, requires that no opposition exist between the general and the individual will. Since our

knowledge of Natural Law is derived from observation and a single exception invalidates our formulation, there can be no Natural Philosophy, only a Natural Way:

The way rests upon Faith and Doubt: Faith that Natural Law exists and that we can have knowledge of it; Doubt that our knowledge can ever be perfect or unmixed with error.⁽¹⁾

This view of Natural Law as purely empirical, while it clearly reflects the part played by inductive reasoning, gives no credence to the deductive element of all mathematics.

Nor is the relation between Logos and Eros clarified by the following characterisation:

The rays of Logos take effect,
But not as theory would expect,
For, sterile and diseased by doubt,
The dwarf mutations are thrown out
From Eros' weaving centrosome.

(782-86)

Does this imply that the mutations are being eradicated by the influence of the Logos or that in spite of its effect Eros is still fundamentally perverted?

Finally, hope must be placed in "the gift of double focus"⁽²⁾, consciousness itself, and in "awareness of the dialectic"⁽³⁾ which should arise from it. Poetry's role in encouraging such awareness is

(1) 761n

(2) 829

(3) 821n

ambiguous since it may be defined, Auden says, as "the clear expression of mixed feelings."⁽¹⁾

Part Three occupies just over half of the poem and represents the Religious point of view, intended to reconcile the Aesthetic and Ethical realms. Its opening mood is one of celebration, ostensibly aroused by the poet's own experience of the fellowship needed for human unity and his conviction that everyday someone is shown "the field of Being where he may /Unconscious of Becoming, play /With the Eternal Innocence"⁽²⁾ though he may only stay there for a moment. Auden takes from Jung as symbol of this field of Being, the Temenos, "the region of taboo"⁽³⁾ which seems incongruously ritualistic by contrast with its opposite state, Hell, characterised as the lie we become "if we deny/ The laws of consciousness and claim /Becoming and Being are the same." The cryptic line, "Time is sin and can forgive"⁽⁴⁾ is explained by the principle that "forgiveness of sin does not mean that the effect of an act is annulled, but that we are shown what the effect is"⁽⁵⁾, a definition which further complicates the theology of this section. (Auden's metaphor of Time---the mountain we are obliged to climb---seems somewhat banal and over-extended (some 40 lines).)

- (1) 829n
- (2) 876-8
- (3) 863n
- (4) 926
- (5) 926n

Reliance on teasing, quasi-paradoxical phrases like "with only guessing for a guide"⁽¹⁾ and a kind of subservient humility tantamount to nihilism ("Admitting every step we make /Will certainly be a mistake")⁽²⁾ diminishes the exhortatory force of this section. Similarly, the tone in which Auden identifies himself, "a tiny object in the night"⁽³⁾, seems somewhat coy by comparison with, say, the close of 'September 1st, 1939'.

More salient is the reflection that the barbarism of the present day, unlike that which destroyed the Roman Empire, is not the "pure instinctive joy / Of animals"⁽⁴⁾ but "the refined/ Creation of machines and mind."⁽⁵⁾ Paralleling this technical and intellectual 'development' is, ironically, the emergence of a primitive syndrome, the "metaphysics of the Crowd"⁽⁶⁾, that is :

The hitherto-unconscious creed
Of little men who half succeed.

(1032-3)

The irony is doubled if Auden's analysis of the social attitude of introverts is accepted: whereas the extrovert may lose his social consciousness altogether, the introvert can only pervert his and

- (1) 945
- (2) 963-4
- (3) 975-6
- (4) 1013-4
- (5) 1014-5
- (6) 1025

become a dictator. Politically "this is the age of the great, mad introverts."⁽¹⁾ Thus, introspection, far from being an asset to society, is likely to overthrow it.

Auden now modifies his earlier distinction between the Open and Closed Society to incorporate within the scope of the latter a Golden Age when man not only did not sin, i.e., "when society was relatively so closed that freedom was confined to obedience to causal necessity"⁽²⁾, but "when human law was not felt as coercive but regarded as a perfect codification of Natural Law"⁽³⁾, two responses he previously regarded as mutually exclusive.⁽⁴⁾

A different and surprising technique now appears: the extended comparison of the earthly Eden to "the limestone moors that stretch from Brough/ To Hexham and the Roman Wall"⁽⁵⁾ familiar to Auden's boyhood. The effectiveness of this section (by contrast, perhaps, to 'In Praise of Limestone'⁽⁶⁾ which uses the same analogy) derives more from the autobiographical, personal note it introduces than from the pertinence of specific points of comparison, though the symbolisation of the unconscious, Oedipal drive with its combined terror and attraction represents, perhaps, the single most appropriate use of Freudian symbolism in Auden's work. Here too, his

(1) 1062n

(2) 1063n

(3) Loc. cit.

(4) See above, pp. 234-5

(5) 1102-3

(6) Horizon, XVIII (1948), pp. 1-3 ; and see below, pp. 387-92

style seems to strike the right balance of argument and rhetoric, as when he speaks of "the human creature we / Must nurse to sense and decency."⁽¹⁾

Reverting to social analysis, Auden imagines a new 'anthropos' produced by the conditions of industrialised society, Empiric Economic Man:

The urban, prudent, and inventive,
Profit his rational incentive
And work his whole exercitus.

(1222-4)

He has had his "half-success"⁽²⁾ in subduing natural forces and in the process, restricted to empirical methods of investigation, has unconsciously refuted the intellectual's assumption that useful concepts are the same as universally true propositions. The quotation accompanying this assertion in which Paul Tillich analyses the change in the nature of thought occasioned by Protestantism after the Renaissance, suggests that Auden's earlier distinction between Absolute Presuppositions and verifiable propositions no longer holds; in the modern world, according to Tillich, "the subject has no possibility of an absolute position."⁽³⁾

Those who warned against the effects of industrialism and social conformity (Blake, Rousseau, Kierkegaard and Baudelaire form a strange

(1) 1097-8

(2) 1233

(3) 1245n

alliance!) were ignored and now their fears have proved justified. Yet again Auden illustrates his argument by an extended catalogue of relevant instances, but by contrast to his earlier technique of selecting the salient, exemplary details, he now emphasises the contradictory, paradoxical aspects of "man captured by his liberty"⁽¹⁾, a method which seems to invest them with interest rather than diagnostic pertinence.

Finally, however, it is not the fault of the state that we fail to "fulfil /Eros legislative will."⁽²⁾ The real reason, indeed, is camouflaged in metaphors designed to stress the idea, expressed more concisely and effectively in those poems of Look, Stranger! on the theme that "love, except at our proposal,/Will do no trick at his disposal."⁽³⁾ Auden now resorts to obscure biological terms --- 'morphon' and 'cryptozoon'--- and to a meaningless duality:

O what can love's intention do
If all his agents are untrue ?

(1362-3)

(The second line is glossed by a summary of the findings of sociologists as to the optimum conditions for a successful marriage. No indication of what is meant by love's 'agents' is given, though.)

Philosophically, the present situation derives from two linked fallacies: Plato's "lie of intellect"⁽⁴⁾ and Rousseau's "falsehood of

(1) 1287

(2) 1338-9

(3) 'A bride in the 30s', The Listener, XIII (1935), p. 317

(4) 1378

the flesh".⁽¹⁾ Both are attributable to the "cold concupiscence
d'esprit"⁽²⁾ of the Ego who:

...looks upon her liberty
Not as a gift from life with which
To serve, enlighten, and enrich
The total creature that could use
Her function of free-will to choose
The actions that this world requires
To educate its blind desires,
But as the right to lead alone
An attic-life all on her own.

(1401-9)

In Freudian terms the Ego cannot indulge in this kind of self-analysis for it is dependent on the Id; equally, it cannot be divorced from 'the total creature' nor appropriate the function of free-will. In Auden's interpretation the Ego is, in fact, synonymous with the will, an autonomy responsible for the Ego's eventual collapse through dissatisfaction when:

She ask(s) herself why she should will
This more than that, or who would care
If she were dead or gone elsewhere,
And on her own hypothesis
Is powerless to answer this.

(1413-7)

This idiosyncratic use of Freud's terms is further confused by taking the Wagnerian "mental hero who has swooned/ With sensual pleasure at his wound"⁽³⁾ as exemplar, for the Ego is not,

- (1) 1384
- (2) 1400
- (3) 1434-5

presumably, conscious that what it worships is self-destructive.

The problem of social organisation is now resumed in the specific case of America which from its inception has furnished examples of the same heresies found in Europe, the same because their cause is unchanged: "round the freedom of the Will /Our disagreements centre still."⁽¹⁾ This does not seem to be quite true, for Auden goes on to speak of America as exemplifying even more than Europe the effects of the machine which has destroyed the intimate bonds of community and made clear that "aloneness is man's real condition."⁽²⁾ To illustrate this solitude by comparison with legendary quest heroes---"Each salesman now is the polite /Adventurer, the landless knight"⁽³⁾ seems a device of mere literary ingenuity, by contrast, for example, with Simeon's use of mythological figures in For the Time Being⁽⁴⁾, to convey the sense of importance ordinary people will feel when the Incarnation has made all equal before God:

Every invalid is Roland defending the narrow
pass against hopeless odds, every stenographer
Brünnhilde refusing to renounce her lover's ring.⁽⁵⁾

Again Auden abandons argument in favour of declamation, in

(1) 1487-8

(2) 1542 The sense of 'real', though crucial, goes undefined.

(3) 1547-8

(4) See below, p. 307

(5) For the Time Being, p. 182 ; see below, p. 299ff.

this case of a kind which tacitly co-opts the reader's agreement:

O,
Three-quarters of these people know
Instinctively what ought to be
The nature of society
And how they'd live there if they could.

(1581-5)

Here, perhaps, imagery is at its most deceptive, especially
Auden's habitual technique of 'paysage moralisé' used to
represent the ideal society as:

The seamless live continuum
Of supple and coherent stuff
Whose form is truth, whose content love,
Its pluralist interstices
The homes of happiness and peace.

(1590-4)

This is not made any more convincing by a crude half-translation
of the latin 'res publicum', nor by the exaggeratedly paradoxical
characterisation of the ideal place:

Where Freedom dwells because it must
Necessity because it can,
And men confederate in Man.(1)

(1600-2)

In the process of summing up Auden (in the poem which forms the
note to line 1629) runs the logical gamut of solutions offered so
far: metaphysics convinces us that our 'maze' has a plan, though

- (1) Auden takes this 'formula' from Charles Williams's The Descent of the Dove (see below, p. 290) but, lacking the theological 'commitment' of that work, the present context is less able to absorb the superficial glitter of aphorism.

the explanations offered by Art and Science are either self-referential or contradicted by experience, and psychology's attribution of all reactions to unconscious states gives no answer acceptable to the conscious mind upon which decision depends. Thus 'anthropos apteros' is forced to rely on empirical evidence and dismiss his subjective impressions, a conclusion effectively circumvented by Auden's repetition of the view that we "can live because we're lived; the powers /That we create with are not ours."⁽¹⁾ Formerly (1168n) substantiated by Groddeck's theory of the It, these powers are delimited only by two tangential notes suggestive of the wrestling relationship already proposed as the only one to acknowledge the dialectical nature of truth.⁽²⁾

The Letter concludes with the invocation of archetypal spirits of power --- Unicorn among the cedars, Dove of science and of light, Ichthus, Wind, Voice, Clock and Keeper of the years---all, presumably, palimpsests of Christ and as such distractingly metaphorical if poetically impressive.

The greatest virtues of the Letter are its allusiveness and the way its verse is sustained, against which too great a reliance on aphorism and general equivocations of tone must be set. Judgement

(1) 1649-50

(2) See 'Jacob and the Angel', The New Republic, CI (1939), p. 293

of the Letter must, however, be regarded as partial without reference to 'The Quest' especially since its baroque images and personification of abstractions so effectively counterpoint the prosaic, factual manner of the Letter.

The 'genre' of the Quest is especially interesting to Auden, mainly because he detects in it archetypal literary and psychological qualities. He distinguishes three types of Quest: the fairy tale, the medieval legend of the Holy Grail, and the post-Reformation quests of Christian, Faust, Peer Gynt and K in Kafka's The Castle.⁽¹⁾ As noted above, what marks K's task is the knowledge that the Necessary which he must pursue appears arbitrary to the human vision. 'The Quest' is, therefore, a necessarily ambiguous series of stages and progressions whose logically autobiographical character⁽²⁾ is offset by the extreme personification of abstractions. In the same way the third-person 'narration', perhaps intended to contribute a sense of overwhelming irony, may be thought to border at times on virtuoso nihilism. It seems that as well as portraying the despair which he regards as the necessary prelude to faith, 'The Quest' reveals Auden both dazzled

(1) 'The Wandering Jew', The New Republic, CIV (1941), p. 185

(2) In his prefatory note to the sequence (The New Republic, CIII (1940), p. 716) Auden explains that "the 'He' and 'They' referred to should be regarded as both objective and subjective."

by illogicality and impatient for some equally powerful demonstration of Christian belief.

The sequence is further paradoxical in that each poem is autonomous yet part of the whole, and in the more fundamental ideological sense that any literary treatment of the Quest theme is liable to be read not merely as symbolic of the spiritual or moral journey but as a paradigm of actual behaviour. (Auden makes the point that Kafka, exemplifier of the modern quest situation, may be "one of those writers who are doomed to be read by the wrong public"⁽¹⁾, that is, those morbidly fascinated by anxiety.) It is just this habit of self-projection which 'The Preparations',⁽²⁾ exposes as false:

In theory they were sound on Expectation
Had there been situations to be in;
Unluckily they were their situation.

The sonnets are divisible into three groups according to their method. The first extemporise upon the symbolic properties of some object. The door⁽³⁾ represents a way to new things as well as something to be closed voluntarily when afraid and involuntarily at death. The poem's ending is effective but vague: childhood wonderment is a powerful feeling but what, here at the beginning of the sequence, does Auden want us to feel about it?

'The Garden',⁽⁴⁾ which concludes the sequence, embodies

(1) The Dyer's Hand, p. 166

(2) II (This is the number of the sonnet.)

(3) 'The Door', I

(4) XX

traditional associations of resolution and peace, though in imagery which implicitly revalues these connotations:

All journeys die here; wish and weight are lifted:
Where often round some old maid's desolation
Roses have flung their glory like a cloak.

'The Tower',⁽¹⁾ depends upon a traditional, ambiguous symbol and the poem does delicate justice to a kind of Yeatsian splendour-in-futility⁽²⁾ though the ironic reference to magic in the last line makes its personal application clear:

Here great magicians caught in their own spell
Long for a natural climate as they sigh
'Beware of Magic' to the passer-by.⁽³⁾

'The Waters',⁽⁴⁾ does not restrict its moral to the poet but includes him among those who seeks answers in introspection, the waters symbolising the depths of the unconscious. To exercise its necessary control the rational mind must, paradoxically, first penetrate if not into the unconscious at least to a theoretical understanding of their relationship; like the fisherman of the poem, it must know how fish live under water in order to land them.

(1) IX

(2) John Bayley suggests that a similar feature is characteristic of Auden's earlier work ; The Romantic Survival, pp. 127-34

(3) 'Magic' is about to become Auden's favourite term for the illegitimate use of art to enchant rather than disenchant its audience; see below, p. 295

(4) XIX

The city⁽¹⁾ symbolises release from causal necessity determined by Nature but, paradoxically, provides not freedom but another temptation, anonymity. The crossroads⁽²⁾ is the place "of decision and farewell", though Auden's attitude to both seems ambivalent. Must all adventure lead to dishonour irrespective of whether friends actually need the sobering experience of "the Bad Lands and the sinister direction"⁽³⁾ or not ? Equally uncertain is the conclusion Auden intends to be drawn from the fairy tale formula of the year-and-a-day as the time allotted to complete a set task. Over-confidence in our ability to finish "the journey that should take no time at all"⁽⁴⁾ (psychic unity or Christian faith ?) is, surely, more excusably human than the strictness of the stipulation itself.

'The Traveller', next in the sequence, identifies the 'Greater Hallows' more realistically as the desire for innocence, and presents it in an evocative setting and in terms of the counter-suggestibility of age: acting one's age is, invariably, to distort one's personality. As in 'The Waters', Auden relies on a heavily involuted conclusion : 'the traveller

(1) 'The City', V.

(2) 'The Crossroads', III.

(3) Loc. cit.

(4) Loc. cit.

thinks himself too young to admit that he longs for innocence,
the truth that is:

...only waiting to be told
To be his father's house and speak his mother tongue.

The next four sonnets deal with the progress of the artist, beginning with three temptations to which he is vulnerable.⁽¹⁾ The adolescent of 'The First Temptation',⁽²⁾ discovers his talent as a means to power in classic Freudian fashion. In the process, however, he is assailed by the frightening awareness that the 'real' creations of the imagination do not correspond to the empirical truth. The possibility of fantasy being anything other than pleasant for the artist does not seem to have occurred to Freud. That some chastening comparison with reality must be part of the artistic exercise of imagination, as Auden here suggests, appears to be more psychologically credible than Freud's view. (Ironically, it is proposed at a time when Auden comes closest to accepting that Freud's interpretation of art is the correct one.)⁽³⁾

(1) Their similarity to the three temptations of Christ, suggested by Fuller (p. 145) seems too incongruous to be compatible with the role of the artist.

(2) VI

(3) See below, p. 295

'The Second Temptation',⁽¹⁾ illustrates the dangers of egotism, especially for the intellectual, both psychologically and practically, in terms of the subjugation of the flesh and a consequent madness leading to suicide. The poem fails to establish an effective causal connection between the two but, employing a characteristic kind of personification, successfully conveys what might be called the 'inscape' of reality perceived by the unstable mind:

The library annoyed him with its look
Of calm belief in being really there.

This is a less successful effect than, for example, occurs in the fifth stanza of 'If I could tell you':⁽²⁾

Perhaps the roses really want to grow,
The vision seriously intends to stay.

The latter conveys more suggestively the mysterious assertiveness of unconscious phenomena, but the idea behind both is the same.

The third temptation⁽³⁾ is to a different kind of intellectualism (one, in fact, especially applicable to Auden himself), the tendency to rationalise all human feelings, reaching the conclusion that:

'All the arm-chair philosophers are false;
To love another adds to the confusion;
The song of pity is the Devil's Waltz.'

The protagonist bows to fate and achieves material success while

(1) VII

(2) Vice Versa, 1,2 (1941), p. 19

(3) 'The Third Temptation', VIII.

suffering nightmare encounters with the real self he has denied. The ambiguity of the poem, paralleling the ambivalent attitude which tends to lead to rationalising, leaves the reader to wonder whether any drawing of conclusions based on observation must inevitably fail to reveal the basis of happiness or whether the conclusions drawn here are archetypal fallacies. The fact that in 'September 1st, 1939' Auden did express the view that romantic love confuses the issue of world unity and that he has always regarded pity as a variety of egocentricity, adds to the ambiguity.

'The Tower' completes the biography of the artist, identifying (as noted above) his egocentric, sermonising, bewitching role. The remaining poems of the sequence deal with various religious situations, frequently defined in Kierkegaard's terms and all dependent basically, on his idea of compulsion, which may be said to unite the aesthetic and ethical lines of argument. Auden quotes the relevant section from The Journals as the note to line 109 of the Letter:

A man cannot in reason embark upon 'the voluntary' unless he has an immediate certainty that it is required of him in particular. From the point of view of the universal requirements, 'the voluntary' is in fact presumption; and consequently one must have immediate certainty that the particular is required of one in order to be able to risk embarking upon it.(1)

(1) The Journals of Soren Kierkegaard, edit. and transl. by Alexander Dru, (London, 1938), pp. 413-4

The corollary of this is that:

In order really to be a great genius, a man must be an exception. But in order that his being exceptional should be a serious matter he himself must be unfree, forced into the position.⁽¹⁾

'The Average',⁽²⁾ reveals the horrifying spectacle of "an Average Man /Attempting the Exceptional" and in 'The Presumptuous',⁽³⁾ the misguided adventurers set out "on what, for them, was not compulsory."

With the exception of these poems, Auden uses Kierkegaard's ideas in order, apparently, to criticise them. 'Vocation',⁽⁴⁾ seems to satirize the subject both for his adolescent wish to suffer and for the adult 'savoir-faire' that enables him to "keep the silences at bay." Similarly, the disasters which befall all extremists are seen, in 'The Useful',⁽⁵⁾ to provide essential guidance to the moderate masses. The pretence of being exceptional is not, therefore, entirely without value. 'The Way',⁽⁶⁾ satirizes the same attributes of the fairy tale hero and the propensity of anyone to imagine he could imitate such quests. To remind us that all the traditional legends were actually formulated by "married men /Who liked fishing and a flutter on the horses now and then" is

(1) The Journals of Soren Kierkegaard, p. 407

(2) XI

(3) X

(4) XII

(5) XIII

(6) XIV

obviously salutary. To conclude by also questioning the reliability of any result arrived at "by observing oneself and then just inserting a Not" leaves only the external and divine as a source of truth. 'The Lucky',⁽¹⁾ next in the sequence, seems, however, to decry even that. The poem is, presumably, intended to illustrate the fact that grace is only bestowed on the person unaware of his claim to supernatural reward. Its conclusion, apparently demonstrating this principle, does not actually do so:

Hence Failure's torment: 'Was I doomed in any case,
Or would I not have failed had I believed in Grace ?'

For, while grace, once given, assures success for its recipient, the converse can only be true if consciousness of the possibility of receiving grace automatically prohibits one from doing so.

'The Hero',⁽²⁾ is just as ambiguous. Far from showing that "only God can tell the saintly from the suburban"⁽³⁾ — the interviewers have identified him—— it actually confuses the opposition Auden has already set up between the dashing world conquerer and the potterer-at-home of 'A Shilling Life will give you all the facts.'⁽⁴⁾

The two remaining poems of this group deal with a more nebulous

(1) XV

(2) XVI

(3) 'New Year Letter', 1277n

(4) Rep (magazine of the Croydon and Westminster Repertory Theatre), 1 (1934), p. 5

reaction, that of society to its extreme members, though again, the intention is unclear. Whilst it seems true that outcasts reinforce the codes they violate, the fact that:

The Nameless is what no free people mention;
Successful men know better than to try
To see the face of their Absconded God.(1)

....does not seem to reflect either creditably or discredibly on society.

In 'The Adventurers',⁽²⁾ too, paradox replaces a definite 'conclusion'. Are the ascetic implicitly condemned for following the Negative Way⁽³⁾ or the supplicants for adopting their relics as a shrine? The fact that the ascetics die praising the Kierkegaardian Absurd⁽⁴⁾ suggests their rightness, yet the phrase introducing them as "spinning upon their central thirst like tops" implies egocentricity.

The autonomy of the poems in the sequence is increased by this diversity of themes and their paradoxical treatment. The result may appear baffling but stimulating, a combination in keeping with the ideas of trial and discovery behind the Quest theme itself.

(1) 'Adventure', XVII

(2) XVIII

(3) Fuller notes, (pp.146-7), that the concept of the Affirmative and Negative Way is proposed in Williams's The Descent of the Dove, pp.57-9; see below, p. 291

(4) See below, p. 282

The 'Epilogue' changes the third-person narration of 'The Quest' for the intimate, involving second-person plural of the 'Prologue' and the Letter. It evokes by a series of powerful images the present state of doom, reminiscent of the final part of XVI of Poems 1930.⁽¹⁾ The basic question remains:

...how can
We will the knowledge that we must know to will ?

The psychological solution has proved unsatisfactory for the ego has become 'inflamed' by its migration to "the hanging gardens of Eros."⁽²⁾ Faith must now be placed in "the Word which was / From the beginning" and, implicitly, attempts at rational explanation abandoned.

Before tracing the development of this thesis in For the Time Being, a summary will be given of the specific concepts featured in New Year Letter and their origins.

The greatest influence of this period and, probably, of any period of Auden's writing, is Kierkegaard. Auden records that he began reading him in the late 1930s while starting "in a tentative and experiment sort of way"⁽³⁾ to go to church. He identifies Kierkegaard as "a secular dialectician"⁽⁴⁾, 'theologian' being too systematic a term to apply to one whose approach is

(1) See above, p. 117

(2) The sexual connotation Eros acquires here contradicts its earlier definition as "the basic will to self-actualisation", 'Eros and Agape', The Nation, CLII (1941), p. 757

(3) Untitled essay in Modern Canterbury Pilgrims, p. 41

(4) 'A Preface to Kierkegaard', The New Republic, CX (1944), p. 683

"equally hostile to Cartesian mechanism and Hegelian idealism."⁽¹⁾

Though the approach is said to be typical of what is most valuable in Marx and Freud⁽²⁾, Existentialism differs from all mechanistic or pragmatic philosophies which begin "by considering the objects of human knowledge, essences and relations":⁽³⁾

....the existential philosopher begins with man's immediate experience as a subject, i.e., as a being in need, an interested being whose existence is at stake.⁽⁴⁾

Nonetheless, Existentialism has its own categories corresponding to the psychological ego and self, referred to by Kierkegaard as the Aesthetic and the Ethical, Immediateness and Reflection, Anxiety and Pride, the Exceptional and the Average, Being and Becoming, the Unconditional and the Arbitrary.

Auden illustrates the categories of Aesthetic, Ethical and Religious historically.⁽⁵⁾ The Greek gods exemplify the Aesthetic attitude which depends on the criteria of strength and weakness, fortune and misfortune. The Ethical view is based on the premise that sin is ignorance and that 'to know the good is to will it'. Only the Religious approach (free from antithetical stricture) assumes the existence of God. Hence:

(1) 'A Preface to Kierkegaard', p. 683

(2) Loc. cit.

(3) Loc. cit.

(4) Loc. cit.

(5) Discussed in 'A Preface to Kierkegaard' and in the 'Introduction' to The Living Thoughts of Kierkegaard, edit. Auden, (New York, 1952). (For simplicity, references to this work omit the names of the individual works of Kierkegaard from which they are taken.)

The commands of God are neither the aesthetic fiat, "Do what you must" nor the ethical instruction, "These are the things which you may or must not do", but the call of duty, "Choose to do what at this moment in this context I am telling you to do."⁽¹⁾

Of all the specific ideas Auden adopts from Kierkegaard this of choice, reinforcing his own assertion of 1934, "Choose therefore that you may recover"⁽²⁾, is the most important. He accepts Kierkegaard's view that choice is the essential, distinguishing feature of human beings, the expression of man's real nature, precisely because it involves the whole personality: "I cannot observe the act of choice objectively. If I try, I shall not choose."⁽³⁾ Auden also expresses the sense in which freedom of choice is only conceivable as a moment in which it "rushes with infinite speed to bind itself unconditionally by choosing resignation, the choice of which it is true that in it there is no question of choice."⁽⁴⁾ Or, in Auden's words:

Freedom from, the rejection of something, is absolutely conditional on freedom to, the acceptance of something.⁽⁵⁾

Kierkegaard dramatises the element of risk involved in faith in the figure of the Leap by which one breaks out of the circle of conscious thought, and in the image of sailing out over seventy thousand fathoms

- (1) 'Introduction' to The Living Thoughts of Kierkegaard, p. 16
- (2) See above, p. 197
- (3) 'Introduction' to The Living Thoughts of Kierkegaard, p. 7
- (4) The Living Thoughts of Kierkegaard, p. 131
- (5) 'Romantic or Free?' Smith Alumnae Quarterly, (August, 1940), p. 353

of water. Though the latter occurs in The Sea and the Mirror,⁽¹⁾ Auden makes no mention of the Leap except to comment with hindsight that it did not seem to correspond with the way choices had actually been presented to him.⁽²⁾

One of Auden's most memorable definitions is of Romanticism which he calls "unawareness of the dialectic"⁽³⁾, though, strictly speaking, the dialectic is not, according to Kierkegaard, an object of cognition but, as it were, a natural process.

In temporal terms the dichotomy of Immediateness and Reflection resolved in the act of choice is represented as the difference between Being and Becoming. The difference is vital, for:

Hell is the being of the lie
That we become if we deny
The laws of consciousness and claim
Becoming and Being are the same.⁽⁴⁾

Some disparity seems to exist, however, between Kierkegaard's view of time and Auden's. Whereas the latter takes it as "our best protection" against the Devil's "paralysing smile" that we "live in eternity"⁽⁵⁾, Kierkegaard quotes a tale of the Middle Ages in which a sufferer in hell asked the Devil what time it was and received the damning reply, 'An eternity.'⁽⁶⁾

(1) See below, pp. 459-60

(2) The Dyer's Hand, p. 103

(3) 'New Year Letter', 821n

(4) Ibid., 898-901

(5) Ibid., 427-30

(6) The Living Thoughts of Kierkegaard, p. 90

('Hell' ⁽¹⁾), on the other hand, may have been prompted by this same story.)

A crucial question underlying his discussion of choice, though not posed as such by Kierkegaard, is which facet of the personality should be thought of as promoting choice. Auden gives two answers, the first being Eros, "the basic will to self-actualisation" ⁽²⁾ whose task is "to actualize the possible by a series of decisions in which one future possibility is grasped by the present, and the rest thereby rendered impossible." ⁽³⁾ As examples of the alternative perversions of this exercise --- hiding from the possible and attempting to live in the actual or hiding from the actual and trying to exist only in terms of the possible --- he cites Don Juan and Tristan respectively, suggesting that Eros still retains sexual and romantic connotations. (Elsewhere, however, he quotes Kierkegaard's point that Eros, the god of Love, was not himself in love , so that "if I continue to worship erotic immediacy, I am worshipping myself.") ⁽⁴⁾

Auden's second suggestion as to the agent by which choice is realised is the imagination:

In order to become what I should become....I have to put my imagination to work, and limit its playful activity to imagining those possibilities which, for me, are both permissible and real; ⁽⁵⁾

(1) Harper's Bazaar, 2732 (1940), p.118

(2) 'Eros and Agape', The Nation, CLII, 26 (1941), p.757

(3) Loc. cit.

(4) 'A Preface to Kierkegaard', p. 684

(5) The Dyer's Hand, p. 133

Though not apparent until 1954 this emphasis on the role of the imagination is the one which persists in Auden's work and constitutes a main principle of The Age of Anxiety.⁽¹⁾ It is, in fact, anathema to Kierkegaard's view, for he considers imagination as the province of being not becoming, "or at most becoming in a very foreshortened perspective."⁽²⁾

This stricture clearly affects art and the artist, firstly because his very medium, language, "involves reflection, and cannot, therefore, express the immediate."⁽³⁾ Music, by contrast, is "the medium for that species of the immediate which, spiritually determined, is determined as lying outside of the spirit"⁽⁴⁾, that is, the essence of non-personal immediacy, the image of immediacy rather than the substance. (Comparison of these definitions with Auden's own later consideration of language, music and painting as means of communication indicates how much they derive from Kierkegaard's ideas.)⁽⁵⁾ The second and more morally damning limitation on the artist is that "his only standard for appreciating experience is The Interesting, which in practice means his childhood and his sex-life."⁽⁶⁾

(1) See below, p. 336

(2) The Living Thoughts of Kierkegaard, p. 74

(3) Ibid., p. 66

(4) Ibid., p. 68

(5) See below, p. 368

(6) 'The Rewards of Patience', Partisan Review, IX,4 (1942), p. 337

Two further terms expressing the basic dichotomy are the Arbitrary and the Unconditional, the former being regarded as a conscious exercise whereby "you transform something accidental into the absolute, and as such, into the object of admiration."⁽¹⁾ Auden, however, seems to regard the arbitrary as a philosophical burden, the main result of reflection being to discover that "the Necessary itself, to the human vision, appears arbitrary."⁽²⁾

Similar to the idea of the Arbitrary is that of the Absurd, one of Kierkegaard's arguments for belief in the existence of God being the very absurdity of such an idea. Auden alludes to it in XVIII of 'The Quest' where the presumptuous questers die "still praising the Absurd with their last breath", a context which implies perhaps that the idea of absurdity itself is misguided. Though he does refer to the idea of something unconditionally demanded of individuals,⁽³⁾ a much more prevalent notion is that of the Absolute Presupposition, derived from Collingwood.⁽⁴⁾ The essential difference between the two is that Absolute Presuppositions may be revised when they become redundant.⁽⁵⁾ (This idea dominates even the distinction between Temptations and Tribulations which he also employs⁽⁶⁾, indeed

(1) The Living Thoughts of Kierkegaard, p. 69

(2) 'The Wandering Jew', The New Republic, CIV, 1367 (1941), p. 186
This view may be derived from Schelling's dictum "arbitrariness is the goddess of history" quoted by Tillich, The Interpretation of History, (New York, 1936), p. 255

(3) See 'Romantic or Free?', Smith Alumnae Quarterly, (August, 1940), p. 356

(4) Ibid., pp. 355-6; see above, p. 236

(5) See above, p. 237

(6) See 'Mimesis and Allegory', English Institute Annual, (1940) pp. 13-4, and 'New Year Letter', 1244n.

no indication is given of the relation of Tribulations, unalterable hazards, to Absolute Presuppositions.)

Auden follows Kierkegaard in interpreting the Unconditional, that is, God, in quasi-psychological terms. Kierkegaard writes that since the human race ceased to fear God it began to fear itself, "began to cultivate the fantastic, and now it trembles before this creature of its own imagination."⁽¹⁾ Auden makes the same comment so as to reveal the conversion as psychologically inevitable:

...man cannot live without a sense of the Unconditional: if he does not consciously walk in fear of the Lord, then his unconscious sees to it that he has something else, airplanes or secret police, to walk in fear of.⁽²⁾

Auden's idea that 'God' is merely the term man uses to express the real nature that his own actions are unable to express⁽³⁾ seems somewhat dogmatic by comparison with Kierkegaard's more mystical account of God as concept, spirit and, above all, subject.⁽⁴⁾

Anxiety and Pride are terms used by Kierkegaard to describe the essential existential predicament and the reason for it. Auden takes up both, making the former the common denominator of both the major ideologies he has considered so far:

- (1) The Living Thoughts of Kierkegaard, pp. 48-9
- (2) 'Tract for the Times', The Nation, CLII (1941), p. 25
- (3) 'Christian on the Left', The Nation, CXLIX (1939), p. 273
- (4) The Living Thoughts of Kierkegaard, p. 128

..... the basic human problem is man's anxiety in time; e.g., his present anxiety over himself in relation to his past and his parents (Freud), his present anxiety over himself in relation to his future and his neighbors (Marx), his present anxiety over himself in relation to eternity and God (Kierkegaard).⁽¹⁾

Auden follows Kierkegaard in identifying pride as the most pernicious of sins and the root of all others because it is "both incorrigible and absolute"⁽²⁾ and "is invisible to the one who is guilty of it he can only infer it from results."⁽³⁾

One of the most influential ideas Auden adopts from Kierkegaard is implicit in the basic presupposition of Existentialism, the dependence of "the Protestant principle" on the existence of "a man who sits in the anguish of death, in fear and trembling and much tribulation" of which "there are not many in any one generation."⁽⁴⁾ It is this view of the individual as solitary and autonomous which Auden finds both intrinsically attractive and necessitated by the fragmenting nature of a technological society. "Aloneness is man's real condition"⁽⁵⁾ is a maxim often repeated during this period as is the comparison of people to parts of

(1) 'A Preface to Kierkegaard', p.683

(2) The Dyer's Hand, p.95

(3) 'Introduction' to The Living Thoughts of Kierkegaard, p.8

(4) 'Mimesis and Allegory', English Institute Annual, (1940), p.17 and in The Living Thoughts of Kierkegaard, p.219

(5) 'New Year Letter', 1542

speech which accompanies it in The Journals :

Only those who accept their aloneness can be
substantives or verbs: those who reject it
remain merely adjectives, conjunctions, adverbs.(1)

Few of Kierkegaard's attacks are as strong as those against the
apathy of the bourgeoisie and the rigours of officialdom⁽²⁾ but
neither is taken up by Auden at present. The former is strongly
reminiscent of his attitude to the middle-classes during the
1930s and the latter surely encouraged his invective against
The Management in such a later poem as 'The Chimeras'.⁽³⁾

Kierkegaard's actual appearance in 'New Year Letter'....

Ironie Kierkegaard stared long
And muttered, 'All are in the wrong'.

(1265-6)

.... beside Blake, Rousseau and Baudelaire, all reacting in
negative and somewhat hysterical terms against progress as
embodied in the emergence of Empiric Economic Man, seems to
discredit him and if taken in conjunction with those sonnets
of 'The Quest' which appear to criticise or refute Kierkegaard's
views, may suggest that by 1941 his influence had reached its
peak if not actually started to wane.

- (1) Quoted in 'Romantic or Free?', p.358 and 'New Year Letter',
514n
- (2) See The Living Thoughts of Kierkegaard, pp.32 and 27
respectively.
- (3) Nones, (1951), p.45 ; see below, p.446

Auden makes the point that "to become a disciple of Kierkegaard is to betray him for what he would teach is an approach not a conclusion."⁽¹⁾ Since the approach itself is essentially subjective (each must approach God, the supreme Subject, by realising the extent of his own subjectivity) it is impossible to estimate how successfully Auden learned from him. Apart from the terminology Kierkegaard supplies, his most important calculable appeal may perhaps have been the talent of "making Christianity sound bohemian"⁽²⁾ which Auden ascribes to him.

Spears considers the influence of Reinhold Niebuhr to be second only to that of Kierkegaard.⁽³⁾ The nature of this influence is accurately suggested by the invidious comparison Auden draws between Niebuhr and Kierkegaard in reviewing the former's Christianity and Power Politics:⁽⁴⁾

...orthodoxy, the middle way, has its spiritual dangers too, and it is a sense of these that one misses here, the sense as Kierkegaard puts it, of always being out alone over seventy thousand fathoms.⁽⁵⁾

It might be said, in fact, that Niebuhr supplies exactly the social context that Auden finds missing in Kierkegaard's approach (even if he is disposed to prefer the latter's excitement) the sense ,
h h

(1) 'A Preface to Kierkegaard', p. 686

(2) Modern Canterbury Pilgrims, p. 41

(3) Spears, p. 179 Nones (1951) is dedicated to the Niebuhrs.

(4) 'Tract for the Times', The Nation, CLII (1941), pp. 24-5

(5) Ibid., p. 25

in which, as well as his unique 'existential' relation, man has a second relation to God:

As a creature composed of matter, as a biological organism, every man, in common with everything else in the universe, is related by necessity to the God who created that universe and saw that it was good, for the laws of nature to which, whether he likes it or not, he must conform are of divine origin.(1)

With this the following statement of Niebuhr's may be compared:

The revelation of God to man is always a twofold one, a personal-individual revelation, and a revelation in the context of social-historical experience.(2)

Perhaps the most useful example of Niebuhr's consideration of both relations (or revelations) is his formulation of the paradoxical nature of anxiety, arising precisely from the opposition of the two:

Anxiety is the inevitable concomitant of the paradox of freedom and finiteness in which man is involved. Anxiety is the internal precondition of sin. It is the inevitable spiritual state of man, standing in the paradoxical situation of freedom and finiteness. Anxiety is the internal description of the state of temptation.(3)

He further endows the concept with psychological credibility by saying that it is impossible to make a simple separation between the creative and destructive elements of anxiety⁽⁴⁾, this being just the ambivalent

(1) Untitled essay in Modern Canterbury Pilgrims, p. 42

(2) The Nature and Destiny of Man, vol. I, (London, 1941), p. 136

(3) Ibid., pp. 194-5 This definition seems to be the one drawn upon in The Age of Anxiety; see below, p. 338

(4) Ibid., p. 196

character of neurosis as Auden interprets it.⁽¹⁾

The degree of freedom here presupposed is significantly greater than Kierkegaard seems to allow and, whilst it contradicts Auden's views on the connection between social conditions and human attitudes,⁽²⁾ is tacitly assumed by the invariably optimistic conclusion of even his most chastening reviews. In Niebuhr's words:

(Man) tries to interpret himself in terms of natural causality or in terms of his unique rationality; but he does not see that he has a freedom of spirit which transcends both nature and reason.⁽³⁾

Niebuhr implicitly rejects both the Catholic and the Protestant concepts of 'Natural Law', concluding unequivocally that "love is the law of freedom"⁽⁴⁾, an idea Auden takes pleasure in exploring in 'Law, say the gardeners, is the sun'⁽⁵⁾, where comparison of law and love culminates in these beautiful qualifications:

Like love we don't know where or why
Like love we can't compel or fly
Like love we often weep
Like love we seldom keep.

(1) See above, p.209.

(2) Significantly Niebuhr's analysis pays considerable tribute to Marx for recognising "the profound paradox of human spirituality and morality: that the interests of the self cannot obscure these interests behind a facade of general interest and universal values." The Nature and Destiny of Man, vol. I, p.36

(3) Ibid., p.102

(4) Ibid., p.314

(5) Another Time, (1940), p.5

In the same way Niebuhr's view of God is more 'humane' than Kierkegaard's seems to be, and ultimately more acceptable to Auden. The essence of Niebuhr's view of both man's idea of God and of God himself is summed up thus:

The Christian view of the self is possible only from the standpoint of Christian theism in which God is not merely the 'x' of the unconditioned or the undifferentiated external. God is revealed as loving will; and His will is active in creation, judgement and redemption.(1)

The influence of Paul Tillich is less easy to separate from that of Kierkegaard. Auden seems to derive from Tillich the concepts of Kairos and Logos, the former being defined as "this fulfilled moment, the moment of time approaching us as fate and decision"(2) : the latter as "the timeless Logos".(3) Though these concepts are superficially glanced at in 'Kairos and Logos',(4) they receive more thorough treatment in For the Time Being.(5)

In New Year Letter Auden quotes a passage from The Interpretation of History describing the attitude to nature which prevents Protestantism assuming "the absolute position of the knowing subject"(6) This seems to be an abstrusely philosophical and elaborate gloss on Empiric Economic Man's battle with "reason's

(1) The Nature and Destiny of Man, vol. I, p. 267

(2) The Interpretation of History, trans. N.A.Rasetzki & E.L.Talmey, (New York, 1936), p. 129

(3) Loc. cit. Tillich's definition is actually less 'full' than Auden's own, as "the consciousness, the will informing till it fashion all things fair"; 'A Literary Transference', Purpose, XII, 3 & 4 (1940), p. 133

(4) Southern Review, VI, 4 (1941), p. 729

(5) See below, pp. 304-5

(6) 'New Year Letter', 1245n; The Interpretation of History, pp. 134-5

depravity that takes /The useful concepts that she makes /As
universals."⁽¹⁾

Auden acknowledges that many of the ideas of the Letter come from Charles Williams's The Descent of the Dove.⁽²⁾ The epigram of Montaigne⁽³⁾ which is the 'motto' of New Year Letter, the lines "Postremum Sanctus Spiritus effudit"⁽⁴⁾, "Quando non fuerit, non est"⁽⁵⁾, "O da quod jubes, Domine"⁽⁶⁾, "Our life and death are with our neighbour"⁽⁷⁾ and "Where Freedom dwells because it must/ Necessity because it can, /And men confederate in Man"⁽⁸⁾ are all drawn directly from Williams's book.

The detailed references to the history of ideas and Christianity in the third section of the Letter also seem to come from Williams. Auden mentions the death of Polycarp⁽⁹⁾, the Councils of Nicea and Canossa⁽¹⁰⁾, the philosophy deriving from Pelagius⁽¹¹⁾ and, most recondite of all, the word 'hilarious' used by Williams to describe the aims of Roman government, which was "to keep their world fed, to keep their world quiet,

(1) 'New Year Letter', 1245-7

(2) First published in London in 1939, a reprint with an introduction by Auden was published in New York in 1956. (Quotations are from the first edition.)

Auden makes this acknowledgement in 1600n.

(3) Dove, p. 192

(4) 'New Year Letter', 1245n; Dove, p. 187

(5) Ibid., 1668 ; Ibid., p. 39

(6) Ibid., 1680 ; Ibid., pp. 65-6

(7) Ibid., 1704 ; Ibid., p. 46

(8) Ibid., 1600-2 ;

(9) Ibid., 1167 ; Ibid., p. 28

(10) Ibid., 1467 ;

(11) Ibid., 1319 ; Ibid., p. 16

and to keep their world 'hilarious'".⁽¹⁾

Two poems of 'The Quest' make direct use of ideas found in The Descent of the Dove. 'The Preparations' quotes the gist of Williams's paraphrase of St. Augustine's reaction to Pelagianism:

Man precisely was not in a situation--- not even in a difficult situation. He was, himself, the situation; he was, himself, the contradiction; he was, himself, death-in-life and life-in-death.⁽²⁾

'The Adventurers' deals with the Negative as opposed to the Affirmative Way, the alternatives conceived by early theologians of indulgence or asceticism.⁽³⁾

The influence of Charles Cochrane must be assumed to be commensurate with Auden's statement that he has read Christianity and Classical Culture. A Study of Thought and Action from Augustus to Augustine⁽⁴⁾ many times and that his "conviction of its importance....has increased with each rereading."⁽⁵⁾ It is impossible to specify his debts to the work but his very reading of it attests the thoroughness with which he has investigated the history of Christianity as well as its philosophical complexities.

(1) 'New Year Letter', 1319 (Dove, p. 16)

(2) Dove, p. 66

(3) Ibid., p. 57

(4) First published in New York in 1940.

(5) 'Augustus to Augustine', The New Republic, CXI (1944), pp. 373-6

With Kierkegaard, Pascal was one of the first theological writers to interest Auden, indeed, at school, the only one "whom I found readable and disturbing to my complacency."⁽¹⁾ He now cites Pascal as exemplifying one of the three great dangers to democracy: "the mystic pessimism of the unhappy, who believes that man has no free will":⁽²⁾

Pascal's extreme view of original sin, by denying to fallen man any free will, makes the intellect useless, all human relations a hinderance, and all social forms meaningless.⁽³⁾

He goes further and speaks of Pascal and Rousseau illustrating "like parables how people come to prefer certainty to freedom"⁽⁴⁾, alluding to the former's advocacy of the Catholic church because it offers the security of dogma. Auden's indictment of Pascal's pessimism should, however, be set against comments of his own such as "man is lazy, impatient, and wicked at all times."⁽⁵⁾ (In further retrospect he is somewhat more charitable, detecting "a certain element of fake in his writings, a kind of romantic indulgence in unhappiness not so far removed from The Sorrows of Young Werther."⁽⁶⁾)

(1) Untitled essay in Modern Canterbury Pilgrims, p. 36

(2) 'A Great Democrat', The Nation, CXXXVIII, 13 (1939), p. 352
Auden is representing the situation from the point of view of Voltaire with whom, however, he is clearly in agreement.

(3) Loc. cit.

(4) Loc. cit.

(5) 'Romantic or Free?', Smith Alumnae Quarterly, (August, 1940), p. 356

(6) Untitled essay in Modern Canterbury Pilgrims, p. 36

From R.G. Collingwood Auden derives two concepts: the notion of Absolute Presuppositions and the view of art as magic. Collingwood defines metaphysics as the science of absolute presuppositions⁽¹⁾ and criticises the basis of Positivism which takes the absolute propositions implied by science and then exhibits them "as generalisations from observed facts."⁽²⁾ Actually, if science has a character of 'certainty':

It is because absolute presuppositions are not 'derived from experience', but are catalytic agents which the mind must bring out of its own resources to the manipulation of what is called 'experience' and the conversion of it into science and civilization.⁽³⁾

Auden quotes⁽⁴⁾ four of the kind of assumptions Collingwood is referring to but seems to take them as applying not merely to science but to all kinds of experience, including the field of ethics. Whilst Collingwood's formulation does not appear to restrict the area of its application, he modifies his original definition in a way which obviously limits its effective value:

A reformed metaphysics will conceive any given constellation of absolute presuppositions as having in its structure not the simplicity and calm that characterize the subject-matter of mathematics but the intricacy and restlessness that characterize the subject-matter, say, of legal or constitutional history.⁽⁵⁾

(1) Metaphysics, (London, 1940), p. 41

(2) Ibid., p. 149

(3) Ibid., p. 197

(4) In 'Romantic or Free?', p. 356 and, partially, in 'Mimesis and Allegory', p. 2

(5) Metaphysics, p. 77

Auden quotes this passage as explanation of the lines:

No codex gentium we make
Is difficult for Truth to break.

(759-60)

Since 'truth' is normally the term given to the relation between our codex and reality which, as it were, proves successful, that is, makes for useful and coherent correspondence, both definitions seem too vague to be useful. What both amount to is the right of intellectuals to "state what these presuppositions are, and to revise or restate them should fresh knowledge render them no longer absolute in their old form."⁽¹⁾

Secondly, Auden adopts Collingwood's distinction between art and what he calls 'magic'. The only appearance of the word itself in 'New Year Letter' is in the note to line 109, where 'The moralist mania' is defined as:

To imagine that man can play at ethics,
that art is not a conjuring trick, but magic,
that Mrs. Beecher Stowe was God.

(He explains this further elsewhere as the confusion of art with science, the failure to realise that the moral effect of art "depends upon our individual responses.")⁽²⁾ 'Magic' connotes a more primitive and effective form of stimulation such as occurs

(1) 'Romantic or Free?', p. 355

(2) 'Mimesis and Allegory', p. 15

in societies where the difference between art and life is only vaguely realised:

The incantation of a curse is believed to be as practically effective as a stab with a knife, but aesthetics only begins when it is realised that one man curses another precisely because he knows he is unable to murder him.(1)

This may be compared with Collingwood's definition (which in turn evokes the more famous one of Freud):

A magical art is an art which is representative and therefore evocative of emotion, and evokes of set purpose some emotions rather than others in order to discharge them into the affairs of practical life.(2)

Collingwood, in his analysis and in his use of the word 'magic', emphasises the extent to which readers wish art to be magical and it is this idea which is newly co-opted into Auden's theory. He writes, in a review of 1943, that no artist can prevent his work "being used as magic, for that is what all of us, highbrow and lowbrow alike, secretly want Art to be."⁽³⁾ Such a statement has the dual effects of intensifying the implied power of art and increasing the artist's responsibility to ensure that his work is appreciated for its real virtues. It raises, in fact, both the question of the relation of art to belief and of what reactions a

(1) 'Mimesis and Allegory', p. 15

(2) The Principles of Art, (Oxford, 1938), p. 69

(3) 'The Poet of the Encirclement', The New Republic, CIX, 1508 (1943), p. 579 The idea is reiterated in 'Epithalamion', Another Time, p. 107

work of art characteristically stimulates. Auden's uncertainty as to the first question has already been noted; to the second he provides a new and ingenious answer:

By significant details it shows us that our present state is neither as virtuous nor as secure as we thought, and by the lucid pattern into which it unifies these details, its assertion that order is possible, it faces us with the command to make it actual.⁽¹⁾

To equate the formal nature of a work of art with the innate desire of a personality for order may be said to follow from Freud's view of art as compensatory in its effect. To suggest that the contents of a work of art may themselves be disturbing would be an equally mundane observation. 'Significant details', however, implies not merely a kind of psychoanalytical perception by the author of those details which will provoke a response in the reader, but, more importantly, that it is the intrinsic property of the content of a work of art to produce this effect. (This may be part of the legacy of Imagism⁽²⁾ which regarded the image not as the mere imposition of a formal unity on antithetical perceptions but the ingenious integration of a kind of formality integral to the subject and the work.) The range of effects which this new view implies is, however, somewhat curtailed when Auden adds that in so far as art has a purpose it is to disenchant.⁽³⁾

(1) 'The Poet of the Encirclement', The New Republic, CIX (1943), p. 579

(2) See above, pp. 11-12

(3) 'The Poet of the Encirclement', p. 579

Of the artists from whose work Auden quotes, Kafka and Rilke are the most prominent. The former, indeed, he regards as "the artist who comes nearest to bearing the same kind of relation to our age that Dante, Shakespeare and Goethe bore to theirs."⁽¹⁾

Kafka is exemplary as perhaps the greatest master of "the pure parable"⁽²⁾ and also as a Jew in an anti-semitic world. His greatest value to Auden, however, is his presentation in

The Castle of man's contemporary predicament:

To be saved is to have Faith, and to have Faith
means to recognize something as the Necessary.⁽³⁾

The difficulty arises when one recognises that the Necessary is anything one arbitrarily selects as such. Having once made this discovery K "can never again hide the arbitrary appearance of everything from himself (and) is in constant danger of denying the Necessary he cannot understand":⁽⁴⁾

His ethical problem is how to separate what he must obey from what he must decide, how to avoid equally both presumption and delay; his temptation is to accept the incompatibility, not as an appearance caused by human sin and limitation, but as real and final, to become a dualist.⁽⁵⁾

(1) 'The Wandering Jew', The New Republic, CIV, 1367 (1941), p. 185

(2) 'The I without a Self', The Dyer's Hand, p. 159

(3) 'The Wandering Jew', p. 185

(4) Ibid., p. 186

(5) Loc. cit.

Rilke embodies another attitude to a situation of equal universality: violence. It is both the integrity of his own pacificism and the individuality of its expression which attract Auden. He is characterised in the Letter as:

Rilke, whom die Dinge bless
The Santa Claus of loneliness.

(215-6)

The first line reflects the technique of 'paysage moralisé' already explored by Auden⁽¹⁾ but it is the second which introduces the quality in Rilke Auden now admires, especially in his delimitation of the role of artist and intellectual in wartime:

He of all people knows how slowly the changes of lasting significance are accomplished....how Nature, in her constructive zeal, hardly anywhere lets intellectual forces come to the fore. And yet on the other hand, it is the same intellectual who, by force of his insight, grows impatient when he sees in what miscarried and muddled conditions human things are content and persist.⁽²⁾

The expression of hope placed in the Word at the end of New Year Letter acquires theoretical depth when considered in relation to the main ethical dichotomy of modern life: free will or determinism. It is not this relation, Auden writes in 1947,

(1) See above, p. 177 and Spears, pp. 141-2

(2) 'Poet in Wartime', The New Republic, CIII, 1336 (1940), p. 59

"which seems to our generation the real problem involving our liberty and happiness"⁽¹⁾, but that "of the Word to the Flesh, the universal to the individual, the eternal to the historical."⁽²⁾

For the Time Being⁽³⁾ is based upon this thesis. Its subtitle is 'A Christmas Oratorio', but, Spears notes, it is too long to be set in its entirety⁽⁴⁾. He implies that Auden may have anticipated this difficulty when he suggests that "the verse is an equivalent for the kind of distancing produced by musical setting"⁽⁵⁾; there is, he thinks, "no dramatic illusion, no identification, and no dramatic characterisation."⁽⁶⁾ While this does not seem to be quite true Herod, for example, is interesting precisely because his personality emerges.... the difference between the predominantly ratiocinative form of New Year Letter and that of For the Time Being is obvious.

(1) 'Some Notes on D.H.Lawrence', The Nation, CLXIV, 17 (1947), p.483

(2) Loc. cit.

(3) Dedicated to Auden's mother who died in 1941, it was written in 1941-2, (see Spears, p.205), and published in 1944 in a volume of the same title.

Three pieces had been previously published as follows:

'Because I am bewildered, because I must decide, because my...'
Harper's Magazine, CLXXXVIII, 1123 (1943), pp.64-7

'Well, so that is that. Now we must dismantle the tree...'

Ibid., (1944), pp.154-5

'O shut your bright eyes that mine must endanger....'

Commonweal, XXXVII, 10 (1942), pp.246-7

(4) He records, however, that an abridged version was set by Melvin Levy and performed in New York "a few years ago", p.205

(5) Loc. cit.

(6) Loc. cit.

The oratorio falls into nine parts, most of which correspond to the kind of divisions found in medieval Church drama. The soldier's song, for example, which may seem incongruous, derives from the comic soldier traditional in the Corpus Christi play, e.g., Watkyn in the York cycle. It employs a Narrator whose tone is distinctly modern, a Chorus, who express collective attitudes in a formal manner reminiscent of Eliot's women in Murder in the Cathedral, and two Semi-Choruses complementing the full Chorus.

The ideological crux of For the Time Being is the Incarnation, the mystical translation of the Word into Flesh. Auden's problem is, therefore, to dramatise the need for such revelation, to make its unique satisfaction equally convincing in both personal and social terms and to do so within the oratorio form.

The 'status quo' described by the Narrator and Chorus is significantly different from that of New Year Letter. There aloneness was "man's real condition"⁽¹⁾ and the integration of society depended on his realising it; here perpetual minor anxieties have culminated in the breakdown of the sense of the self and the despairing conviction that:

...our true existence
Is decided by no one and has no importance to love.⁽²⁾

(1) See above, p. 263

(2) Narrator, p. 137 Because it conveniently includes For the Time Being, The Sea and the Mirror and The Age of Anxiety, all textual quotations following in this chapter are from Collected Longer Poems (1968) and are given by page number only.

The anguish is all the greater because it seems to be a betrayal of the reward which should attend those who have taken the Pilgrim Way; they blame the Logos for its failure to fructify their Eros. The Recitative explains the situation from the Christian point of view, using Kierkegaard's concept of Absurdity⁽¹⁾ whereby Necessity will seem not only arbitrary but positively contrary to desire and expectation:

As long as the self can say 'I', it is impossible not
to rebel;
As long as there is an accidental virtue, there is a
necessary vice:
And the garden cannot exist, the miracle cannot occur.⁽²⁾

The Narrator voices the same principle of mystical contradiction:

The Exceptional is always usual
And the Usual exceptional.⁽³⁾

The definition of faith based on this formula is Auden's rather than Kierkegaard's and may be said to express the spirit rather than the letter of his theory:

To choose what is difficult all one's days
As if it were easy, that is faith. Joseph, praise.⁽⁴⁾

(1) See above, p. 282

(2) Recitative, p. 138

(3) Narrator, p. 153

(4) Loc. cit. Joseph's need for proof from God that Mary's act was His will and that that will is Love, clearly indicates his lack of this kind of faith.

The historical explanation of the Fall, however, accords with Kierkegaard's and Auden's earlier stated views, though its expression may seem excessively epigrammatical:

Since Adam, being free to choose,
Chose to imagine he was free
To choose his own necessity,
Lost in his freedom.(1)

The same experience is presented in allegorical form through the four faculties: Intuition, Feeling, Sensation and Thought reveal their own imbalances in dream-like sequences embodying the essential qualities of each. Thought, for example, found himself in a land of horrifying abstraction:

Where I was,
The haunting ghosts were figures with no ground,
Areas of wide omission and vast regions
Of passive colour.(2)

More specific illustration of categorical attitudes is provided by the Three Wise Men, the three Shepherds and Caesar. The Wise Men exemplify three intellectual positions which deny the immediacy of life: the scientist discovered that Nature cannot be reduced to simple, consistent propositions; the philosopher's analysis of Time failed to reveal what destroys the "inherited self-importance"(3) of the Present, while the moralist-politician, working on the assumption that passion, because of its very

(1) Gabriel, p. 146

(2) Thought, p. 144

(3) The Second Wise Man, p. 158

intensity and self-sufficiency, would readily yield to moral constraint, has discovered that the criterion of social welfare is not conducive to simple affection.

By contrast the plight of the Shepherds is that of ordinary people concerned like the Chorus only with subsistence and therefore inclined to view the Incarnation as a possible source of redress. Through them Auden expresses, perhaps more tellingly than ever before, the particular oppression of the proletariat which comes not from poverty but from a lack of identity:

The solitude familiar to the poor
Is feeling that the family next door,
The way it talks, eats, dresses, loves and hates,
Is indistinguishable from one's own.(1)

The Fugal Chorus celebrates the greatness of Caesar as conqueror of the Seven Kingdoms, identified by Fuller as Philosophy, Physics, Mathematics, Economics, Technology, Medicine and Psychology.(2) The chorus is elaborately and skilfully ironic, the progress referred to being in each case specious and largely a matter of expedient re-definition:

Instead of Quite-a-lot, there is Exactly-so-many;
Instead of Only-a-few, there is Just-these.(3)

(1) Second Shepherd, p. 173

(2) Fuller, p. 152

(3) Fugal Chorus, p. 161

These changes seem, intentionally, less than crucially important until it is realised that their combined effect is to exact total dependence:

When he says, You are happy, we laugh;
When he says, You are wretched, we cry;
When he says, It is true, everyone believes it;
When he says, It is false, no one believes it: (1)

The aridity of modern life is also illustrated symbolically in 'The Flight into Egypt' where the Voices of the Desert, that symbol of "actualised Triviality"⁽²⁾, reflect on their own downfall while satirically recommending their environs:

Come to our old-world desert
Where everyone goes to pieces;
You can pick up tears
For souvenirs
Or genuine diseases. (3)

(The equal triviality of organised human groups is revealed in the song of the Soldiers which exudes the raucous camaraderie popularly associated with the armed forces.)

Against this background the Incarnation is visualised. The possibility of "extemporising life" depends upon an event outside time which "redeems" time,⁽⁴⁾ that is, unites it with being; (fundamentally, the very title of the work is,

(1) Fugal-Chorus, p.162

(2) The Enchafèd Flood, p.28

(3) Voices of the Desert, p. 193 Auden is obviously much impressed by Eliot's thought and language in the fifth section of 'Burnt Norton', for example: "The Word in desert/ Is most attacked by voices of temptation".

(4) The phrase comes from St. Paul's epistle to the Ephesians, chapt. 5, verse 16.

therefore, a pun):

'The incarnation of the Word in the world is the astounding event whereby we are delivered from the woe of being alive...for the Incarnation to have occurred is the radical negation of every kind of religion(which) tends to sublimate man, and leads to the condemning of his "finite" life....men can only achieve salvation by ceasing to be, by being "lost" in the bosom of the divine.'

(1)

If this is the primary meaning of the Incarnation, its secondary effect is to end "all claims of the imagination to be the faculty which decides what is truly sacred and what is profane"⁽²⁾, since the contradiction between Christ's profane appearance as an ordinary man and the sacred assertion that he is the Son of God "is impassible to the imagination."⁽³⁾

Both facets of the personality are explored in 'The Meditation of Simeon', the thirteen sections of which move, as Greenberg has shown⁽⁴⁾, through Kierkegaard's stages of the Aesthetic, Ethical and Religious. In Aesthetic terms the 'impasse' needed before man's lack became apparent to him involves exhausting the possibilities

(1) Denis de Rougemont, Love in the Western World, (New York, 1941), quoted in 'Eros and Agape', The Nation, CLII, 26 1941), p.757

(2) The Dyer's Hand, p.457

(3) Loc. cit.

(4) Greenberg, pp. 146-152

of rational enquiry and sensory experience.⁽¹⁾ The Ethical demand is that assertion of the Positive which can only happen when all negation has been removed, the integration of the Infinite within the Finite and the manifestation of the Unconditional within the conditions of existence. In sum, therefore:

The Word could not be made Flesh until men had reached a state of absolute contradiction between clarity and despair in which they would have no choice but either to accept absolutely or to reject absolutely.⁽²⁾

The specific religious obligation imposed by the Incarnation is a consciousness of Necessity as "our freedom to be tempted"⁽³⁾ just as freedom itself is "our necessity to have faith."⁽⁴⁾ Its salutary effects involve the redress of extremes in ways either psychologically or epistemologically explicable. The two examples of the latter involve the integration of Imagination and Reason:

Because in Him the Flesh is united to the Word without magical transformation, Imagination is redeemed from promiscuous fornication with her own images.⁽⁵⁾

Because in Him the Word is united to the Flesh without loss of perfection, Reason is redeemed from incestuous fixation on her own Logic, for the One and the Many are simultaneously revealed as real.⁽⁶⁾

(1) Greenberg notes (p. 149) that "this conception of the Ethical as the category of abstract intellect is rather different from that of Kierkegaard, for whom the Ethical is the category of duty."

(2) Simeon, p. 181

(3) Ibid., p. 182

(4) Loc. cit.

(5) Loc. cit.

(6) Ibid., p. 183

Of even greater psychological importance, however, is the emancipation of imagination as the vehicle of what might be called 'moral recreation' from the class who have traditionally indulged it:

The tragic conflict of Virtue with Necessity is no longer confined to the Exceptional Hero; for disaster is not the impact of a curse upon a few great families, but issues continually from the hubris of every tainted will.⁽¹⁾

The practical result is that "every invalid is Roland defending the narrow pass against hopeless odds, every stenographer Brünnhilde refusing to renounce her lover's ring which came into existence through the renunciation of love."⁽²⁾

It is the practical interpretation of this psychological development which gives the character of Herod its dramatic as well as its personal 'raison d'être'. When "Justice is replaced by Pity as the cardinal human virtue"⁽³⁾, he observes:

The New Aristocracy will consist exclusively of hermits, bums and permanent invalids. The Rough Diamond, the Consumptive Whore, the bandit who is good to his mother, the epileptic girl who has a way with animals will be the heroes and heroines of the New Tragedy.⁽⁴⁾

This prediction is shown to be more than mere cynicism by the

(1) Simeon, p. 182

(2) Loc. cit.

(3) Herod, p. 189

(4) Loc. cit.

psychological cogency of his argument that the Public has grown too sophisticated for both art and religion:

Under all the charming metaphors and symbols, it detects the stern command, 'Be and act heroically'; behind the myth of divine origin, it senses the real human excellence that is a reproach to its own baseness.⁽¹⁾

(His adoption of the Freudian view that civilisation requires a sublimation of the "old barbaric note"⁽²⁾ seems equally reasonable.)

Herod appears at his most sympathetic in expressing the consequence to himself of Christ's birth, "that God has given me the power to destroy Himself".⁽³⁾ Herod, in fact, is to be doubly pitied in that this power is his not only symbolically, as it is all men's --- they can believe in Christ's incarnation or not as they choose--- but actually, since upon his decision waits the Massacre of the Innocents.

Dramatically, Herod must invite the reader's sympathy up to his final collapse into self-pitying vindication, though even here the plaintive assertion that he is a liberal is subtly calculated to recommend him. At face value, liberalism must seem laudable, especially in a dictator, while for the initiated reader familiar with Auden's case against liberalism, Herod's obviously liberal

(1) Herod, pp. 187-8

(2) Loc. cit.

(3) Herod, pp. 189-90

temperament must make his desperate adherence to the formal title of 'liberal' especially pathetic.

In his final speech the Narrator reflects upon the familiar post-Christmas scene with its left-over food and general feeling of recrimination at one's self-indulgence. His summing-up of the psychological effects of the celebration for the Christian seems ambiguous:

To those who have seen
The Child, however dimly, however incredulously
The Time Being is, in a sense, the most trying time of all.(1)

If to see the Child is to realise the meaning of Christian faith in a unique, transcendent way, any return to the sequence of mundane, anonymous moments of experience which constitutes time for each person must, surely, be trying in every sense. Such a deduction seems to be reinforced by the Narrator's further description which emphasises the psychological need to escape from the intensity of revelation, a need which appears to entail a sort of masochism:

We look round for something, no matter what, to inhibit
Our self-reflection, and the obvious thing for that purpose
Would be some great suffering. So, once we have met the Son,
We are tempted ever after to pray to the Father:
'Lead us into temptation and evil for our sake.'(2)

(1) Narrator, p. 196

(2) Loc. cit.

The oratorio ends with the celebration of Christ as the Way, the Truth and the Life, and the contrast this forms with the preceding speech of the Narrator illustrates the two elements of tone in For the Time Being, the traditional and the modern.

The work, in form and content, is clearly autonomous and unique in the sense that it is difficult to imagine a further work which would either pursue its theological thesis while retaining any dramatic form, or follow a similar imaginative pattern while still dealing credibly with Christian ideas (though Auden might object that opera can do the latter). The only viable possibility seems to be the application of fully accepted Christian principles to society or art. In The Sea and the Mirror⁽¹⁾ Auden selects the latter and his analysis of how The Good may be willed is continued in terms of the faculty to be viewed most ambivalently in this respect, the imagination. Whereas For the Time Being took as its 'foundation' (both subject and object) a unique, supernatural event, The Sea and the Mirror bears the same structural relation to a unique work of man's creation, Shakespeare's The Tempest.

(1) Written between 1942 and 1944 (Spears, p. 218) and dedicated to James and Tania Stern, it was published in the same volume as For the Time Being in 1944.

The Sea and the Mirror is divided into three sections. The first, 'Prospero to Ariel', shows Prospero finally relinquishing his claims on Ariel, the embodiment of imagination, contemplating the morality of the life he has led with Ariel in his service and the difficulties of living in the future left to his own devices. The second part, 'The Supporting Cast, Sotto Voce', introduces the characters of the play, each one exemplifying a particular attitude to the dilemma voiced by Prospero. The final section, 'Caliban to the Audience' (longer than the first two together) features Caliban adopting the style of the later Henry James to explain the full implications of both sides of the dichotomy. The three parts are preceded by a preface spoken by the Stage-Manager, and followed by a postscript which brings in Ariel himself.

Ariel is called "the spirit of reflection", itself an aptly ambiguous title since the imagination not only mirrors one's wishes but in doing so reveals the weaknesses for which it is being employed as compensation. In a sense, therefore, it imitates the process of consciousness itself, fulfilling an obligation "to sustain your infinite conceptual appetite with vivid concrete experiences."⁽¹⁾ It is "without desire"⁽²⁾ and consequently beyond love and hate, inhabiting a world of pure

(1) 'Caliban to the Audience', p. 235

(2) 'Balaam and His Ass', The Dyer's Hand, p. 133

This essay dealing with the Master-Servant relationship in literature provides essential commentary on The Sea and the Mirror through its observations on The Tempest.

possibility. Paradoxically, its relation to consciousness is indefinable, for in so far as imagination is absolutely spontaneous it is a 'sui generis':

...we have only to learn to sit still and give no orders,
To make you offer us your echo and your mirror;
We have only to believe you, then you dare not lie.(1)

On the other hand, if imagination is thought of in Platonic fashion as a separate faculty, it becomes such and hence liable to moral, that is, objective, censorship, for:

In order to become what I should become.... I
have to put my imagination to work, to limit
its playful activity to imagining those possibilities
which, for me, are both permissible and real.(2)

How Auden actually conceives of the Imagination in the work is obviously crucial to its meaning.

Dramatically at least, Ariel is the detached, independent agent of command. Strictly, therefore, he cannot be said to represent imagination itself but rather the logical place of imagination in personality and the results of choosing to exercise it. Similarly, Caliban does not represent the Natural Man incarnate so much as man's archetypal desire for freedom from the

(1) 'Prospero to Ariel', p. 204

(2) 'Balaam and His Ass', The Dyer's Hand, p. 133

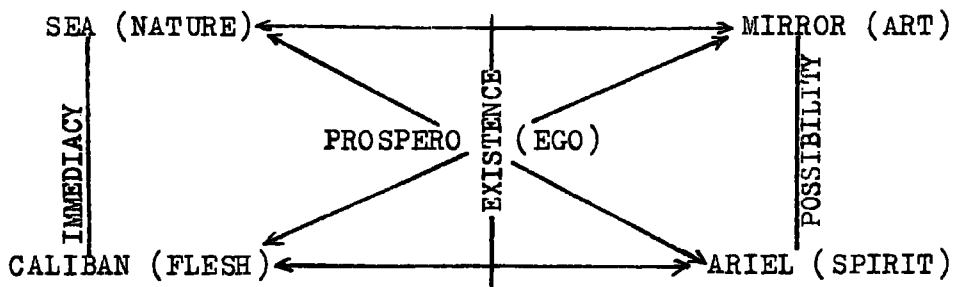
imagined difficulties attendant upon imagination, the desire for unconsciousness, the state one can only experience "as a biological organism."⁽¹⁾ Thus the relation of Caliban and Ariel is one not only of mutual exclusion but of the "mutual reversal of value".⁽²⁾ Ariel is aware of Caliban's existence but unaware of his relation to him: Caliban is unaware of Ariel as being anything different from himself:

Without imagination I remain an innocent animal,
unable to be anything but what I already am.⁽³⁾

Hence each 'faculty' merely perpetuates its own character to a logical, extreme, nightmare world, instead of becoming integrated with the rest of the personality. Caliban will transport his master

(1) 'Balaam and His Ass', p. 130

(2) 'Caliban to the Audience', p. 232 Their inter-relationship and that of the symbols of sea and mirror are neatly summarised in a diagram in the manuscript of the work, reproduced by Spears, p. 247:



(3) 'Balaam and His Ass', p. 132

to a totally objective existence "where the possessive note is utterly silent and all events are tautological repetitions and no decision will ever alter the secular stagnation."⁽¹⁾ Ariel, on the other hand, takes one where "all the voluntary movements are possible" but "any sense of direction, any knowledge of where on earth one has come from or where on earth one is going to is completely absent."⁽²⁾ Significantly, it is Caliban whom Auden makes omniscient, neutral and, in this sense, out of character, to elaborate these subtleties, presumably as a corrective to Shakespeare's bias in favour of Ariel.⁽³⁾ Caliban's role here is, in fact, the same as Prospero's in The Tempest : to step outside the drama and comment upon it.

In The Sea and the Mirror Prospero has apparently achieved the ideal relation between his Caliban and Ariel elements. Whether it is this very state of equilibrium or the arrival of the shipwrecks that makes him realise he has been using his imagination illegitimately, is uncertain. His characterisation is, in fact, fundamentally ambiguous.

(1) 'Caliban to the Audience', p. 243

(2) Ibid., p. 245

(3) "The Tempest seems to me a manichean work, not because it shows the relation of Nature and Spirit as one of conflict and hostility, which in fallen man it is, but because it puts the blame for this upon Nature and makes the Spirit innocent." 'Balaam and His Ass', The Dyer's Hand, p. 130

Does his making of the apprentice vow "To hate nothing and to ask nothing for its love"⁽¹⁾ evince the denial of his true nature and wish for detachment suggested by Auden himself of the original Prospero ?:

He has the coldness of someone who has come to the conclusion that human nature is not worth much, that human relations are, at their best, pretty sorry affairs.⁽²⁾

This does not seem true of the redeemed Prospero seen at the end of The Tempest or the character as a whole in The Sea and the Mirror. Although his "sailing alone, out over seventy thousand fathoms" identifies his situation as Kierkegaardian⁽³⁾, his songs betray his reluctance to forfeit Ariel's help. Nor is it clear why, morally, he should relinquish his art. He may be guilty of treating Caliban tyrannically but , in The Tempest at least, Caliban is equally culpable. Certainly, it is Prospero's art which brings the castaways to their respective regenerations and, it may be said, his own realisation of weakness.

The characters in Section Two⁽⁴⁾ exhibit various disjunctions of their Ariel and Caliban elements of which Prospero's art has

(1) 'Prospero to Ariel', p. 206

(2) 'Balaam and His Ass', p. 129

(3) See above, p. 278

(4) The direction 'Sotto Voce' indicates perhaps the sense in which their comments are an undertone of the poem's theme.

made them conscious. Ferdinand's love of Miranda is possible because of his simultaneous awareness of "another tenderness / That neither without either could or would possess." Ferdinand's reality for Miranda is all the greater because before his arrival she had only the consolation of self-reflection, her mirror. Stephano's identity is divided between his mind and body: having despaired, he drinks only to discover that his body makes its own demand for that which no longer consoles his mind. He illustrates, therefore, the wrong way of integrating mind and body, by trying to appease one with the other. Gonzalo exemplifies a similar error: the attempt to console mind with mind.⁽¹⁾ He, "by self-reflection made / Consolation an offence", whereas, actually:

There was nothing to explain:
Had I trusted the Absurd.⁽²⁾

Adrian and Francisco, by their apparently homosexual frivolity, stand, as Antonio does, outside the terms of seriousness required by the effort of self-knowledge. Alonso applies the principles of integrated personality to government (his advice being, not surprisingly, to take the middle way between body and mind, a choice

(1) Here, surely, Auden is introducing another term into the Ariel-Caliban dialogue. Greenberg notes, p. 137, a modification of Kierkegaard's categories to the dichotomy of Ego and Self Auden adopted formerly.

(2) Gonzalo, p. 215 This is Auden's most direct use of this Kierkegaardian concept; see above, p. 282

dependent on self-knowledge).(1)

Sebastian's case illustrates what happens when Ariel is let loose in the real world:

The arrant jewel in his crown
Persuaded me my brother was a dream
I should not love because I had no proof.(2)

Failure, seen now as the agent of mercy, restores his sense of reality. Trinculo exemplifies artistic detachment in which imagination serves not the body but an external ideal---Art. Significantly, there is no indication in what he says of any way in which he can achieve self-fulfilment: the way back from Art has still to be found.

- (1) Alonso's speech introduces a further symbolic aspect, that of the sea as opposed to the desert. The former is, in the Romantic hierarchy "the symbol of primitive potential power as contrasted with the desert of actualised triviality"; The Enchafèd Flood, p. 28 The ideal Alonso proposes is "the spring in the desert, the fruitful /Island in the sea" which also corresponds to the Romantic definition of an island as "the earthly paradise where there is no conflict between natural desire and moral duty"; The Enchafèd Flood, p. 29 Applied to Prospero's island this may seem to cast doubt on Ariel's power by suggesting that the island setting is intrinsically therapeutic. Greenberg notes, p. 130, that the Master and the Boatswain are the only characters not to reach the island and therefore remain disenchanted.

- (2) Sebastian, p. 221

Most obdurate of all is Antonio's exhibition of will, the 'faculty' to which both imagination and body must relate if they are to be marshalled, but which depends upon them to incite and execute its impulses. This ambiguity of the will is well illustrated in Antonio's behaviour. His hostility to Prospero indicates his ambivalence: ostensibly it is directed against the order brought about by the latter's art which Antonio regards as a kind of confidence trick, but it is clear that he also envies Prospero's power and success. Whichever is his real motive, he believes his recalcitrance will force Prospero to resume his magic in order to subdue him to its pattern and thus prevent Prospero from enjoying the child-like irresponsibility his freedom from Ariel should bestow; he will remain "the adult in his pride", that is, like Antonio himself. This plan obviously assumes the potency of art itself (as the source of Prospero's power) so whatever happens, Antonio, the will, can neither win nor lose completely.

'Caliban to the Audience' is Auden's fullest exposition of the relation of Art to Life. Caliban's appearance at the end of the play represents the audience's natural sense of querulousness when, as it were, thrown back upon itself in reality. In Caliban's impersonation the audience is well aware of its recent

indulgence in "that world of freedom without anxiety, sincerity without loss of vigour."⁽¹⁾ It is even aware that beneath its conception of Eros, "the nude august elated archer of our heaven"⁽²⁾ lurks "a deformed and savage slave"⁽³⁾ , gross Caliban himself. The audience is, however, equally conscious of the tyrannical demands imagination necessarily makes, but it is a price they will gladly pay "for universal reconciliation and peace."⁽⁴⁾

Caliban then addresses the embryo artist, charting his intimacy then disillusion with Ariel culminating in the awareness that imagination is not to be viewed as an external, inspirational faculty but as an integral part of his own nature, Caliban, as it were, suspended by not being believed in:

...your charms, because they no longer amuse you, have cracked and your spirits, because you are tired of giving orders, have ceased to obey, and you are left alone with me, the dark thing you could never abide to be with.⁽⁵⁾

Reverting to the audience in general, Caliban describes the nightmare worlds reached by the majority who pursue him---"where the possessive note is utterly silent and all events are tautological repetitions....at long last you are, as you have asked to be, the only subject"⁽⁶⁾, and by the majority who follow Ariel

- (1) 'Caliban to the Audience', p. 229
- (2) Ibid., p. 233
- (3) Ibid., p. 232
- (4) Loc. cit.
- (5) Ibid., p. 239
- (6) Ibid., p. 243

to a region where "all the voluntary movements are possible.... but any sense of direction, any knowledge of where on earth one has come from or where on earth one is going to is completely absent."⁽¹⁾

Finally, Caliban analyses the actual communicative effect produced by art and concludes that if, as seems almost inevitable, it is didactic in intention, it is doomed to fail, for the more clearly it portrays "your estrangement from the truth"⁽²⁾, the more it strengthens "your delusion that an awareness of the gap is itself a bridge."⁽³⁾ The artist must rely, therefore, on some accident to ruin his effect without destroying "the expectation aroused by him that there was an effect to ruin."⁽⁴⁾ Caliban is, in fact, describing his own role in the piece though it is at several removes from mere accident. He has symbolic value as the representative of man's physical nature but speaks as an individual though in the highly stylised manner of a famous writer, Henry James. He speaks successively of the artist, for the artist and the audience about and on behalf of Ariel's activity, he analyses the didactic function of art and

(1) 'Caliban to the Audience', pp. 245-6

(2) Ibid., p. 247

(3) Ibid., p. 248

(4) Loc. cit.

proposes the accident as its crucial deficiency.

His 'make-up' now acquires one further 'layer' as he considers impersonation in practical terms and not merely any impersonation but the one which has just taken place in the performance of this particular play. It is at the moment of acknowledging that the play has been dreadfully performed that we see ourselves in our true, existential position, "swaying out on the ultimate wind-whipped cornice that overhangs the unabiding void---we have never stood anywhere else."⁽¹⁾ In this silence we can hear "the real Word which is our only 'raison d'être'".⁽²⁾ It is now possible to interpret the stage and auditorium separated by the proscenium arch as "feebly figurative signs" of the "essential emphatic gulf" dividing us from "that Wholly Other Life".⁽³⁾

Caliban's conclusion is, in fact, the same as Prospero's when the latter asks himself:

Can I learn to suffer
Without saying something ironic or funny
On suffering?⁽⁴⁾

and defines art as "the power to enchant that comes from disillusion."⁽⁵⁾ But, whereas these are mere statements, Caliban's

(1) 'Caliban to the Audience', p. 249

(2) Loc. cit.

(3) Ibid., p. 250

(4) 'Prospero to Ariel', p. 209

(5) Ibid., p. 204

presentation of the issue is, as noted, reinforced by actual imitation of the state of 'artistic exhaustion' it describes. If 'Caliban to the Audience' does, through the multiplicity of its 'levels' and the involutions of its style, leave the reader in a state of 'spiritual silence' (which Ariel's final song of submission and contrition completes) he must be inclined to recall earlier statements in the work which implied that art may be conducive to an even deeper sense of contemplation than Caliban suggests here. In his preface the Stage-Manager asks:

....who in his own backyard
Has not opened his heart to the smiling
Secret he cannot quote ?⁽¹⁾

And it is in addressing Ariel that Prospero says "for all things,
In your company, can be themselves"⁽²⁾ and continues with heartfelt evocativeness:

No one but you had sufficient audacity and eyesight
To find those clearings where the shy humiliations
Gambol on sunny afternoons, the waterhole to which
The scarred rogue sorrow comes quietly in the small hours.⁽³⁾

This sense of the unique spiritual benefit gained through imagination is perhaps the meaning of the quotation from Emily Brontë which

- (1) 'Preface': 'The Stage-Manager to the Critics', p. 202
- (2) 'Prospero to Ariel', p. 204
- (3) Ibid., p. 205

accompanies the dedication of the work, asking:

... am I wrong to worship where
Faith cannot doubt nor Hope despair
Since my own soul can grant my prayer?

It seems possible that the reader may leave The Sea and the Mirror more convinced of Auden's ingenuity in conceiving such a commentary on The Tempest and 'polarising' the psychological implications of the play than of the efficacy of "the real Word." While Caliban's speech is brilliantly ambiguous, the work as a whole suggests that Auden remains confident of the value of art and therefore of the sanctity of the imagination. This impression is confirmed by the ethical responsibility Auden ascribes to the imagination to restrict itself to creating what is both "permissible and real" for each individual, a role made immensely more important in the immediate therapeutic sense if human beings are regarded as actors "who cannot become something before they have first pretended to be it."⁽¹⁾

The change from strict, religious theorising to human practicality which gives rise to this newly pragmatic view of the part played by the imagination also influences the

(1) 'The Masque', part five of The Age of Anxiety, p. 333

dichotomy of Eros and Agape. 'In Sickness and in Health',⁽¹⁾ for example, reiterates the Kierkegaardian terminology but in the context of a love poem:

Rejoice, dear love, in Love's peremptory word;
All chance, all love, all logic, you and I,
Exist by grace of the Absurd,
And without conscious artifice we die.

The poem's conclusion shows how easily this kind of combination can confuse the sacred and the profane, the loved-one and God. Part of this confusion is detectable in the frequent attempts to personify God in quasi-secular, self-consciously daring terms and in imagery of melodramatic obliqueness:

O Fate, 'O Felix Osculum', to us
Remain nocturnal and mysterious:
Preserve us from presumption and delay,
And hold us to the ordinary way.

The finale of 'Though determined Nature can',⁽²⁾ demonstrates the extreme of this tendency to amalgamate Eros and Agape beneath the same rampant emblem. In the process sin becomes a matter-of-fact condition of things, retribution merely a source of erotic speculation and the beloved herself a potential saviour:

(1) Collected Poetry, (New York, 1945), p. 29

(2) Ibid., p. 231

We, my darling, for our sins
Suffer in each other's woe,
Read in injured eyes and hands
How we broke divine commands
And served the Devil.
Who is passionate enough
When the punishment begins?
O my love, O my love,
In the night of fire and snow
Save me from evil.

The alternative to open eroticism is epistemological complexity, the attempt in fact, to revert in lyric verse to the kind of argument featured in New Year Letter. 'My second thoughts condemn,'⁽¹⁾ illustrates the inevitably turgid result of this practice as, questioning his own right to promise eternal love, the poet concludes:

If I can give my word,
Forgiveness can recur
Any number of times
In Time. Which is absurd.

Here the Kierkegaardian concept of divine irrationality does nothing to mitigate the effect of crudely used epigram as a substitute for thought of greater depth. 'The Lesson,'⁽²⁾ contains even more cryptic reasoning without the vindication of technical terminology; the poet, waking from three dreams, decides that all held a lesson for him:

- (1) Collected Poetry, p. 215
(2) Ibid., p. 116

For had not each
In its own way tried to teach
My will to love you that it cannot be,
As I think, of such consequence to want
What anyone is given, if they want ?

It is, surely, as a reaction to these impossible verbal compromises that Auden turns to verse of great technical virtuosity and wit, often further specified by celebrating a particular event. The classic example is 'Under Which Lyre: A Reactionary Tract for the Times',⁽¹⁾ the Phi Beta Kappa poem for Harvard in 1946. The poem argues the respective virtues of "the sons of Hermes", the eccentric, inspirational individualists, and the much more numerous "children of Apollo", the conscientious social organisers. Its wit comes from the satirical assessment of the results of Apollonian efforts to usurp Hermes's characteristic office, art, which becomes horribly popularised:

His radio Homers all day long
In over-Whitmanated song
That does not scan,
With adjectives laid end to end,
Extol the doughnut and commend
The Common Man.

Equally skilful is the portrait of the literati's self-defence, conducted with verbal but military precision:

Lone scholars, sniping from the walls
Of learned periodicals,
Our facts defend,
Our intellectual marines,
Landing in little magazines
Capture a trend.

(1) Harvard Alumni Bulletin, XLVIII (1946), p. 707

'Music is International',⁽¹⁾ is the other main poem of this period. Music is to be recommended for its simple pleasure which the "sensible soul" will readily appreciate. There is also something morally beneficial in music, residing perhaps in its formality:

Even the dinner waltz in
Its formal way is a voice that assaults
International wrong.

Yet its emotive tendencies must be realised and guarded against for "what we find rousing or touching /Tells us little and confuses us much." It is, above all, necessary to appreciate the gratuitous nature of all art, that:

.... these halcyon structures are useful
As structures go---though not to be confused
With anything really important
Like feeding strays or looking pleased when caught
By a bore or a hideola.

The poem gives no answer to the crucial question of whether music itself stimulates this sort of self-analysis or not. It might be said, indeed, that at this time Auden's chief ideological problem is to reconcile Life with Art and Art with Christianity, a task which The Age of Anxiety may be seen as attempting.

(1) The American Scholar, XVI (1947), p. 404

The Age of Anxiety⁽¹⁾ takes as its setting a New York bar, chosen by its occupants for presumably the same dramatic and psychological reason that Auden chose it, because it offers:

...an unprejudiced space in which nothing particular ever happens, and a choice of physiological aids to the imagination whereby each may appropriate it for his or her private world of repentant felicitous forms, heavy expensive objects or avenging flames and floods.⁽²⁾

The second World War is still going on and the action begins on the night of All Souls, November 2nd, a time appropriate to reflection. Four characters are involved. Quant, a widower and a clerk in a shipping office, came from Ireland

- (1) According to Spears, p. 230, "a substantial part of the work was written by 1944 and at least half by 1945; the whole was published in October 1947."

Five pieces had appeared previously, as follows:

'These ancient harbours are hailed by the morning...' as 'Landfall', Inventario, (1946-7)

'Opera glasses on the ormolu table...', as 'Spinster's Song', The New Yorker, XXII, 33 (1946)

'How tempting to trespass in these Italian gardens...', as 'Baroque', Changing World, I (1947)

'The scene has all the signs of a facetious culture...', as 'Metropolis', Commonweal, XLV, 10 (1946)

'We elude Him, lie to Him, yet His love observes...', as 'Bless Ye the Lord', Litany and Anthem for St. Matthew's Day, (Northampton, 1946)

- (2) p. 255

at the age of six; his memories are of that colourful past interspersed with a knowledge of Mythology gained from his reading in the Public Library when unemployed during a depression. There is now "no one-to-one correspondence between his social or economic position and his private mental life."⁽¹⁾ Malin, a Medical Intelligence officer in the Canadian Air Force, reminisces on the calm, disciplined intellectual world of university, which National Service has removed him from.

Rosetta, a Jewess, experienced in love and older than she looks, is a buyer for a large department store; she appreciates the material benefits of American life but compensates for its lack of spiritual nourishment with her favourite daydreams of English life set in one of those "lovely innocent countrysides inhabited by charming eccentrics with independent means and amusing hobbies."⁽²⁾ Emble enlisted in the Navy during his sophomore year at a mid-Western university; he suffers from "that anxiety about himself and his future which haunts, like a bad smell, the minds of most young men",⁽³⁾ an anxiety aggravated by his sexual successes.

The remarkable detail and 'contingency' of these portraits is unique in Auden's writing, suggesting real development in his conception of the wholeness of character.

(1) p. 256

(2) p. 257

(3) Loc. cit.

The Age of Anxiety is divided into six parts. The first consists of a prose Prologue in which the characters and their setting are described, followed by excerpts from their reflections. They begin to converse after hearing the radio "compelling them to pay attention to a common world of great slaughter and much sorrow."⁽¹⁾ Malin proposes that they embark on an analysis of "the incessant Now of /The traveller through time"⁽²⁾ and they resume to a booth to do so.

Part two is 'The Seven Ages' whose subject is the archetypal seven ages of man, discussed by the characters in turn. Interspersed with their speeches are three records played on the Wallomatic, in each case having words appropriate to what is being said. By this time, as a result of drink, they have achieved a heightened sense of awareness:

The more completely these four forgot their surroundings and lost their sense of time, the more sensitively aware of each other they became, until they achieved in their dream that rare community which is otherwise only attained in states of extreme wakefulness.⁽³⁾

(1) p. 261

(2) p. 271

(3) p. 296

The narrator adds that "this did not happen all at once"⁽¹⁾ and it may be supposed to continue during the next section, 'The Seven Stages' which is a quest for "that state of prehistoric happiness which, by human beings, can only be imagined in terms of a landscape bearing a symbolic resemblance to the human body."⁽²⁾

They awake from this dream to find the bar closing so they go to Rosetta's apartment for a nightcap. Driving there they experience depression at Nature's "unending stream of irrelevant events without composition or centre, her reckless waste of value"⁽³⁾, and Man's own deficiencies:

...the torpor of his spirit, the indigent dryness of his soul, his bottomless credulity, his perverse preference for the meretricious or the insipid.⁽⁴⁾

They lament in 'The Dirge' the passing of heroes and part five, 'The Masque' exemplifies the principle that human beings are actors who "cannot become something before they have first pretended to be it."⁽⁵⁾ Therefore they pretend to be good, Rosetta and Emble by adorning their mutual physical attraction with vows of fidelity, Malin and Quant by temporarily abandoning their scepticism. Finally they leave, assuming that Rosetta and Emble will make love but the latter falls asleep and Rosetta,

(1) p. 296

(2) Loc. cit.

(3) p. 330

(4) Loc. cit.

(5) p. 333

torn between sadness and relief, acknowledges the reality of her childhood spent in a "semi-detached /Brick villa in Laburnum Crescent"⁽¹⁾ with her father, a pathetic figure who, like her, tried to have fun.

Part Six, 'The Epilogue', follows Malin and Quant to their conclusions as dawn breaks. Malin expresses Christian faith and hence optimism and Quant seems less cynical than before, though creation remains "in pain and earnest, once more reprieved from self-destruction."⁽²⁾

What has been aimed at and achieved in this scene-setting is a most provocative balance of poetic and dramatic formality (psychologically-based formalisms reinforce both in a quite original way), and that wealth of disparate experiences and events usually regarded as the prerogative of the novelist or playwright. This hybrid of contingency and structure seems to be the real artistic advance borne out in The Age of Anxiety , an innovation not generally attributed to it critically, perhaps because the signs of formality are so multifarious and distinct, particularly those of 'traditional' literary origin.

Each section, for example, has a religious 'motto' drawn from such diverse sources as S.Baring-Gould, George Herbert,

(1) p. 347

(2) p. 353

Ronald Firbank and Milton. By contrast Parts Three and Four have secular mottoes. The whole work is introduced with a quotation, perhaps from Thomas a Celano, lamenting the sorrow of the Day of Judgement. These quotations enjoy different degrees of irony (that to Part Four is positively satirical) but it is not therefrom that they gain significance. Rather, they seem incongruously literary and 'delicate', remnants of some past aesthetic, yet appropriate thematically.

The subtitle of the work, 'A Baroque Eclogue', embraces both artistic licence and a natural formality, the latter occurring in "the slight dramatic form, with dialogue; the singing contest; an elegy; love-songs and laments, with courtship of a shepherdess; a dirge; formal, 'artificial' diction and meter."⁽¹⁾ Spears adds that "this idyll takes place in a Third Avenue bar, and the pastoral imagery is either symbolic or ironic."⁽²⁾ In fact, 'eclogue' is an appropriate title since it originally described a deliberately artificial form devoted to extremely naturalistic moralising; 'baroque', suggesting artistic self-indulgence and elaboration describes the unconventional structure of The Age of Anxiety and, within it, also applies

(1) Spears, p. 231 The only point at which the characters themselves refer to the eclogue setting is when Quant speaks of himself, Malin and Emble as shepherds awaiting Rosetta's commands, (p. 295).

(2) Loc. cit.

by extension, to the extreme stylisation produced by imitating the stress and alliteration of Old English verse.⁽¹⁾

Why did Auden adopt this most distinctive style ? Spears suggests that it represents "a rhetoric consciously assumed, deliberately incongruous with what is said; its effect is therefore mock-heroic or distancing, rather than intensifying and heightening."⁽²⁾ This seems to ignore those descriptions, for example Rosetta's nostalgic flights where, in John Bayley's opinion, Auden produces effects "of the purest romantic pathos."⁽³⁾ Yet Bayley's own suggestion that the uniformity of alliteration may represent "the common style....of the fantasy life"⁽⁴⁾ takes no account of

- (1) As to the quality of imitation, see Christine Brooke-Rose, 'Notes on the Metre of Auden's The Age of Anxiety', Essays in Criticism, XIII,3 (1963), pp. 253- 264

Briefly, she concludes that his usage is sophisticated but tends to over-use alliteration and produce lines of a triviality which may "reflect a conscious reaction against the rich concision of the more majestic epic line" (p. 254). His prosody is less competent and he frequently produces half-lines which are not adequately stressed. These apart, the poet's chief fault is lack of variation, in particular the failure "to exploit the legitimate variations of any one type (of alliterative pattern), and the repetition of the same types from one half-line to another, or even several types." (p. 260)

- (2) Spears, p. 231
(3) The Romantic Survival, p. 182
(4) Ibid., p. 178

realistic descriptions achieved in the same style. Nor does the emphasis on the 'thingness' of things⁽¹⁾ seem an adequate explanation of a style which also embodies argument and abstraction. One clue to its function may be deduced from Auden's growing interest in philology⁽²⁾, which he later describes as "the most poetical of all scholastic disciplines", for when language is studied "in abstraction from its uses" the words "become as it were, little lyrics about themselves."⁽³⁾ Hence philology provides a way of overcoming the illegitimate, magical quality of language while still arousing an interest in the medium itself.

This explanation seems at odds, however, with the general ethos of The Age of Anxiety, especially if one accepts Bayley's

(1) This is Greenberg's suggestion, p.157

(2) The following curiosities appear in it :

archons (p.295); coigns (p.327); comatose (p.288); concatenation (p.267); couth (p.260); daedal (p.319); deisal (p.290); dendritic (p.310); dotterels and dunlins (p.297); esker (p.276); farouche (p.268); fioritura (p.263); fucoid (p.306); fumerole (p.292); hepatoscopists (p.349); herms (p.280); indagation (p.296); optative (p.261); smirk ouches (p.319); pelagic (p.335); pinguid (p. 325); pullulating (p.331); pursive (p.319); pyknics (p.308); relievos (p. 319); seizin (p.269); unctuous (p.319); vert and volant (p.290); virago (p.296); virid (p.287); watchet (p.278).

(3) 'Making, Knowing and Judging', (Auden's Inaugural Lecture as Professor of Poetry at Oxford, delivered in June, 1956), The Dyer's Hand, p.35

view that it enters the contingent world of the novelist and is an achievement comparable to that of The Waves in revealing "the desire of four people, at a time of stress, to fall back on a sort of communal privacy of inner experience."⁽¹⁾ The Age of Anxiety represents a return to the principle beneath New Year Letter, the problem of community rather than the integration of the psyche itself⁽²⁾, though unlike the earlier work it is not doctrinaire in the connection it suggests between people and their society. This abandonment of dogma, especially theoretical psychology, marks a radical development in Auden's outlook, the acceptance, in fact, of the real integration of personality, that :

...the ego is a dream
Till a neighbour's need by name create it;
Man has no mean.⁽³⁾

Expressed more comprehensively this becomes the basis of a novel and ostensibly convincing formula:

...only animals who are below civilisation and the angels who are beyond it can be sincere. Human beings are necessarily actors who cannot become something before they have first pretended to be it; and they can be divided, not into the hypocritical and the sincere, but into the sane who know they are acting and the mad who do not.⁽⁴⁾

(1) The Romantic Survival, pp. 178-9

(2) The first radio broadcast breaks in upon "their separate senses of themselves" (p. 261) and the most beneficial effect of drink "is the way in which our faith in the existence of other selves, normally rather wobbly, is greatly strengthened" (p. 296).

(3) p. 259

(4) p. 333

A comparison of this statement with another of the same year which asserts that "for better or worse, we who live in this age not only feel but are critically conscious of our emotions" so that "a naive rhetoric, one that is not confessedly 'theatrical' is now impossible in poetry. The honest manly style is today suited to Iago"⁽¹⁾ gives a probable clue to the function of the alliterative style as representing the automatic and substantially similar way in which each individual's need to act distorts his expression. (This 'counterpointing' is also discernible in the contrast between the objective descriptions of the characters in the prose introductions to each section and their appearance in the poem itself.)

A further level of meaning is introduced in 'The Seven Stages' where the characters take part in an allegorical dream pilgrimage to the source of "prehistoric happiness." Fuller suggests⁽²⁾ their individual allegorical status, according to Jung's terms as follows: Malin represents Thinking and Rosetta Feeling (which Jung regards as the rational, evaluative faculties); Quant stands

(1) Introduction to John Betjeman's Slick but not Streamlined, (Garden City, 1947), p. 15

(2) Fuller, p. 189 His suggestion that these allegorical roles operate throughout the work is surely wrong.

for Intuition and Emble for Sensation (the irrational, perceptive faculties). The derivation of the Melvillean names themselves has been proposed by Edward Callan⁽¹⁾ as follows: Rosetta, from the Rosetta Stone "suggesting through the link with the mouth of the Nile and prehistory, the feminine principle, the past, the unconscious"⁽²⁾ ; Malin, from the French 'malin' meaning clever, shrewd or knowing; Quant, from quantum, referring to the intuitive perception of things as wholes, and Emble, from emblem, which translates concepts into sensory terms.

The existential condition of The Age of Anxiety is obvious. At the literal level its cause is the war which reduces everyone "to the anxious status of a shady character or a displaced person."⁽³⁾ Each character is also beset by individual worries which the war merely accentuates. At a deeper level still is the anxiety held by Niebuhr to be the consequence of man's situation on earth, "being both free and bound, both limited and limitless"; "anxiety is the inevitable concomitant of the paradox of freedom and finiteness."⁽⁴⁾ (Significantly, only Malin is aware of this kind of anxiety and he only refers to it in his final speech.)

(1) 'Allegory in Auden's The Age of Anxiety', Twentieth Century Literature, X (1965), pp. 163-4

(2) Fuller, p. 191

(3) p. 255

(4) The Nature and Destiny of Man, vol. I (London, 1941), p. 194; see above, p. 287

Under this condition the four characters create their respective "repentant felicitous forms"⁽¹⁾ and in doing so reveal their own characters. Whereas Rosetta, Quant and Emble create compensatory dream worlds of greater or lesser vividness, Malin's fantasy seems closer to reality than his present life:⁽²⁾ he returns to "his real interests"⁽³⁾ which are "the old atmosphere of laboratory and lecture hall."⁽⁴⁾ Malin it is who suggests that the group turn their attention to man's predicament in time and diagnoses in strict terms the task of the psyche:

His pure I
Must give account of and greet his Me,
The field of force where he feels he thinks.⁽⁵⁾

He is equally aware, though, of man's actual longing to inhabit "some /Nameless Eden where he never was"⁽⁶⁾ (He is also the only one of the three not to react to Rosetta's charms.) In view of such intelligence his deficiency is, perhaps, unconvincing

- (1) p. 255 Significantly the forms of the imagination are now repentant: in For the Time Being they were merely felicitous.
- (2) The fact that Malin is an airman does not seem to have the significance which the status of that occupation in Auden's early work might lead one to expect.
- (3) p. 256
- (4) Loc. cit.
- (5) p. 271
- (6) p. 288

and unconvincingly presented; it amounts to no more than excusable intellectual satisfaction, hardly deserving the word 'pride':

I have felt too good
At being better than the best of my colleagues:
Walking by water, have worked out smiling
Deadly reviews.(1)

In his final thoughts Malin must inevitably move out of character, or at least, not explain his reasoning. He diagnoses man's tendency to pray "to primitive totems /As absurd as they are savage"(2) as arising from an unwillingness:

...to say Yes
To the Self-So which is the same at all times,
That Always-Opposite which is the whole subject
Of our not-knowing.(3)

Though Auden has tried here to give Malin's Christianity a strict epistemological character, Malin's later direct references to 'Him' are, surely, more spiritually convincing and certainly belie the modesty of his claim to only "the flash /Of negative knowledge."(4) Indeed, the God he posits who "observes /His appalling promise; His predilection /As we wander and weep is with us to the end"(5) is reminiscent of the abiding friend of Methodism rather than the Anglican trinity.

(1) p. 321

(2) p. 352

(3) p. 353

(4) p. 352

(5) p. 353

Rosetta demonstrates the most blatant use of the imagination to avoid reality. It is an obvious symptom of her condition that she condemns all kinds of evasion and inadvertently describes her own situation, "infatuated with her former self / Whose dear dreams though they dominate still / Are formal facts which refresh no more."⁽¹⁾ Her dreams of childhood and England are attempts to eradicate the fact that she is Jewish. A parallel may be intended between Rosetta's childhood and the state of Judaism during the Second World War. Judaism is patriarchal in origin but just as Rosetta's father was vulgar and a failure--- "How appalling was / Your taste in ties. How you tried to have fun, / You so longed to be liked"⁽²⁾ so Judaism may have appeared in 1947 to have been destroyed by Nazism. In Rosetta's opinion America is "the best place on earth to come to if you have to earn your living"⁽³⁾ and it was, presumably, the only country participating in the war which was safe for Jews to live or seek refuge in. Paradoxically though, its very classlessness might have had the effect of accentuating the intense unity of the Jewish people and their desire for social respectability, of

(1) p. 270

(2) p. 347

(3) p. 256

revealing the latter, in fact, as itself a species of vulgarity. (The song Rosetta chooses on the Wallomatic is "a sad little tune 'The Case is Closed' (Tchaikovsky-Fink)".)(1)

Yet Rosetta steps out of her allegorical character as what might be termed the representative of racial consciousness, mainly through the vividness and dexterity of her imagination. How uniquely mesmerising is the inventory of inhabitants of her imaginary village:

There was Lord Lugar at Lighthazels
Violent-tempered; he voted against
The Banking Bill. At Brothers Intake
Sir William Wand; his Water Treaty
Enriched Arabia. At Rotherhope
General Locke, a genial man who
Kept cormorants. At Craven Ladies
Old Tillingham-Trench; he had two passions,
Women and walking-sticks. At Wheels Rake,
In his low library loving Greek
Bishop Bottrel.(2)

Secondly, Rosetta has moments of remarkable awareness, seen especially in her final self-acceptance but also reflected in her ability to ask a question such as "Are our dreams indicative?" which goes to the heart of the whole work. A measure of her percipience is that Auden endows her with his own view of the poet as someone who deals in extra-worldly situations:

(1) p. 281

(2) p. 293

....chooses rightly
His pleased picture of pure solitudes
Where gusts gamble over gaunt areas
Frozen and futile.(1)

Quant shares with Rosetta a preference for the imagined over the real but, unlike her, his field of imagination is memory.(2)
This follows from his reductive, almost nihilistic attitude born of failure or a reason for it. Apparently, however, Quant's attitude is, like Rosetta's, ultimately a matter of race, in his case, 'deracination':

He had come to America at the age of six when his father, implicated somehow in the shooting of a landlord, had had to leave Ireland in a hurry, and, from time to time, images, some highly-coloured, some violent, derived from a life he could not remember, would enter unexpectedly and incomprehensibly into his dreams.(3)

Accident has endowed him with a detrital knowledge of mythology, the second-hand classicism contrasting ironically with his own memories of Ireland, a country rich in myth. He is a determinist ("We are mocked by unmeaning; among us fall /Aimless arrows, hurting

(1) p. 286

(2) The lack of a "one-to-one correspondence between his social or economic position and his private mental life" is not, surely, a distinguishing feature of Quant; it is, in fact, what is shown to be true of all the characters and, indeed, is the reason that they are so revealing as types.

(3) p. 256

at random")⁽¹⁾ a psychologist aware of the fallacy of romantic love (he describes his own disillusioning voyage to "Venus Island")⁽²⁾ and, indeed, of myths themselves (man's "myths of Being/ Are there always").⁽³⁾ The strongest clue to his personality is perhaps his reaction to the paradox of finitude and freedom implied in his prediction to Emble that the latter will soon realise that he is merely a commodity in a buyer's market, torn between "the fight with work, the feud of marriage",⁽⁴⁾ discovering "the train-ride between your two natures" is "an awkward hiatus" so that eventually he:

....will no longer expect
Expect more pattern, more purpose than
Your finite fate.⁽⁵⁾

Quant, then, has abdicated the human will to freedom and has become a sceptic. His name, therefore, more properly signifies that aspect of science which adopts a fiercely pragmatic attitude, as if in an effort to stand outside Nature itself. Far from yielding the satisfaction of the generalised and authoritative view, however, the sceptic's vision is severely myopic. (Even in the sense that he adopts such an externalised

(1) p. 283

(2) p. 279

(3) p. 287

(4) p. 285

(5) Loc. cit.

perspective Quant can hardly be said to see things as wholes in the true sense of the phrase).

Emble is the opposite of Quant in that he is young and Quant is old. Whereas Quant may be said to have too keen a sense of the intrusion of the outside world and of his relative insignificance among the equally insignificant masses, Emble fails to realise that other young men feel the same sense of insecurity he feels. This detail and the episode of the wood chopping :

After a dreadful
Row with father, I ran with burning
Cheeks to the pasture and chopped wood, my
Stomach like a stone.(1)

suggest that Emble may be intended as emblematic of American youth. Certainly his dramatic awareness of what being young means has all the trappings of sophisticated metropolitan life:

To be all on edge, to be held waiting in
A packed lounge for a Personal Call
From Long Distance, for the low voice that
Defines one's future.(2)

There is in his character (in addition to his persistent and naive self-projection as a prince) a good deal of genuinely sensitive observation, one episode being remarkably reminiscent of

(1) p. 278
(2) p. 285

Auden's account of his own development in romantic adolescence:⁽¹⁾

And his steps follow the stream
Past rusting apparatus
To its gloomy beginning, the original
Chasm where brambles block
The entrance to the underworld;
There the silence blesses his sorrow,
And holy to his dread is that dark
Which will neither promise nor explain.⁽²⁾

His 'flaw' is a failure to distinguish between love and sexual attraction. He, like Rosetta, makes no direct comment on love but sings a song which portrays love as a game of cards with "a reason for One, a risk on the Pair."⁽³⁾ For this frivolity the Prologue makes some excuse, explaining that "a succession of sexual triumphs" while it would appear to give confidence actually makes "the doubt of ever being able to achieve the kinds of success which have to be earned, and the certainty of being able to have at this moment a kind which does not, play dangerously into each other's hands."⁽⁴⁾ But if Emble is to be held morally responsible for his conquests he must also bear the burden of what is really a lack of awe, a huge over-confidence

(1) See 'New Year Letter', 1134-52

(2) p. 326

(3) p. 281

(4) p. 257

in himself and mankind, which when disappointed turns to disillusion. Here too, the resemblance to Auden's own career is striking. Emble then, is hollow, lacking the substance promised by his attractive veneer: a symbol of vacuity all the more empty for its versatility in using words to describe its own situation.

In 'The Seven Stages' allegory predominates, appropriately since the journey is through the unconscious, along "the / Regressive road to Grandmother's House".⁽¹⁾ Why the state of prehistoric happiness can only be imagined "in terms of a landscape bearing a symbolic resemblance to the human body"⁽²⁾ is not explained but may be a reversal of the Freudian assumption that objects have symbolic meaning in terms of human limbs and parts. Artistically, the principle furnishes much needed direction through an obscure series of symbols, an apparently inept feature in a work already so involved.

Fuller suggests that the first stage, involving mountains, represents "man's first mammary objective"⁽³⁾, the breast, from where they proceed to the heart ("the tumbledown Mariners Tavern.... miles inland").⁽⁴⁾ That this is actually the stomach is implied by references to the "oddest collection /Of characters"⁽⁵⁾ who meet there each evening, the "gaunt gospel" of privation felt by miners

(1) p. 296

(2) Loc. cit.

(3) Fuller, p. 195

(4) p. 302

(5) Loc. cit.

with no food and the general relaxation food induces socially:

Heroes confess to whores, detectives
Chat or play chess with thieves.(1)

Food, however, may cause indigestion ("the creak of new creeds on the kitchen stairs")⁽²⁾ or induce nostalgia in the heart ("the sob of a dream next door")⁽³⁾ and prevent sleep. Digestion has a sobering effect on the mind and "gentler grows the heart, gentler and much/ less certain that it will succeed."⁽⁴⁾

The subsequent departure of the couples in opposite directions is not, surely, in the direction of the lung and liver but of the mouth and anus (why else should they be called "rival ports"?).⁽⁵⁾ Malin and Quant go to the anus (an allusion, perhaps, to Freud's and Groddeck's belief that retention of the faeces is a symptom of a calculated, not to say miserly, attitude to life which becomes more marked with age) and Malin describes the "certain exciting /Kind of discomfort"⁽⁶⁾ associated with excretion. Rosetta and Emble, however, are at the mouth, the "ancient harbour"⁽⁷⁾ whose warehouses and wharves are "untidied" each morning by the intake of food.

- (1) p. 302
- (2) Loc. cit.
- (3) Loc. cit.
- (4) Loc. cit.
- (5) p. 306
- (6) Loc. cit.
- (7) Loc. cit.

In the third stage of their journey they move, according to Fuller, to the brain. That this is the correct interpretation is suggested by the presence of the State Asylum and the general air of hospital-prison restrictiveness. On the assumption, however, that the next stage represents the brain, it is arguable that "the subterranean /Miles of dendritic drainage"⁽¹⁾ also referred to, may be the branching veins and arteries supplying the heart. Also, Malin's observation that the scene "has all the signs of a facetious culture"⁽²⁾ hardly seems appropriate of one confronted with his own realm, the mind. The fact that the four are reunited at this stage may be more likely to occur at their common centre of humanity rather than the seat of intellect.

The fifth stage of the journey is to the big house which is located to the north of the heart and into which Rosetta rushes only to return disappointed with its vacuity. Fuller interprets it as the womb, "the very matrix of the human psyche"⁽³⁾, a title more suitable, surely, to the brain. The relevance of the womb to this fairly advanced stage of their journey is not obvious, whereas the brain is a suitably elevated station, and appropriately

(1) p. 310

(2) Loc. cit.

(3) Fuller, p. 197

deceptive: Rosetta expects to see something attractive but is disillusioned by a harsher reality:

....there's Alison pinching
Her baby brother, Bobby and Dick
Frying a frog with their father's reading-glass,
Conrad and Kay in the carpentry shed
Where they've no business to be.(1)

The brain reveals "a World that is fallen,/ The mating and malice of men and beasts",⁽²⁾ and they leave it by means of physical absorption in a race, arriving at the opposite extremity of the body, its unconscious structure, the skeleton. They again divide so that "their erotic objectives (Quant's for a 'daughter-wife', Malin's for a 'son', Emble and Rosetta for each other) are prepared for as they arrive at the seventh stage."⁽³⁾ More precisely it signifies their awareness that, in Malin's words:

To know nature is not enough for the ego;
The aim of its eros is to create a soul,
The start of its magic is stolen flesh.(4)

Thus, the hermetic gardens at which they finally arrive, symbolise either the genitals (as Fuller suggests) or the soul itself. Each achieves a degree of resolution but, as in 'New Year Letter'(11.86Off)

(1) p. 313

(2) p. 314

(3) Fuller, p. 197

(4) p. 318

it is impossible to stay in the gardens and they progress through forest to desert, and in a state of distress, awake, the dream being necessarily inconclusive since its resolution depends on conscious decisions.

Its first manifestation is 'The Dirge', the irony of which is guaranteed by the esoteric, jingoistic epitaph to Edward VII. Reminiscent of 'Argument' in Book One of The Orators, the dirge seems out of place since the characters have never shown signs of hero-worship and certainly should not do so after their purgative journey through the unconscious. It is justified on the grounds of the apparent impossibility of man's opposing Nature "had not some semi-divine stranger with superhuman powers, some Gilgamesh or Napoleon, some Solon or Sherlock Holmes, appeared from time to time to rescue both, for a brief bright instant, from their egregious destructive blunders."⁽¹⁾ Clearly, though, the need for the hero-figure is a human-psychological rather than an economic-political one, but unlike 'Argument', its origin is not dismissed here as neurotic. It might be suggested, in fact, that Auden's temperamental 'hero-orientation' finds in the heroic connotations of Christianity both its

(1) p. 330

fulfilment and its condemnation. His attitude is therefore one of ambivalence.

'The Masque' is chiefly important for its resolution of the dichotomy of virtue or truth and 'style' or the impossibility of absolute honesty in human beings. To the prayer "Oh, Heaven help me to be decorative and to do right"⁽¹⁾ Auden replies that since human beings must continually experiment with new moral roles they must be classed as "the sane who know they are acting and the mad who do not."⁽²⁾ The definition seems, on reflection, a trifle slick, having the best of at least three worlds : the force of neat antithesis, the safety and strength of clear psychological categories ('sane' and 'mad'), and the authority that comes from putting the onus on the individual for his imaginative choices. In this light the declarations of Rosetta and Emble are obvious performances, a conscious pretence (emphasised by Malin's own participation in the vulgarity of building an altar of sandwiches and invoking Venus) which, were it not that "in times of war even the crudest kind of positive affection between persons seems extra-ordinarily beautiful"⁽³⁾, would seem aesthetically depressing and 'religiously' indistinguishable

(1) p. 333

(2) Loc. cit. Hence the title of this section: a play of artificially assumed roles.

(3) p. 334

from sin. The war, in fact, serves as a continuum not only of reality but of "compensation", a universal excuse for every aberration. (This is also empirically true, of course, since war does have this function.)

'The Epilogue' presents just such a balance between empirical truth and Christian aspiration. Malin's list of those who contend that we do not learn from the past --- the police, dress-designers, the gross and aggressive, the seedy, professor and prophet--- is a comprehensive one, made all the more so by the inclusion of the poets whose "noble despair" is also an evasion. Malin goes on:

.....it is silly
To refuse the tasks of time
And, overlooking our lives,
Cry- 'Miserable wicked me,
How interesting I am.'
We would rather be ruined than changed,
We would rather die in our dread
Than climb the cross of the moment
And let our illusions die.(1)

Rhetorically convincing though this is, it seems vague as a prescription. 'Overlooking' is an obvious pun, playing 'ignoring' against 'overseeing' or 'looking down on from a high place', but the crass evocation of egocentricity is too fulsome and leads too easily into the plangent antitheses. The observation that we prefer ruin than change is pessimistically pertinent and may be an

important truth, but what is "the cross of the moment"⁽¹⁾, how is it to be climbed and how will it dispel our illusions? Malin himself admits that "the new locus"⁽²⁾ is not to be discovered by reason or imagination, but is a commonplace spot "reserved /For the eyes of faith to find."⁽³⁾ After reverting to the Niebuhrian definition of anxiety, the poem withdraws from a creation "in pain and earnest, once more reprieved from self-destruction, its adoption, as usual, postponed"⁽⁴⁾, for in such a real world poetry "can take no interest."⁽⁵⁾

Fuller concludes:

As in The Sea and the Mirror, it is the richness and candour of art which by implication continually absolves men from solving their insoluble predicament. Malin's last words stress the irresponsible childishness of men, but Auden's poem is....a subtle and generous effort of understanding.⁽⁶⁾

By contrast, Bayley's view is that:

Empirically at least, what emerges from the poem is that the remedy against Anxiety is the slightly absurd richness of the human consciousness, its capacity for protecting itself with a colourful cocoon of myth and invention.⁽⁷⁾

(1) p. 350

(2) p. 351

(3) Loc. cit.

(4) p. 353

(5) Loc. cit.

(6) Fuller, p. 200

(7) The Romantic Survival, p. 180

The Age of Anxiety may be seen as Auden's last and perhaps most successful attempt to make Christian belief convincing and interesting, his object in all the long poems (including, it is apparent in retrospect, New Year Letter) of this period. From now on he will abandon large-scale dramatic and ratiocinative works, concentrating instead on lyrical variations of the Christian-humanitarian theme.

CHAPTER IV

(1948 - 1969)

The last phase of Auden's writing is, of all his work, the most resistant to criticism, for not only does it represent the resolution of ideas held at different stages of his career, but a new synthesis of theory and practice itself is established which superannuates the criteria and terminology by which his work has previously been judged. Two features are outstanding: a tone of controlled whimsy which dominates the poems and pervades the prose, and an attitude of pragmatic common-sense equally conspicuous in both.

Auden's subjects are those he has always pursued, but now each is specialised so that it incorporates theory and technique in this newly synthetic way. ⁽¹⁾ Nones (1951) philosophises on the concept of the Just City; The Shield of Achilles (1955) presents Horatian portraits of the life of Rome with implicit reference to modern-day tyrannies; Homage to Clio (1960) introduces abstract speculations on Time, History and Culture; About the House (1966) exemplifies the personal and universal features of a habitat, and City without Walls (1969) reiterates all these themes, adding Auden's first portraits of himself.

The part played by ideology in this period is made more ambiguous by collected works of criticism in which sequences of notes bring together Auden's controlling ideas. The Dyer's Hand (1962)

- (1) For brevity these works will be designated in footnotes by their initial letters: Nones- N; The Shield of Achilles- SA; Homage to Clio-HC; About the House-AH; City without Walls-CW; The Enchafed Flood- EF; The Dyer's Hand- DH; Secondary Worlds-SW.

is the most comprehensive but The Enchafèd Flood: or The Romantic Iconography of the Sea (1950) is a fascinating example of detailed and ingenious scholarship, while Secondary Worlds (1968) provides essential interpretation of one of the poet's oldest influences, the Norse Sagas, and his latest preoccupation, opera.

The new harmony of style and attitude characteristic of this period has the paradoxical effect of throwing greater intrinsic emphasis onto style and attitude individually. It is particularly tempting to label and expatiate upon the confident, whimsical 'high' manner, here exemplified as the poet visualises when he may:

surrender my smidge
of nitrogen to the World Fund
with a drawn-out 'Oh' (unless at the nod
of some jittery commander

I shall be translated in a nano-second
to a c.c. of poisonous nothing
in a giga-death).....(1)

'Baroque' offers itself as a suitable name for this technique, especially in the light of Auden's previous uses of it. It occurred in the quatrain prefacing Look, Stranger! :

After the external disorder and extravagant lies,
The baroque frontiers, the surrealist police;
What can truth treasure or heart bless
But a narrow strictness?

With luxuriant despair this proposes 'strictness' as the only remedy

(1) 'Thanksgiving for a Habitat', AH., p. 17

for the chaotic, emotive social and political developments of the war. The need for such discipline has, however, been exorcized by the war and by Auden's return to Christianity, the latter imposing on him the obligation of making his faith both convincing in itself and clearly distinct from the motives which make him an artist. The Age of Anxiety confronted this paradox in a formal way, balancing the simplifying, monotonous 'obligato' of the alliterative metre against the novel creations it facilitated.

Auden provides the other term of the inevitable dichotomy and also a hint of the philosophy beneath it when he refers to an exclusive preoccupation with identity as the hallmark of "philistine realism", as opposed to the confusion of identity and analogy which is the sign of madness.⁽¹⁾ (It might follow that an obsession with analogy itself would be designated a parochial kind of madness or a fantastic form of philistinism.) Auden's thinking has always been categorical and generic, and his present inclination towards identity (as well as counteracting the huge impersonality he sees as a main feature of modern life) seems to represent an older man's attempt to recapture certainty. This is all the truer because Auden's characteristic intellectualism still appears but in the complementary guises of ingenuity and large, Romantic assertion. The most 'concentrated' theoretical manifestation of this sort of intellectualism is, not surprisingly, Auden's theory of poetry itself.

(1) DH., p. 137

It enjoys a rudimentary psychological authenticity as well as the prestige of a direct literary antecedent in Coleridge's distinction of two facets of the Imagination. Whereas he regards the Primary Imagination as operative over the whole area of perception, Auden restricts its reference to what he calls "sacred beings and events":

The sacred is that to which it is obliged to respond; the profane is that to which it cannot respond.....The impression made upon the imagination by any sacred being is of an overwhelming but undefinable importance --- an unchangeable quality, an Identity, as Keats said: I-am-that-I-am is what every sacred being seems to say.⁽¹⁾

Some sacred beings seem to be sacred to all imaginations at all times, for example: the Moon, Fire, Snakes and "those four important beings which can only be defined in terms of nonbeing: Darkness, Silence, Nothing, Death".⁽²⁾ The first three examples, suggestive of Jung's Archetypal Images of the Collective Unconscious,⁽³⁾ reinforce the conclusion that whatever determines the response to a sacred object "lies below consciousness and is of concern to psychology, not art".⁽³⁾ Art comes about when "the passive awe provoked by sacred beings or events is transformed into a desire to express that awe in a rite of worship or homage"⁽⁴⁾. The conception of art as the active equivalent of ubiquitous and usually passive

(1) D.H., pp. 54-5

(2) See his Two Essays on Analytical Psychology, (2nd edition, London, 1953)

(3) D.H., p. 55

(4) Ibid., p. 57

states is conventionally Romantic, its status as a rite being merely an aesthetic modification of that convention. What is startling is that Auden of all modern poets should be drawing on such traditions to explain the process of language-use itself.

Auden's current theory of language is based on the concept of identity in the use and effect of proper names. The proper name "must not only refer, it must refer aptly and this aptness must be publicly recognisable".⁽¹⁾ Calling Adam the 'Proto-poet' because he named the animals, Auden seems oblivious to the difference between a proper and a common noun. The perfect analogy to his theory is found, paradoxically, in philology, for it is in studying words in abstraction from their uses that reveals them as "little lyrics about themselves".⁽²⁾ This equation is novel but obviously solipsistic, for philology can only consider extant meanings: it can neither add to the sum of usages nor contribute to the transmission of information. Slightly more 'useful' is the formula he adopts from Valéry that language is prosaic to the degree that "it does not matter what particular word is associated with an idea, provided the association once made is permanent"⁽³⁾ and poetic to the degree that it does matter. Valéry admits that the sense of 'matter' is indefinable and that this is an essential characteristic of poetry (for definition is intrinsically prosaic). What neither he nor Auden

(1) D.H., p. 34

(2) Ibid. p. 35

(3) Loc. cit.

acknowledges is that, in fact, a single word does not correspond to an idea in the true sense, that it is necessary to organise words into larger 'structures' in order to embody meaning. From one point of view form is an essential concomitant of the 'philological' theory of words, helping to counteract the 'magical' power which that theory gave them. Thus, Christopher Isherwood and Chester Kallman, the dedicatees of Homage to Clio, must be cautioned:

Although you be, as I am, one of those
Who feel a Christian ought to write in prose,
For poetry is magic: born in sin, you
May read it to exorcise the Gentile in you.

Magic, it might be said, is the corollary of sacredness; "to the imagination the sacred is self-evident"⁽¹⁾ but that which is sacred in the specifically Christian sense must never be confused with it. Christianity, in fact, brings to its most crucial head the tenuous relation of poetry and truth, a tenuity reflected in the literal use Auden makes of the concept of the Word made Flesh. It is, he asserts, the difference between Christ's physical appearance and his identity that finally contradicts the Imagination's claim to veridical perception⁽²⁾, just as the very translation of the Word into physical terms endows God with a literal character which makes it impossible to imagine him "as speaking anything but the most sober prose".⁽³⁾ The unity of Word and Flesh is, in fact, symbolic of the unity Auden has attributed to words themselves.

(1) D.H., p. 456

(2) Ibid., p. 457

(3) S.W., p. 136

Though he continues to regard prose as intrinsically 'drab', 'sober' and 'truthful',⁽¹⁾ there is no theoretical reason for doing so (unless Valéry's dichotomy is accepted) except by reference to its characteristic content, that most basic unit of identity. It is precisely this tendency to move surreptitiously towards content that marks Auden's current discussion of form. He approaches it in the context of defining beauty, an entity perceived by the Secondary Imagination, for "beauty and ugliness pertain to Form not to Being".⁽²⁾ In adding that a poem is ugly or beautiful "to the degree that it succeeds or fails in reconciling contradictory feelings in an order of mutual propriety"⁽³⁾ Auden is automatically placing it in the realm of psychological events which he has already made the exclusive property of the Primary Imagination and its sacred encounters. When he goes further still to say that "the effect of beauty....is good" to the extent that it prompts awareness of man's fall and the possibility of regaining heaven, and evil "to the degree that beauty is taken, not as analogous to, but identical with goodness"⁽⁴⁾ he is not only contradicting himself (the second part of the statement really means that beauty is good to the extent that its effect is known but ignored) but assuming the Christian context whose existence art is said to demonstrate.

(1) Auden's reply in 'A Symposium on W.H. Auden's "A Change of Air"', Kenyon Review, XXVI (1964), p. 207

(2) DH., p. 56

(3) Ibid., p. 71

(4) Loc. cit.

Paradoxically, however, these illogical attempts at definition seem more satisfactory, more authentic, than the lip-service paid to what might be called the Wittgensteinian model of language. Auden quotes Whitehead's neat formulation of the ideal correspondence of form to content whereby the language is adjusted "so that it embodies what it indicates".⁽¹⁾ (This is clearly similar in principle to Wittgenstein's famous dictum that "that which mirrors itself in language, language cannot represent"⁽²⁾ and Auden does refer to its ethical equivalent that "ethics does not treat of the world. Ethics must be a condition of the world like logic").⁽³⁾

A similar impression of authenticity is attached to Auden's later tendency to endow language itself with a primacy which effectively belies the presence of form or personality. He is fond, for example of citing Karl Kraus's epigram 'Speech is the mother, not the handmaid of thought',⁽⁴⁾ nor is this mere rhetoric; Rosenstock-Huessy is also quoted:

Living language always overpowers the thinking of the individual man. It is wiser than the thinker who assumes that he thinks whereas he only speaks and in so doing faithfully trusts the material of language; it guides his concepts unconsciously towards an unknown future.⁽⁵⁾

(1) DH., p. 13

(2) Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus, transl. by D.F. Pears & B.F. McGuinness, (London, 1961), p. 51

(3) DH., p. 273

(4) SW., p. 122

(5) Loc. cit.

This view of language makes it both democratic and authoritarian, a comforting yet moral background to the idiosyncrasy and egotism of human beings. It is also an understandable reflection of the artist's practical problem, the "interminable wrestle with words and meanings" common especially to the twentieth century.

Above all, however, its effect is to reinforce the sense of Art's autonomy making any theoretical description of it appear intrinsically interesting, thus retarding any tendency to establish a dialectical relation between poetry and poetic theory. The matter is complicated, of course, by the reader's anticipation of such a dialectic, based on the poet's previous habit, and the degree of importance Auden appears to attach to theories which might be thought banal.

Two approaches are especially notable: the comparison of poetry with other artistic media and a consideration of the 'practical' element in aesthetic theory and writing itself, mimesis. Four developments have made the artistic vocation more difficult than it was. Firstly, science has destroyed belief in the eternity of the physical universe by showing nature to be merely a series of processes. Hence:

It is difficult for a modern artist to believe he can make an enduring object when he has no model of endurance to go by; he is more tempted than his predecessors to abandon the search for perfection as a waste of time and be content with sketches and improvisations. (1)

(1) DH., p. 78

The presupposition of this argument, that it might never have occurred to man to create had the contrast of human mortality to the permanence of earth, ocean, sky, sun, moon and stars not struck him first, whilst credible psychologically does not correspond to historical fact. For while the production of works of art differs from manufacturing articles in being gratuitous where the latter is necessary, man's earliest artistic efforts show no clear awareness of this difference: the earliest decoration is on pots, the earliest illustrations are of animals to be hunted.

Secondly, belief has been lost in "the significance and reality of sensory phenomena"⁽¹⁾, due in part to science shaking our faith in the naive observation of our senses, in part to philosophy, especially Luther "who denied any intelligible relation between subjective Faith and objective Works"⁽²⁾, and Descartes, with his doctrine of primary and secondary qualities. Again, the supposed effect of these changes, that they have deprived the artist of the traditional conception of 'art as mimesis' because "there is no longer a nature 'out there' to be truly or falsely imitated"⁽³⁾, seems unduly pragmatic, as Auden's illustration itself suggests:

The change of attitude is already to be seen in Blake's remark that some people see the sun as a round golden disc the size of a guinea but that he sees it as a host crying Holy, Holy, Holy.⁽⁴⁾

(1) DH., p. 78

(2) Loc. cit.

(3) Loc. cit.

(4) Ibid., pp. 78-9

He comments that what is really significant here is Blake's implicit acceptance of that division between the physical and the spiritual (for promoting which he held Newton mainly responsible) rather than the intrinsic ingenuity of imagination which prompted Blake's particular interpretation. Integral though mimesis, in the strict sense, is in works of art, it has actually been the 'raison d'être' of none but ephemeral or experimental movements.

The third deterioration Auden notes is "the loss of belief in a norm of human nature which will always require the same kind of man-fabricated world to be at home in".⁽¹⁾ Its first result is the finite equivalent of the loss of belief in eternity:

Until the Industrial Revolution, the way in which men lived changed so slowly that any man, thinking of his great-grandchildren, could imagine them as people living the same kind of life with the same kind of needs and satisfactions as himself. Technology, with its ever-accelerating transformation of man's way of living, has made it impossible for us to imagine what life will be like even twenty years from now.⁽²⁾

In addition, and more fundamentally, the very idea of human nature has been shown by anthropology and archaeology to be a provincial one; we now know that "human nature is so plastic that it can exhibit varieties of behaviour which, in the animal kingdom, could only be exhibited by different species".⁽³⁾ (Yet again Auden's judgement appears to be unwarrantably literal, in this case adopting

(1) DH., p. 79

(2) Loc. cit

(3) Loc. cit

the criteria of behaviourism, criteria anathema, one would have thought, precisely to the artist!)

More obviously relevant to the poet, however, is the change which technology, by making available to us the arts of all ages and cultures, has brought about in the concept of tradition which:

.....no longer means a way of working handed down from one generation to the next; a sense of tradition now means a consciousness of the whole of the past as present, yet at the same time as a structured whole the parts of which are related in terms of before and after.(1)

As a result:

Originality no longer means a slight modification in the style of one's immediate predecessors; it means a capacity to find in any work of any date or place a clue to finding one's authentic voice. The burden of choice and selection is put squarely upon the shoulders of each individual poet and it is a heavy one.(2)

It is, perhaps, ironic that technology and the theory of T.S. Eliot in 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' should find themselves in conjunction, especially since Auden's own ambivalence towards the concept of tradition reflects his closer proximity to the technologist's idea of progress-by-minute-adaptation than to Eliot's rarified transcendence of the poet's individuality.

The last imposition of the modern world on art is consequent upon "the disappearance of the Public Realm as the sphere of

(1) DH., pp. 79-80

(2) Loc. cit.

revelatory personal deeds".⁽¹⁾ The Greek notion of privacy assigned to it merely the necessity of sustaining life: by contrast the public was looked upon as "the sphere of freedom where a man could disclose himself to others"⁽²⁾:

Today, the significance of the terms private and public has been reversed; public life is the necessary impersonal life, the place where a man fulfills his social function, and it is in his private life that he is free to be his personal self.⁽³⁾

This has had two consequences. Firstly, the arts, particularly literature, "have lost their traditional principal human subject, the man of action, the doer of public deeds".⁽⁴⁾ Secondly, there has emerged a social phenomenon unknown to the ancient world, designated by Auden (after Kierkegaard) The Public⁽⁵⁾. The Public demands entertainment from mass media, an audience abducted from the popular artist, leaving only the 'highbrow' artist truly independent of his audience. Hence the characteristically intimate tone of 'Modern' poetry ("whenever a modern poet raises his voice he sounds phony")⁽⁶⁾ and its tendency to deal with "the man or woman in any walk of life who, despite all the impersonal pressures of modern society, manages to acquire and preserve a face of his own".⁽⁷⁾ In its very provincialism, indeed, lies art's only

(1) DH., p. 80

(2) Loc. cit.

(3) Loc. cit.

(4) Loc. cit.

(5) See below, p. 444 for Auden's definition of the Public.

(6) DH., p. 84

(7) Loc. cit.

remaining public obligation, to remind bureaucracy, 'The Management', that "the managed are people with faces, not anonymous numbers".⁽¹⁾

Another method of prescribing the nature of poetry itself is by comparison with its rivals, painting and music. Literature (Auden uses the word 'speech') is found to be unique in its ability to represent both the subject and object in any expression, 'I love you', for example:

Music can, I believe, express the equivalent of 'I love', but it is incapable of saying whom or what I love, you, God or the decimal system. A painting can portray someone as beautiful, loveable, etc., but it cannot say, who, if anybody, loves this person.⁽²⁾

Music, however, emerges as the most versatile medium because it incorporates the greatest extremes of theory and practicality, the nature of the former being particularly esoteric. An unconscious moral reaction arises from music's exploitation of the two aspects of time, "natural or organic repetition, and historical novelty created by choice"⁽³⁾, which makes us aware that choice is confined to the latter. Hence "a succession of two musical notes is an act of choice"⁽⁴⁾ and "the fact that we cannot shut our ears at will allows music to assert that we cannot not choose."⁽⁵⁾

At the opposite extreme, music, in the form of singing, is superior to speech by every criterion except that of precision. On

(1) DH., p. 88

(2) SW., p. 91

(3) DH., p. 465

(4) Loc. cit.

(5) Ibid., p. 467

the one hand it is the most democratic of the media: singing is "the most gratuitous of acts",⁽¹⁾ akin to a kind of public outcry, "on the voluntary level what an 'ouch' of pain or the howl of a hungry baby is on the involuntary"⁽²⁾. Because, when listening to opera in a foreign language, one can recognise the emotions being expressed but not know whether the person expressing them is of high or low rank, Auden concludes that song "abolishes all social and age differences".⁽³⁾ On the other hand, because singing is a virtuoso art, it possesses only one style, the high, so that by singing them we can forget "our use of words for banal and profane purposes"⁽⁴⁾. It is the contrast between this spoken effect of words and the height of singing's virtuosity which forms the character of opera, Auden's favourite kind of music now.

Upon this comprehensive foundation of definition what poetic structures does Auden build? The most conspicuous and, as it were, the purest development, especially by contrast to the long works of the previous decade, is the frequent occurrence of aphorisms and clerihews: 'Academic Graffiti' in Homage to Clio, 'Symmetries and Asymmetries' in About the House and 'Marginalia' in City without Walls. Both permit the baroque style to reveal its full virtuosity by placing it in a form intrinsically given to dexterity. A typical clerihe

(1) SW., p. 94

(2) Ibid., p. 88

(3) Ibid., p. 89

(4) Ibid., p. 88

is that on Valéry:

Paul Valéry
Earned a meagre salary
Walking through the Bois,
Observing his Moi. (1)

The cleriheW accentuates the natural exaggeration of rhyme and hence the element of absurdity in its subject, its skill of execution vindicating this essential flippancy. By contrast the aphorism points up absurdity or simple paradox by making a tangential comment on it or presenting it naked of context or explanation:

The tobacco farmers
were Baptists who considered
smoking a sin. (2)

A more eccentric innovation is what Auden calls 'transliteration', that is, the free translation of other poets, in this case, four contemporary Russians: Adam Mickiewicz, Bella Akhmadulina, Evgeni Vinokurov and Andrei Voznesensky. His version of the latter's 'Parabolic Ballad' typifies the result:

Along a parabola life like a rocket flies,
Mainly in darkness, now and then on a rainbow.
Redheaded bohemian Gauguin, the painter,
Started out life as a prosperous stockbroker. (3)

The lack of verbal and intellectual tension in this stanza intrudes upon the reader used to Auden's craftsmanship. He would have assumed that Gauguin's famous occupation was well known and would

- (1) HC., p. 89
- (2) CW., p. 64
- (3) AH., p. 80

have intensified the contrast between it and his earlier career, exploiting the imaginative distance between a socially respectable though uncreative job and the gratuitous, socially irresponsible nature of art. (An effect not dissimilar to this is produced in 'In Memory of W.B. Yeats'⁽¹⁾ when the brokers "roaring like beasts on the floor of the Bourse" are introduced as examples of the life Yeats has left behind continuing to pursue its ends).

A less purely stylistic but poetically more profound development is that represented by the 'Five Occasional Poems' which begins City without Walls and the 'Four Commissioned Texts' with which it ends. The third poem of the former, a eulogy of Auden's Oxford tutor, Nevill Coghill, epitomises the sort of poem which is of less than excellent quality but, as it were, vindicated by the worth of its occasion and subject. It begins by reiterating, in terms oblique but familiar for their very obliqueness, the comprehensive, fully-absorbed collocation of childhood memories:

In our beginning
was a snuffling life without
sky or horizon,
full of objects and not-theres,
too close, over-big,
and not all of them friendly,
lit up at moments
from an invisible source
by shafts of sunlight
or a split-second levin.

The poem recovers verbal pertinence in the third stanza which envisages our last views of earth, which may be of:

(1) The New Republic, LXXXVII (1939), p. 123; see above, pp. 245-6

a field of battle
or a vista of terse lawns
and tantalised yews,
or a forgotten province
of sagging fences,
weeds and pecker-wood saw-mills,
where an ill-nourished
sullen people vegetate
in some gloomy schism.

If 'pecker-wood saw-mills' seems obtrusively contrived, the combined precision of 'ill-nourished', 'sullen' and 'vegetate' in conjunction with 'paysage moralisé' to convey the state of schism, revives Auden's familiar descriptive manner.

Having negotiated a veritable Slough of Capitalisation ('Age of Care', 'Nature', 'Cruel Fair', 'Higher Clergy') the poem finally takes up its personal theme. Here the reader is aware of the repetition of material given a definitive airing in the autobiographical part of the 'Letter to Lord Byron'⁽¹⁾, and, indeed, the present version seems to violate the poet's rule that reminiscence be reticent. The poem moves awkwardly from the playfully florid to almost embarrassing self-disparagement, ending with the phrase 'amoebaeen song' which partakes of both tendencies:

swains of a pasture
where neither love nor money
nor clocks are cogent,
a time to wear odd clothing,
behave with panache
and talk nonsense as I did,
ambling in Oxford's
potamic meadows with friends:
one austere dogma
capped another, abstract noun
echoed abstract noun,
to voice our irreverent
amoebaeen song.

(1) Letters from Iceland, p. 209

('Potamic' and 'amoebaeal' add less than their superfluous and idiosyncratic abstruseness subtracts).

Coghill is described with the affection commensurate with such a poem and in the robust style which authenticates Auden's reminiscence for the reader:

you countenanced all species,
the alphas, the bone-
idle, the obstreperous
and the really rum,
never looked cross or sleepy
when our essays were
more about us than Chaucer.

The best example of this robustness is the poet's summing up of his former tutor's character by the phrase "you pass muster".

The function of the baroque style might appear to be chiefly to offset any embarrassment in the expression of personal affection, helping to gloss over the essential privacy of personal recollection. In a sense, though, it has the opposite effect of emphasising the awkwardness of sentimentality by couching it in phrases whose own awkwardness draws attention to them. In a strange, roundabout way, the poet seems, in fact, to be deliberately showing off the inherent pretentiousness and infelicity of his art as a contrast, perhaps, to the sincere worth of its subject.

The reader's 'faith' is tested even more severely in Auden's new style of self-portraiture. 'Profile'⁽¹⁾ is a typical exercise in what seems to be bravado as the poet assesses himself objectively:

(1) CW., p. 36

He thanks God daily
that he was born and bred
A British Pharisee.

A large element of the poem's effect consists in the fact that identification of the profile as Auden's own depends on recognising esoteric details such as the poet's attitude to his appearance, which "reveals an angry baby,/howling to be dressed", his adulatory admiration for Konrad Lorenz and Ronald Firbank and, most reliably circumscribing, his manic dependence on a timepiece:

So obsessive a ritualist
a pleasant surprise
makes him cross.

* * *

Without a watch
he would never know when
to feel hungry or horny.

The whole portrait reveals a poet apparently determined to place himself squarely among the "holders of one position, wrong for years" upon whom so much early wrath was expended, a determination which must impress the reader by its perversity or inverted modesty rather than its accuracy.

If the baroque style fails to inhibit this sort of exaggeration it also provides a climate of rhetoric in which reticent personal statements fit. Thus Auden considers the trials of the present and is consoled by the memory of a former love:

Of what, then, should I complain,
pottering about
a neat suburban kitchen?
Solitude? Rubbish!
It's social enough with real
faces and landscapes
for whose friendly countenance
I at least can learn
to live with obesity
and a little fame. (1)

If the reader detects a certain note of egocentricity and contrivance in the sylleptic combination of obesity and fame, and the qualification of the latter with a coy, almost diminutive adjective, his doubts must be dispelled by the poet's treatment of a more delicate matter, his place as an artist in posterity:

I should like to become, if possible,
a minor atlantic Goethe,
with his passion for weather and stones but without his silliness
re the Cross: at times a bore, but,
while knowing Speech can at best, a shadow echoing
the silent light, bear witness
to the Truth it is not, he wished it were, as the Francophile
gaggle of pure songsters
are too vain to. (2)

It is the easy irregularity of syllabic verse that gives him the assurance to state his wish with quiet assertiveness, to use office slang and middle-class euphemisms ('silliness', 'a bore'), to entangle the reader in playfully convoluted clauses.

In autobiographical writing, the baroque style may appear to take advantage of two significant absences: there is no objective

(1) 'Since', CW., p. 40

(2) 'The Cave of Making', AH., pp. 20-1

truth or ideology which it is obliged to represent and, further, because this sort of fundamental unironised self-portraiture is new to Auden, there is nothing with which to compare it. The opposite is true of the Natural world: its truths are undeniable and the exposition of them has always been Auden's main theme. Nature, as a subject for poetry, is unique in the interpretative possibilities it permits. In practice, however, these tend to be polarised towards either a literal and realistic or a fantastic, symbolic treatment, precisely the alternatives represented in Auden's terminology by the philistine and the baroque. The former throws particular stress onto the element of calculated stylisation for the simple reason that it involves a reversion to his earliest, imitative writing, to those poems of 1925 which treated nature pessimistically in the manner of Hardy, Edward Thomas and Robert Frost. It is to the style of Frost he returns with uncanny and incongruous accuracy in a group of poems. 'Their Lonely Betters'⁽¹⁾ for example, treats a theme typical of Frost, the way in which language distinguishes human beings from animals, not, as one might expect, as the attribute of a higher evolutionary form, but as a sign of the burden of consciousness:

Let them leave language to their lonely betters
Who count some days and long for certain letters;
We, too, make noises when we laugh or weep:
Words are for those with promises to keep.

Comparison with Frost's 'Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening' is

(1) N., p. 15

strikingly suggested, especially the last stanza of that poem:

The woods are lovely, dark and deep,
But I have promises to keep,
And miles to go before I sleep,
And miles to go before I sleep.⁽¹⁾

Similarly 'First Things First'⁽²⁾ employs briefly a variety of the pathetic fallacy used by Frost and emphasised by the repetition of 'said' in a way even more typical of him:

Grateful I slept till a morning that would not say
How much it believed of what I said the storm had said.

The remainder of the stanza, returning to the poem's title, reverts from the dream speculation of the main part of the poem to what the actual effects of the storm are, and draws a homely conclusion:

---So many cubic metres the more in my cistern
Against a leonine summer---, putting first things first:
Thousands have lived without love, not one without water.

'The More Loving One'⁽³⁾ considers our attitude to familiar objects, in this case, stars. Auden seems to share Frost's pleasure in deflating romantic illusions by stating the obvious: clearly the stars must be oblivious of the poet's attention. Not only this, but, on examination he realises that he has overestimated his own love of stars, though the poem ends with this position being tentatively qualified ---learning to do without stars completely would at least take him some time.

Of all the poems ('An Island Cemetery'⁽⁴⁾ and 'A Permanent

(1) Complete Poems of Robert Frost, (London, 1951), p. 250

(2) HC., p. 56

(3) Ibid., p. 31

(4) Ibid., p. 58

Way'⁽¹⁾ may be added to the list) in the manner of Frost, 'Walks'⁽²⁾ captures his mood most perfectly. Like Frost's 'The Road Not Taken',⁽³⁾ for example, it poses theoretical questions in an attempt to convey the significance of moments of decision felt during the course of a walk. He asks, for instance:

What good or evil angel bid
Me stop exactly when I did?
What would have happened had I gone
A Kilometre further on?

He proceeds to confirm the point of the poem which is that a walk taken for pleasure should not involve retracing one's steps but should follow a "curving track". To what seems a perfect Frostian ending Auden adds further detail about the situation of his house at the end of a lane off the main road, so that his walks have an additional pattern given to them, which the poet documents literally as:

The straight a T, the round a Q,

Finally, footprints, a ubiquitous 'sign' in Frost, suggest that a friend has passed, and thus take the poem to a conclusion involving love, the kind of ending typical of Frost:

A lane no traveller would use,
Where prints that do not fit my shoes
Have looked for me and, like enough,
Were made by someone whom I love.

Here, as in Frost's writing, the philosophy is immanent, understated

- (1) SA., p. 48 This is comparable to Frost's 'The Middleness of the Road'.
- (2) HC., p. 65
- (3) Complete Poems of Robert Frost, p. 129

and homely. Auden seems happier pointing the moral either in a pithy phrase --- "she alone is seriously there"⁽¹⁾ --- or in a neat, almost complacent, syllogism:

Nature, consistent and august,
Can't teach us what to write or do:
With Her the real is always true,
And what is true is also just.⁽²⁾

In both of these quotations the hint of female personification is evident and this is clearly an aspect of the traditional poetical approach to Nature which needs to be revived. Auden does it by making the Earth Mother the sort of brisk, no-nonsense woman he also visualises as his Muse:

...like Beatrice in Much Ado, (she) is a spirited girl who has as little use for an abject suitor as she has for a vulgar brute. She appreciates chivalry and good manners, but she despises those who will not stand up to her.⁽³⁾

"Dame Kind", "our Mum", the "Coarse Old Party that wrought you", no "hypochondriac/ Blue-Stocking from Provence"⁽⁴⁾ is merely an older personage.

An almost perfect balance of philosophy and rhetoric is achieved in 'Bucolics'⁽⁵⁾ whose seven poems are prefaced by an epigram which pays tribute to Nature's enduring, consoling power as

(1) 'Memorial for the City', N., p. 34

(2) 'Postscript', AH., p. 22

(3) DH., p. 16

(4) 'Dame Kind', HC., p. 53

(5) SA., pp. 15-30 Fuller notes, p. 218, that the seven poems must have been written by December, 1953 since Auden made a recording of them on the 12th of that month.

the ultimate ground of all comparison, a characteristic shown as much by man's propensity when depressed to find a correlative to that mood in Nature, as to find her elevating when he is happy:

Fair is Middle-Earth nor changes, though to Age,
Raging at his uncomeliness,
Her wine turn sour, her bread tasteless.

'Winds' sets the tone and manner of the sequence; its opening is formidably 'light' and allusive:

Deep below our violences,
Quite still, lie our First Dad, his watch
And many little maids,
But the boneless winds that blow
Round law-court and temple
Recall to Metropolis
That Pliocene Friday, when
At His holy insufflation
(Had He picked a teleost
Or an arthropod to inspire,
Would our death also have come ?)
One bubble-brained creature said; -
'I am loved, therefore I am' - :
And well by now might the lion
Be lying down with the kid,
Had he stuck to that logic.

That the personified region of the psyche is situated beneath its emanations of violence implies that its 'inhabitants' may be the agents of the Electra complex (the daughter attracted to the father) as well, perhaps, as Adam and God. By contrast to these human features, winds are impersonal like the law and religious ritual, themselves symbols of civilisation. Winds also symbolise the breath of life breathed into man by God, presented with a

literalness, discernible both in the incongruous specification of time and place in geological terms, and in the use of technical words from anthropology, which produces the semi-comic tone characteristic now of Auden's religious references. 'I am loved, therefore I am' is a typically ambiguous product of man's reasoning: a right idea falsified by the very process of its being thought, or rather, by the mind's inability to sustain the logic of its perceptions in the face of outside pressures. Auden is implying, in fact, that not only is God's love the necessary cause of our existence, but that this is logically recognisable as such. Paradoxically, however, man has validated the formula precisely by his selfish attitude to love which at the same time circumvents the possibility of universal harmony.

A concern for weather, the outcome of winds, is "an image /For our Authentic City" (as opposed to the fallen Metropolis) and Auden colourfully envisages its inhabitants as "old men in hallways/Tapping their barometers". Finally, the poem turns towards the poet invoking a newly-created goddess of winds to inspire him, protect him from writing nonsense and make him aware of the sanctity of his subjects:

That every verbal rite,
May be fittingly done,
And done in anamnesis
Of what is excellent
Yet a visible creature,
Earth, Sky, a few dear names.

This final phrase strikes the only unequivocally serious tone of the poem in the attempt, perhaps, to offset any impression of flippancy

or mere dexterity.

'Woods' begins with the portrayal of Bacchanalian savageries in the paintings of Piero di Cosimo, thence to the perpetuation of strange rituals in woods against which "Crown and Mitre warned their silly flocks". Woods provide anonymity for the guilt-ridden act, reduce man to his "lower-ordersy" size, provide a change for the Public's 'skirt-and-bargain-chasing-eye', a location refreshingly natural for the remote intellectual and a source of aural re-education. Further, woods contain analogies to man's condition:

Now here, now there, some loosened element,
A fruit in vigour or a dying leaf,
Utters its private idiom for descent,
And late man, listening through his latter grief,
Hears, close or far, the oldest of his joys,
Exactly as it was, the water noise.

The last extension of analogy is as sign or indication, hence "a culture is no better than its woods".

Mountains retain the symbolic associations they have always had in Auden's poetry as places of retreat which also test one's courage. The latter now involves the poet's Christian struggle with physical desire, to which the mountain contributes helpful symbolism:

To manage the Flesh,
When angels of ice and stone
Stand over her day and night who make it so plain
They detest any kind of growth, does not encourage
Euphemisms for the effort.

Mountains are connected not merely with harsh reality but definite perversity. Dracula and other legendary monsters are usually found there and it seems more than coincidental that mountains attract the

petty vicious type "you catch beheading daisies with a stick".

Auden's own view is equivocal and rather banal: he feels safest "where the nearest person who could have me hung is /Some ridges away", but admits ruefully that lyrical solitude makes for boredom: "five minutes on even the nicest mountain /Is awfully long".

Lakes epitomise the self-contained and peaceful, associated with the first ecumenical council of Nicea, family life and, ultimately, the womb, the 'amniotic mere'. Auden's last word on lakes---"just reeling off their names is ever so comfy"--- highlights the crucial ambivalence of tone in 'Bucolics'. Is this an example of rather exaggerated honesty adopting the middle-class, deliberately 'twee' tone natural to it, or an exaggeration meant ironically, reinforcing the moral already hinted at, that private Edens invariably lead their occupants to want to defend them staunchly, to "wish for savage dogs and man-traps"?

An island, "the shore/Of a lake turned inside out", is the habitat of the Ego, a concept Auden proceeds to illustrate in pert quatrains which celebrate rather than criticise the principle of self-asserting isolation by contrast to the mainland livelihood we are all obliged to pursue.

Plains evoke Auden's strongest personal reaction: he cannot see one without a shudder. They also give rise to perhaps his most virtuoso theorising:

It's horrible to think what peaks come down to,
That pecking rain and squelching glacier defeat
Tall pomps of stone where goddesses lay sleeping,
Dreaming of being woken by some chisel's kiss,
That what those blind brutes leave when they are
 through is nothing
But a mere substance, a clay that meekly takes
The potter's cuff, a gravel that as concrete
Will unsex any space which it encloses.

All this elaborate personification, adjectival novelty ('squelching glacier defeat'), assonance ('chisel's kiss', 'potter's cuff'), and brilliant image for the character of concrete (not merely anonymous but positively dehumanising) applies merely to the soil found on plains. "Here nothing points" epitomises Auden's attitude to flat, natural surfaces. Even romance does not flourish, for Cupid (referred to in fitting circumlocutory manner as "Ovid's charmer/Who leads the quadrilles in Arcady, boy-lord/Of hearts who can call their Yes and No their own") would die of cold or sunstroke here. Plains permit government to act efficiently, its efficiency tending to take the form of hanging, flogging and fining. Finally, they comprise a nightmare landscape for the poet and remind him of his real fear, "not of plains, of course, but of me", his failings and frivolity. The latter, an occupational hazard, suggests the real lesson plains have to teach, and one Auden accepts with convincing seriousness:

Though I can't pretend
To think these flats poetic, it's as well at times
To be reminded that nothing is lovely,
Not even in poetry, which is not the case.

The simplicity of this conclusion is marred by the esoteric meaning of 'the case', the phrase used by Wittgenstein in the first proposition of the Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus which states that 'The world is all that is the case',⁽¹⁾ ('the case' representing that reality which depends upon but is not identical to facts).

'Streams' sees its subject as the essence of purity, by contrast to the other natural elements:

Air is boastful at times, earth slovenly, fire rude,
But you in your bearing are always immaculate,
The most well-spoken of all the older
Servants in the household of Mrs. Nature.

Streams connect people who would otherwise remain separate, make fun of man's feuds "by opposing identical banks", and, even when part of machinery or fountains, retain their innocence, reminding man of a world "altogether different from this one". Here the poet recounts a curious, Alice-like dream experienced in Swaledale, involving a croquet tournament whose outcome is an encounter with "the god of mortal doting" and a hectic dance with the poet's loved one. Awaking (and this seems to be the point of the dream) he rediscovers the beauty of Kisdon Beck, imagining, a trifle sentimentally, that it is "glad---though goodness knows why---to run with the human race".

If the overall impression left by 'Bucolics' is one of virtuosity rather than substance the reason may be simply that the sequence is too symmetrical and autonomous in design, and too intensely sustained

(1) Transl. by D.F. Pears & B.F. McGuinness, (London, 1961), p. 7

in execution. 'Bucolics' lacks both a strong personal tone and those episodes of lame writing or invention which authenticate the presence of a fallible man rather than a decorative genius. These deficiencies are superbly remedied in another 'Nature' poem, 'In Praise of Limestone'⁽¹⁾, the apogee, perhaps, of Auden's nature poems. It begins:

If it form the landscape that we, the inconstant ones,
Are consistently homesick for, this is chiefly
Because it dissolves in water. Mark these rounded slopes
With their surface fragrance of thyme and, beneath,
A secret system of caves and conduits; hear the springs
That spurt out everywhere with a chuckle,
Each filling a private pool for its fish and carving
Its own little ravine whose cliffs entertain
The butterfly and the lizard.

The tone of the first sentence resembles the rather ponderous explication of an old guide book, the opening subjunctive being revealed as peremptory rather than tentative by the exhortations 'mark' and 'hear', though 'entertain' revives the note of Augustan, anthropocentric dignity. The multifarious symbolisms this landscape could yield are hinted at in the slight, riddling paradox of 'inconstant' and 'consistently', and, more strongly, in the as yet undisclosed but highly suggestive significance of limestone's ability to dissolve in water. One symbolic meaning is now specified, the maternal:

(1) N., p. 11

What could be more like Mother or a fitter background
For her son, the flirtatious male who lounges
Against a rock in the sunlight, never doubting
That for all his faults he is loved; whose works are but
Extensions of his power to charm?

This exposé maintains a fine balance between the symbolic and the realistic, not merely by stating that the limestone resembles the mother's archetypal roundness but by showing the young male precisely exercising his independence from it, exhibiting confidence in his own ability to charm, which the poem says, originates from and reinforces the security of his mother's love.

This self-confidence does not arrive with adolescence, however, but is fundamental to all self-assertion, for example the child's wish "to receive more attention than his brothers". Hence, climbing "from weathered outcrop/To hill-top temple, from appearing waters to/Conspicuous fountains, from a wild to a formal vineyard" is obvious to his sense of self-improvement, a progress which inevitably means acquiring the cunning refinements of civilised artifice.

The natives of this region, those adjusted to its demands and concessions, are competitive yet close-knit, with a materialist, indeed sensual attitude to morality, untroubled by the immense responsibility of abstract problems, and able to view their fellows with almost total tolerance:

.....to become a pimp
Or deal in fake jewellery or ruin a fine tenor voice
For effects that bring down the house, could happen to all
But the best and worst of us.

As usual Auden's selection of exemplars is deft, but unlike many poems of this period, it is not so dazzling as to disintegrate the whole of which it is part.

Extremists have emigrated, lured by the promise of fulfilment, here represented in the personified connotations of other rock types:

'Come!' cried the granite wastes,
'How evasive is your humour, how accidental
Your kindest kiss, how permanent is death.' (Saints-to-be
Slipped away sighing.) 'Come!' purred the clays and gravels.
'On our plains there is room for armies to drill; rivers
Wait to be tamed and slaves to construct you a tomb
In the grand manner: soft as the earth is mankind and both
Need to be altered.' (Intendant Caesars rose and
Left, slamming the door.) But the really reckless were fetched
By an older colder voice, the oceanic whisper:
'I am the solitude that asks and promises nothing;
That is how I shall set you free. There is no love;
There are only the various envies, all of them sad.'

It is not (as it is in 'Bucolics') the sheer novelty of the device of using soils to symbolise attitudes, but the pertinence of what each says that makes this section effective. The potential for power, both national and personal which a large space, a plain, affords, and the typical, consequent cynicism which sees men and earth as equally malleable (the word 'altered' is a fine example of political euphemism) form a clear contrast to the relatively esoteric and trivial substance of 'Plains'. More deft still is the imagery associated with the 'really reckless' (the alliteration here is deliberately ambiguous suggesting absurdity which is nonetheless

heroic, by contrast with the odd rhyming of 'older' and 'colder' which sounds absurd in a dull, menacing way.) The oxymoronic effect of 'oceanic whisper' completes the impression of desires universally felt and always corrupting. Within a basically Romantic poem (Romantic in the sense both that its images are prominent and daring and that it proceeds indirectly to a moral, --- the limestone evokes 'a faultless love'---whose importance arises organically, as it were, from these indirections) Auden achieves the kind of classical formality and sinister inflection which is the 'raison d'être' of a poem like 'The Fall of Rome':⁽¹⁾

Altogether elsewhere, vast
Herds of reindeer move across
Miles and miles of golden moss,
Silently and very fast.

(Comparison of the two poems shows how 'irresponsible' and 'static' the earlier work seems precisely because it is too neat, too finished to allow for the sense of spiritual development to accompany the brilliant procession of images.)

The poet's voice now enters to begin a question - and - answer examination of the landscape in reality. The calm of this place does not necessarily denote that here "something was settled once and for all", but is it therefore merely "a backward/And dilapidated province, connected/To the big busy world by a tunnel?" The antithesis is resolved by attributing to the Mediterranean the function of calling

(1) N., p. 28

into question "all the Great Powers assume", of disturbing our rights:

The poet,
Admired for his earnest habit of calling
The sun the sun, his mind Puzzle, is made uneasy
By these marble statues which so obviously doubt
His antimythological myth.

Here both tone and grammar are, for the first time in the poem, obscure seeming to decry the poet's role as merely one of naming, a role which has won him admiration as if for great integrity.

It is as difficult to accept that Auden believes this as to make the assumption that the poet's myth must be antimythological, that is, presumably, contrary to the true spirit of myth as suggested by the statues of Greek and Roman gods and goddesses, for the simple reason that Auden's own poetry depends so much on the mythological properties that recur in it. The guilts of the poet himself, for which the landscape seems to reproach him too, revive the poem's authenticity of tone and permit Auden to satirise the refinement tantamount to complacency implied by a love of music "which can be made anywhere, is invisible,/And does not smell".

The final moral of the poem, drawn from the statues and fountains, is that if reincarnation becomes a reality "the blessed will not care what angle they are regarded from". This might seem slightly affected were it not for the totally personal and convincing humility of the poem's ending:

Dear, I know nothing of
Either, but when I try to imagine a faultless love
Or the life to come, what I hear is the murmur
Of underground streams, what I see is a limestone landscape.

It must strike the reader as paradoxical, though in a stimulating rather than confusing sense, that the limestone which has prompted these reflections is actually in a Mediterranean landscape, since he has been accustomed to Auden's praise of and sense of kinship with the terrain of Northern England, "the limestone moors that stretch from Brough/To Hexham and the Roman Wall"⁽¹⁾ already designated as his "symbol of us all".⁽²⁾ Thus geology effectively links Auden's early Englishness both of subject and manner with his current cosmopolitanism.⁽³⁾

In 'Bucolics' the intrinsic frivolity of the baroque style was conducive to the revived, allegorised Nature which appeared there and in 'In Praise of Limestone' the beauty and ingenuity of the perceptions and the authentically reserved voice of the author guaranteed the ultimate seriousness of purpose to which the landscape was adjunct. It is not hard to see, however, the similarity of freely roving intellect in the baroque style and Auden's innate habit of thought; the latter has always been marked by a tendency to categorise and draw general conclusions, and to this predilection the baroque contributes the essential symmetry of its art. From the two together ratiocination of a newly refined, schematic and gratuitous nature may be expected.

The form it takes is to examine the 'nature' of man's relation to animal life and, by extension, his own animal instincts. The

(1) 'New Year Letter', 11. 1102-3

(2) Ibid., 1. 1104

(3) A connection taken up when the cultural predispositions of the Mediterranean are discussed; see below, pp. 413-4

central issue is that of consciousness and this once crucially contested facet of personality now becomes the source of metaphysical sport; how can the absurd hiatus presented by the human possession of consciousness and the animals' lack of it be most picturesquely displayed? Style is the key and even a prose definition comes equipped, in addition to its proverbial rhetoric, with that decisively poetic property, rhyme. The animal motto is 'To thyself, be enough' (as opposed to man's 'To thine own self, be true'):

To be enough to oneself means to have no conscious ego standing over against the self, to be unable to say no to oneself, or to distinguish fantasy from reality, not to be able to lie, to have no name and answer to Hi or to any loud cry.(1)

The equation obviously favours human beings but may sound complacent or, in the poetic extremity to which Auden forces it, painfully tangential:

Woken at sunup to hear
A cock pronouncing himself himself
Though all his sons had been castrated and eaten,
I was glad I could be unhappy.(2)

Even when the credit for human survival goes implicitly to his Maker man's perversely unnatural behaviour still provides the material of a fascinating contrast:

Could any tiger
Drink martinis, smoke cigars,
And last as we do?(3)

(1) EF., p. 78

(2) 'Homage to Clio', HC., p. 3

(3) 'In Due Season', CW., p. 87

The opposite approach is equally fertile, using animals to remind us that "we too make noises when we laugh or weep"⁽¹⁾. Unfortunately the inarticulate nature of such noises renders them useless to poetry and any more explicit version is liable to fall into the very trap it warns against, pretentiousness:

Not to lose time, not to get caught,
Not to be left behind, not, please! to resemble
The beasts who repeat themselves, or a thing like water
Or stone whose conduct can be predicted, these
Are our Common Prayer, whose greatest comfort is music
Which can be made anywhere, is invisible,
And does not smell.⁽²⁾

If the contradictions here are subsumed beneath the, albeit frivolous, aegis of poetical expediency, Auden's theoretical examination of the animal in man openly reveals the inherent artificiality of the distinction. A good example is his attempt to describe the reactions of the Body as if it were fully sentient (this is really what the word 'objectively' entails);

In the debate between the Body and Soul, if the former could present its own case objectively, it would always win. As it is, it can only protest the Soul's misstatement of its case by subjective acts of rebellion, coughs, belches, constipation, etc., which always put it in the wrong.⁽³⁾

This sort of playing upon an idea of objectivity which is never actually met with in experience obviously makes for some charming

(1) 'Their Lonely Betters', N., p. 15

(2) 'In Praise of Limestone', N., p. 11

(3) DH., p. 100

indirections in poetry; an address to the body, for example:

Really, must you,
Over- familiar
Dense companion,
Be there always?
The bond between us
Is chimerical surely:
Yet I cannot break it.⁽¹⁾

What is achieved here is, in fact, a state of teasing ambivalence. Is the flesh a consolation for the ineffectiveness of the imagination and intellect, the ultimate democratising, humiliating adjunct of humanity, or is it the very dead weight which prevents man aspiring to divinity? Auden's point, in fact, is that these two effects are identical, that in keeping man in his place the body is actually establishing for him his true nature and identity; the very 'dumbness' of the animals (and 'the animal') prevents them from being "secretary to man's plot to become divine"⁽²⁾ so that he hovers between those unconscious creatures with nothing to hide, and God "from whom no secrets are hid".⁽³⁾

In practice, however, preoccupation with the body encourages two poetic traits, both of them distinctly philistine and realistic. The less important, ideologically, is Auden's at times irritating, habit of philosophising on parts of the body: hands, nose, ears and eyes. Typically, 'Hands'⁽⁴⁾ makes seemingly exaggerated claims for hands, asserting that "eyes can often be taken in, hands never", and even

(1) 'You', AH., p. 53

(2) 'In Due Season', CW., p. 87

(3) 'Secrets', N., p. 46

(4) HC., p. 9

the more credible distinction drawn between eye and ear:

The ear tends to be lazy, craves the familiar, and is shocked by the unexpected: the eye, on the other hand, tends to be impatient, craves the novel and is bored by repetition.⁽¹⁾

is of curious rather than substantial value.

The other tendency induced by consideration of the body is a mundane pragmatism, summed up in Brecht's phrase 'Erst kommt das Fressen, dann kommt die Moral' which Auden translates as 'Grub first, then Ethics'.⁽²⁾ The consumption of food is a fundamental requirement of existence, and hence the aim of all political parties and of technology itself is to guarantee physical and mental health. Eating evinces man's history, his future and, in its social connotations, his difference from the beasts:

Only man,
supererogatory beast,
Dame Kind's thoroughbred lunatic, can
do the honours of a feast,
and was doing so
before the last Glaciation when he offered
mammoth-marrow
and, perhaps, Long Pig, will continue till Doomsday
when at God's board
the saints chew pickled Leviathan.⁽³⁾

The offering of food is a mark of our charity and civilization, so much so, in fact, that Auden interprets the whole ritual in religious terms seeing it as an alternative to sex and God. He finds it

(1) DH., p. 100

(2) It forms the title of the poem which in HC. was called 'On Installing an American Kitchen in Lower Austria'.

(3) 'Tonight at 7.30', AH., p. 39

"remarkable that in poetry and romantic literature there is so much about sex and very little about food which is just as pleasurable and never lets you down"⁽¹⁾ and opines:

surely those in whose creed
God is edible may call a fine
Omelette a Christian deed.⁽²⁾

This attitude epitomises one effect of the combination of the baroque style and the philistine-realistic attitude, namely its conduciveness to writing which could be called 'amoral'. The element of style here has expanded beyond the limits of technique and become intrinsic in the writer's vision of his material. John Bayley argues that Auden has always tended to enjoy the possibilities of creating this sort of theatrical effect, that "he shares with Yeats an enjoyment of the situation and of the possibilities of making it stylish"⁽³⁾ and that this is part of his success. Bayley, however, takes his examples from Poems 1930 where any theatre Auden introduces into his descriptions of a decaying industrial landscape must automatically be set by the reader against the undramatic reality of the situation. No such corrective reality can be superimposed on Auden's current works: either they seem idolatrous or ingenious.

One poem raises ambiguity to such a pitch that it must read as the poet's virtual admission of being seduced by style or his confirmation that the allure of style is integral to his intention of testing his readers' faith. 'The Love Feast'⁽⁴⁾ elaborates a

(1) Howard Griffin, 'A Dialogue with W.H. Auden', Partisan Review, XX, 1, (1953), p. 80

(2) 'On Installing an American Kitchen in Lower Austria', HC., p. 24

(3) The Romantic Survival, p. 130

(4) N., p. 18

modern Last Supper at which relations between the participants do not transcend the banal and gossipy:

Lou is telling Anne what Molly
Said to Mark behind her back;
Jack likes Jill who worships George
Who has the hots for Jack.

The basis for considering the poem satirical is presumably its contrast of the kind of love on exhibition here and that attendant upon the actual Last Supper, given moral expression as:

The Love that rules the sun and stars
Permits what He forbids.

Yet even this tenuous distinction is blurred when the same Love seems to exert a moral effect on the poet, telling him to go home. His reaction doubles the existing ambiguities:

But that Miss Number in the corner
Playing hard to get.....
I am sorry I'm not sorry....
Make me chaste, Lord, but not yet.

St. Augustine's notorious dictum may logically be held to vindicate permissiveness, yet the context in which it occurs here in conjunction with the poem's title, makes it seem totally ambiguous.

If Nature is intrinsically 'open' to interpretation and the Flesh has inevitable connotations of the philistine and realistic, Society, the object of Auden's most committed examination and abstract theorising, would appear neither to offer such freedom nor

to entail a necessarily baroque or philistine treatment. The degree of both Auden now applies to it is, therefore, especially remarkable. Baroque and philistine combine to produce capitalised conceptions of society's three realms: The Just City, The Management and The Public. The first is an ethical and poetical combination which has been desiderated in Auden's writing since 'Hearing of harvests rotting in the valleys',⁽¹⁾ proposed that we should "rebuild our cities, not dream of islands". He is at pains now as then to emphasise the mundane and laborious nature of the task, but his context, contrasting the modern predicament with that of the Romantics, almost inevitably makes city-building seem not merely arduous but positively unimaginative:

We live in a new age in which the artist neither can have such a unique heroic importance nor believes in the Art-God enough to desire it, an age, for instance, when the necessity of dogma is once more recognised, not as the contradiction of reason and feeling but as their ground and foundation, in which the heroic image is not the nomad wandering through the desert or over the ocean, but the less exciting figure of the builder, who renews the ruined walls of the city. Our temptations are not theirs. We are less likely to be tempted by solitude into Promethean pride: we are far more likely to become cowards in the face of the tyrant who would compel us to lie in the service of the False City. It is not madness we need to flee but prostitution.⁽²⁾

The dichotomy is further weakened by Auden's lengthy exposition of its two poles as the alternatives of Eden and New Jerusalem. The difference between the two is merely chronological:

Eden is a past world in which the contradictions of the present world have not yet arisen; New Jerusalem is a future world in which they have at last been resolved.⁽³⁾

- (1) The Criterion, XII (1933), pp. 606-7
- (2) EF., p. 125
- (3) DH., p. 409

The opposition is the familiar one but its implicit, ethically-required bias towards New Jerusalem is upset by Auden's indulgence in a catalogue of the features of his personal Eden which includes such ideologically undistinguished items as:

Form of Government: Absolute monarchy, elected for life
by lot

Sources of Public Information: Gossip. Technical and learned
periodicals but no newspapers.

Public Statues: Confined to famous defunct chefs.⁽¹⁾

The most concentrated treatment of the City in this, or any other period of Auden's writing, is 'Memorial for a City'.⁽²⁾ The poem is divided into four sections, the first of which elaborates the timelessness and nonentity of the natural world in a manner which seems, perhaps because this theme is a familiar one for Auden, to direct the reader's attention towards the style of exposition, a style riddled with provocative features. The opening image of timelessness is blatantly paradoxical:

The eyes of the crow and the eye of the camera open
Onto Homer's world, not ours.

Yet it is neither Homer's world nor ours which is the real subject
but Nature, personified in awe verging on bravado:

.... She
Does nothing and does not care
She alone is seriously there.

The last line recalls similar ones in the poems of Another Time

(1) DH., p. 7

(2) N., p. 34

which played teasingly with conceptualising time. 'If I could tell you',⁽¹⁾, for example, considers time's unwillingness to enlighten the lovers as to its intentions, leaving them aware of a baffling absence of motive in natural events:

Perhaps the roses really want to grow,
The vision seriously intends to stay.

The combined irony and incredulity here suit the mood of a lyric in which time and love are opposed, but in 'Memorial for the City' the irony works entirely in favour of nature, making her not merely an indifferent onlooker but a god-like eminence.

This ambiguous mood is perpetuated stylistically by the contemporary images of 'happening' Auden selects:

Plum-blossom falls on the dead, the roar of the waterfall covers
The cries of the whipped and the sighs of the lovers
And the hard bright light composes
A meaningless moment into an eternal fact
Which a whistling messenger disappears with into a defile.

Prefaced by a pun --- this is the "space where time has no place"--- and a nonce-word, 'dedolant', this passage seems to be a pastiche of Auden's own earlier, 'hard-edged' style and the characteristics of one of Eliot's 'points of time' in the Four Quartets. Auden's meaningless moment is very similar to Eliot's moment and place of undeception, not only conceptually but in the oblique, mysterious way it is referred to. Eliot's voice is incantatory where Auden's is curt and summary ("He may, she must. There is no one to blame") but,

(1) Vice versa, 1, (1941), p. 19

this aside, the similarity between the two is striking.

The main ideological ambiguity of this section is to be found in the poet's summing up of man's relation to this intransigent world:

Our grief is not Greek: As we bury our dead
We know without knowing there is a reason for what we bear,
That our hurt is a desertion, that we are to pity
Neither ourselves nor our city;
Whoever the searchlights catch, whatever the loudspeakers blare,
We are not to despair.

It seems difficult to reconcile knowing why one suffers with the command not to despair if one is aware that the hurt is due to the desertion of the agent responsible for the command. The alteration of the line to include a negative ("our hurt is not a desertion") in Collected Shorter Poems (1966) while clarifying the literal sense blurs the intention. Has God deserted mankind or not? What bearing does this have on the nature of faith?

This may seem an unnecessarily ponderous account of the first part of 'Memorial for the City', but it is important to show the uncertainty, and positive failure, of tone and coherence which marks the poem. The City is for Auden more than a conceptual nexus, it is a poetical one. Significantly, the three remaining sections deal with separate aspects of the City in contrasting styles. Part Two provides "an adroit potted history of Christendom"⁽¹⁾ from the original shared power of Pope and Emperor, which developed into an almost farcical division of allegiance for the governed, to

(1) Fuller, p. 226

the combined attempts of artists and thinkers during the early Renaissance to make faith orderly, an aspiration shattered by Luther's revival of the strict sense of sin. The art of the high Renaissance the growth of science and the ascendancy of polite culture in France resulting in an extreme secularism, were succeeded by the final phase, Romanticism.

Obviously it is part of Auden's argument that the Just City has not yet been arrived at and therefore previous attempts were illusory, but the irony he lavishes on them seems egocentrically contrary to the spirit of Christian quest, all the more so because its exact degree is uncertain. The modern pioneers' situation is typical:

Chimeras mauled them, they wasted away with the spleen,
Suicide picked them off; sunk off Cape Consumption,
Lost on the Tossport Seas, wrecked on the Gibbering Isles
Or trapped in the ice of despair at the Soul's Pole,
They died, unfinished, alone; but now the forbidden,
The hidden, the wild outside were known:
Faithful without faith, they died for the Conscious City.

Chimeras are serious and so is suicide but the very capitalisation of the three locations of disaster gives them a humorous sound, just as the very effective image of despair is compromised by the yodelling assonance of 'Soul's Pole'. Similarly, the triple-stopped effect of 'the forbidden,/The hidden, the wild outside', inevitably suggests the crisp, dismissive grouping of things ludicrous ("the Simonites, the Mosleyites and the I.L.P.").⁽¹⁾

(1) Ode IV, The Orators, (1932), p. 100

Part Three is a lyrical treatment of barbed wire, symbol of division and separation, a symbolism fused rather awkwardly with mirrors and images to represent the essence of man:

This is the flesh we are but never would believe,
The flesh we die but it is death to pity;
This is Adam waiting for His City.

Yet not even this unequivocal, powerful statement is allowed to stand unqualified, for the final section of the poem is a soliloquy of the Flesh, called, with ponderous irony, "Our Weakness". The method epitomises the poem, consisting of a catalogue of the Flesh's part in the deeds of famous historical personages, most of them literary:

I was the unwelcome third at the meetings of Tristan with
Isolda; they tried to poison me.
I rode with Galahad on his Quest for the San Graal; without
understanding I kept his vow.
I was the just impediment to the marriage of Faustus with
Helen; I know a ghost when I see one.

The irony is inescapable but not, apparently, conducive to an appreciation of the natural instincts of man as the part of him which will ultimately triumph. If indeed such a triumph occurs it will, according to the poem, overthrow not create the City:

At the place of my passion her photographers are
gathered together; but I shall rise again to hear her
judged.

That the most direct Christian allusion in the poem should include a pun on the word 'passion' symbolises its author's certainty that

civilised life needs Christianity and his ambivalence towards the expression in poetry of constructive ways to achieve it.

Elsewhere Auden considers the implications of urban life more practically, for example, the boredom and impersonality associated with technical sophistication:

Every work-day Eve fares
forth to the stores her foods to pluck,
while Adam hunts an easy dollar:
unperspiring at eventide
both eat their bread in boredom of spirit.⁽¹⁾

This age may be 'gadged' but it is also "as unworldly/as when the faint light filtered down/ on the first man in Mirkwood".⁽²⁾ Auden means, presumably, that modern life has supplied no real sense of man's place in the natural realm since technology has made this connection less apparent. Psychologically, in fact, the machine has increased rather than decreased man's sense of equality, for:

..... the greater the equality of opportunity in a society becomes, the more obvious becomes the inequality of the talents and character among individuals, and the more bitter and personal it must be to fail.⁽³⁾

In practice, the more man emancipates himself from given necessity, "the more he loses his sense of importance and becomes prey to anxiety".⁽⁴⁾ It is in the same common-sense vein that Marx is finally

(1) 'City without Walls', CW., p. 12

(2) Ibid., p. 13

(3) DH., p. 245

(4) 'Squares and Oblongs', Poets at Work, edit. C.D. Abbot, (New York, 1948) p. 167

disposed of: it never occurred to him to ask "whether there might not be something hostile to life in the factory system as such, which no change from private to state ownership could cure".⁽¹⁾

It would be unreasonable to expect Auden to contribute in detail to the ideology of modern technological society and, in fact, his most pertinent criticisms are notable as much for the element of rhetoric in their conception as for their practical relevance. He subsumes the agencies of government and bureaucracy together beneath the obviously ambiguous title, 'The Management', suggesting both the sense of manipulation which people feel, even in a democracy, and the extent to which the proper function of government is more akin to running a business than exercising symbolic, monarchical power. The managers themselves are seen to be mere extensions of their data:

.....quiet
Men, working too hard in rooms that are too big,
Reducing to figures
What is the matter, what is to be done.⁽²⁾

Like the Maker⁽³⁾, they are experts who do not need public acclaim, for their reward is their sense of personal mastery, "taking necessary risks, the test / Of one's skill".⁽⁴⁾

His consideration of the need for government reveals a basically cynical trait in Auden's character. 'Terce'⁽⁵⁾, for example, presents the paradigm of government as the inevitable conflict between the

(1) 'Fog in the Mediterranean', Christian Scholar, XXXVII (1954), p. 532

(2) 'The Managers', N., p. 31

(3) 'The Maker', AH., p. 82

(4) 'The Managers', N., p. 31

(5) SA., p. 63

judge, hangman and poet of society, and their victim who occupies that role by virtue of his mysterious knowledge:

It is only our victim who is without a wish
Who knows already (that is what
We can never forgive. If he knows the answers,
Then why are we here, why is there even dust?),
Knows already that, in fact, our prayers are heard,
That not one of us will slip up. (1)

This appears to mean more than that someone must suffer just as someone must govern; it implies rather that victimisation is psychologically essential to social stability because the governing and influential have achieved this position in an effort to compensate for a feeling of insecurity and inferiority, similar to that attributed by Freud to the artist. (2) Auden's attitude seems to be, in fact, that government is necessary but that the individuals who implement it, whilst they must be accorded "the courtesies of the city", (3) should not be assumed to possess any other recognisably human traits.

The sense of 'us' and 'them' becomes uncomfortably marked in a statement like "here are we, all in the same boat, and there is It, the Government". (4) In his opinion the intellectual should act as intermediary defending "the inalienable rights of the individual person against encroachment by an overzealous government". (5)

More pernicious still is his habit of using the word 'ogre' to describe

(1) SA., p. 63

(2) See above, pp. 206-7

(3) 'Sext', SA., p. 67

(4) 'Yeats as example', Kenyon Review, X,2 (1948), p. 191

(5) 'Introduction', Poets of the English Language, edit., W.H. Auden & Norman Holmes Pearson, (New York, 1950), vol V, p.xxv

the anonymous authorities "who have certainly heard of you"⁽¹⁾ and threaten: "those who interfere with us /Get hurt".⁽²⁾ This tendency includes making seemingly casual remarks to the effect that "tyranny, the injustice of one, is less unjust than anarchy, the injustice of many"⁽³⁾, stating his own ideal of government as "absolute monarchy, elected for life by lot"⁽⁴⁾ or referring to "our dear old bag of a democracy"⁽⁵⁾. Whilst these comments have the excuse of humour or intellectual interest, they do nothing to contradict the direct cynicism of a summary such as the following:

Patriots? Little boys,
obsessed by Bigness,
Big Pricks, Big Money, Big Bangs.⁽⁶⁾

or the surprisingly distanced, academic treatment of the Russian invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968:

The Ogre does what Ogres can,
Deeds quite impossible for Man,
But one prize is beyond his reach,
The Ogre cannot master Speech:
About a subjugated plain,
Among its desperate and slain,
The Ogre stalks with hands on hips,
While drivel gushes from his lips.

Clearly the aim here is to reach the zenith of scorn by a kind of understatement, to make clear that tyranny is easy, superficially

- (1) 'There Will Be No Peace', HC., p. 76
- (2) 'Song of the Ogres', CW., p. 47
- (3) DH., p. 187
- (4) Ibid., p. 7
- (5) 'Vespers', SA., p. 74
- (6) 'Marginalia', CW., p. 58
- (7) 'August, 1968', CW., p. 90

impressive and sub-human. But by comparison with Spain the technique seems too refined to bear the crude weight placed upon it, the powers involved in the Czechoslovakian invasion being of infinitely greater magnitude and world-influence than Franco's army.

It is, however, the impersonality not of the Management but of the Public that provokes Auden's most stringent criticism. The label itself, derived from Kierkegaard, involves a lengthy definition (Kierkegaard's own) and gives rise, in turn, to other corresponding definitions:

A public is neither a nation nor a generation, nor a community, nor a society, nor these particular men, for all these are only what they are through the concrete, no single person who belongs to the public makes a real commitment; for some hours of the day, perhaps, he belongs to the public --- at moments when he is nothing else, since when he really is what he is, he does not form part of the public. Made up of such individuals at the moments when they are nothing, a public is a kind of gigantic something, an abstract and deserted void which is everything and nothing.(1)

This is distinct from a crowd, a society and a community. The first is defined by Auden as a group of which the members are related only arithmetically; "they can be counted":

A crowd loves neither itself nor anything other than itself; its existence is chimerical. Of a crowd it may be said, either that it is not real but only apparent, or that it should not be.(2)

A society is made up of a definite number of people "united in a

(1) DH., pp. 81-2

(2) Ibid., p. 63

specific manner into a whole with a characteristic mode of behaviour which is different from the modes of behaviour of its component members in isolation".⁽¹⁾ A society loves itself but requires the subordination of the self-love of each of its members to this end. A community is united by a common love of something other than itself and in it all members are free and equal. Since this is an ideal condition, a community is a potential rather than an actual social arrangement; to 'materialise' it must embody itself in a society or societies "which can express the love which is its 'raison d'être'".⁽²⁾

These definitions clearly differ from that of the Public in that they are objective and 'scientific' whereas it is subjective and emotive. Auden appears, in fact, to regard the Public as composed of individuals fully aware of the vacuity to which their membership leads them and hence responsible for it. He speaks of the Public, for example, as "the least exclusive of clubs; anybody, rich or poor, educated or unlettered, nice or nasty can join it"⁽³⁾, and says that if two members of the Public speak to each other "the function of their words is not to convey meaning or arouse passion but to conceal by noise the silence and solitude of the void in which the Public exists."⁽⁴⁾ It is held responsible for the existence of the mass media and hence the destruction of naive popular art, but, most damning of all, its mood is the archetype of passive, morbid malevolence.

(1) DH., p. 63

(2) Ibid., p. 64

(3) Ibid., p. 82

(4) Ibid., p. 83

If it embodies itself in a crowd it will be inclined to a passive sadism:

.....the crowd, for example, which collects to watch the wrecking gang demolish the old family mansion, fascinated by yet another proof that physical force is the Prince of this world against whom no love of the heart shall prevail.⁽¹⁾

The Public is also being criticised in 'The Chimeras',⁽²⁾ but here it is done more fairly if more obscurely. The poem's opening implies that bureaucracy is to blame for the:

Absence of heart---as in public buildings,
Absence of mind ---as in public speeches,
Absence of worth---as in goods intended for the public.

All these are signs of chimerical visitations, due simply to our inability to ignore them:

Curious from wantonness --- to see what they are like,
Cruel from fear --- to put a stop to them,
Incredulous from conceit --- to prove they cannot be.

As an indictment of sadism, extravagance and conceit this is effective but elaborate and, failing to make a clear, practical connection between the individual and the 'res publicum', seems more likely to confuse the individual's notion of his civic duty than to clarify it.

The broadest, most inclusive perspective on society commensurate with reaching practical conclusions about its organisation is that involving the effects of culture. Auden emphasises the dependence of

(1) DH., p. 83

(2) N., p. 45

culture on history by describing it as "history which has become dormant or extinct, a second nature".⁽¹⁾ This may seem to relegate culture to an inferior position as a kind of unfortunate detritus until it is realised that the scope of history itself is greatly narrowed by his definition of it as "the study of questions"⁽²⁾ for "the studies of answers belongs to anthropology and sociology".⁽³⁾ The distinction is borne out by consideration of man as "a history-making creature who can neither repeat his past nor leave it behind"⁽⁴⁾ and the fact that "since history is something man makes, it is meaningless to talk of obeying it".⁽⁵⁾ Both point to the impossibility of 'utilising' history. Even its study academically is difficult, the most difficult of all disciplines, since "it lacks the demonstratable certainty of the natural sciences and at the same time cannot enjoy the luxury of the arts which are frankly subjective".⁽⁶⁾ This difficulty does not prevent Auden celebrating the "Muse of the unique/Historical fact"⁽⁷⁾ by naming a volume after her and making use of her for obtuse or spectacular comparison:

Lives that obey you move like music,
Becoming now what they only can be once,
Making of silence decisive sound .⁽⁸⁾

upon which he puns, rather inelegantly, "it sounds/Easy but one must find the time".⁽⁹⁾ The historical as a variety of spectacular perspective

(1) DH., p. 97

(2) Loc. cit.

(3) Loc. cit.

(4) Ibid., p. 278

(5) 'Fog in the Mediterranean', Christian Scholar, XXXVII, 4 (1954), p. 533

(6) 'The History of an Historian', The Griffin, IV, II (1955), p. 7

(7) 'Homage to Clio', HC., p. 15

(8) Loc. cit.

(9) Loc. cit.

is well demonstrated in the following:

From gallery-grave and the hunt of a wren-king
to Low-Mass and trailer camp
is hardly a tick by the carbon clock.⁽¹⁾

the spectacle being at once emphasised and diminished by the practical parenthesis, "but I /don't count that way nor do you".⁽²⁾

The qualifications of History as the ideal discipline are obvious: it has no set rules but rather an imposed form which is always open to interpretation and is, as it were, by definition, civilised. Exactly the same conditions apply to culture and far from appearing dormant or extinct it proves eminently susceptible to poetic and theoretical treatment. Auden's main source of cultural material is the Mediterranean. So apt and fertile is the choice that it is difficult to say whether his interest in the Mediterranean prompted his interest in culture or vice versa.

On the theoretical level it permits him to draw a contrast with Europe in terms of the difference between a shame-culture and a guilt-culture, the Mediterranean exemplifying the former. A shame-culture does not differentiate between a man's relation to others and to himself so that "there is no real difference between statements in the third person and statements in the first".⁽³⁾ In a shame-culture "the moral judgement a man passes upon himself is identical with that

(1) 'The Birth of Architecture', AH., p. 13

(2) Loc. cit.

(3) DH., p. 413

which others pass on him":⁽¹⁾

the virtue or shamefulness of an act lies in
the nature of the act itself, irrespective of
the doer's personal intention or responsibility.⁽²⁾

The situation in a guilt-culture is the reverse in each case.

Physically the Mediterranean is soporific and Auden's reasons for
going there⁽³⁾ presumably took this into account; he speaks, for
example, of:

....others, like me,
In middle-age hoping to twig from
What we are not what we might be next, a question
The South seems never to raise.⁽⁴⁾

The Mediterranean may, therefore, be said, to contribute a new, creative,
'laissez-faire' attitude especially interesting in a poet renowned for
his intellectual and moral discrimination. Its influence is epitomised
by his response to the cloudless, Mediterranean sky:

To send a cry of protest or a call for
Protection up into all
Those dazzling miles, to add, however sincerely,
One's occasional tear
To that volume, would be rather silly.⁽⁵⁾

Correspondingly, he avers, with Christian enthusiasm, that "at all
times it is good to praise the shining earth".⁽⁶⁾ This absorption of

(1) DH., p. 414

(2) Loc. cit.

(3) Auden began spending the Spring and Summer of each year on the
island of Ischia from 1948 onwards; see Spears, p. 251

(4) 'Good-bye to the Mezzogiorno', HC., p. 79

(5) 'Pleasure Island', N., p. 24

(6) 'Ischia', Ibid., p. 21

the atmosphere of the Mediterranean is, however, temporary; Auden's final verdict on its people is that "they are without hope."⁽¹⁾

The main poetic interest of this phase, apart from the poems actually about the region, is the parallel it suggests with Roman history, that is, the decline of the Roman Empire seen as analogous to the modern post-war decline. 'The Shield of Achilles'⁽²⁾ draws this comparison most skilfully by using it as the structural basis of the poem, alternate stanzas dealing with the two ages. The force of the comparison comes from the contrast between the formal elegance of design expected on the shield by Thetis:

...athletes at their games,
Men and women in a dance
Moving their sweet limbs
Quick, quick, to music.⁽³⁾

and the equal formality of twentieth-century ritual murder sanctioned by the code of war. The resultant climate of casual violence is so little removed from man's instincts yet so far from the sympathy he is capable of:

A ragged urchin, aimless and alone,
Loitered about that vacancy, a bird
Flew up to safety from his well-aimed stone:
That girls are raped, that two boys knife a third,
Were axioms to him, who'd never heard
Of any world where promises are kept,
Or one could weep because another wept.⁽⁴⁾

(1) 'Good-bye to the Mezzogiorno', HC., p. 79

(2) SA., p. 35

(3) Loc. cit.

(4) Loc. cit.

The other Roman poems are much more parochial being mainly concerned with the difficulty of writing poetry in the enervating conditions of decline. Auden seems to be identifying himself with the unappreciated poet Fortunatus in 'Under Sirius',⁽¹⁾ though the exhortation to seize one's chances is hardly relevant to his own situation. 'The Epigoni',⁽²⁾ provides more immediate evidence of Auden's own present attitude: confronted with the alternatives of "dramatising their doom" or "expiring in preposterous mechanical tricks"⁽³⁾ the Epigoni chose the latter, thus retaining the integrity of their craft. 'Secondary Epic',⁽⁴⁾ considers the necessary limitations of historical prediction though with no suggested relevance to the present, and 'Bathtub Thoughts',⁽⁵⁾ the imagined forethoughts of "the last Romano-Briton/ To take his last hot bath", establishes an unspectacular connection between Rome and the present day.

The fundamental speciousness of the cultural scene as a criterion of judgement in poetry is illustrated by Auden's examination of America. It would, surely, be hard to find two

(1) N., p. 39

(2) HC., p. 29

(3) Loc. cit. A much later poem, 'The Horatians' (CW., p.33) sums up the virtues of these poets in terms of the philosophical resilience they express:

We can only
do what it seems to us we were made for, look at
this world with a happy eye
but from a sober perspective.

(4) Ibid., p. 26

(5) Ibid., p. 60

cultures more different in essentials, yet the generalised view of its habits of thought shows America to share the Mediterranean's freedom from the inhibitions of European civilised life. The difference is clearly seen in the attitude of American writers as compared with their European counterparts:

Living as they do in a well, even overpopulated, countryside where, thanks to centuries of cultivation, Mother Earth has acquired human features, they are forced to make abstract philosophical statements or use uncommon atypical images, so that what they say seems to be imposed upon them by theory and temperament rather than by facts. An American poet like Frost, on the other hand, can appeal to facts for which any theory must account and which any temperament must admit.

(1)

The 'wildness' of the landscape, the habit of itinerancy both physical and conceptual ("democracy is the best form of government, not because men will necessarily lead better or happier lives under it, but because it permits constant experiment"),⁽²⁾ the exaltation of amateurism and distrust of the professional who is suspected as authoritarian, and the position of the artist and intellectual which is subsidiary to that of the pioneer, are the main features of America that Auden observes.

Underlying them is a psychology different from the Mediterranean only in so far as it is semi-conscious, namely the rejection of the concept of 'romanitas' upon which Europe was founded:

(1) DH., p. 348

(2) Ibid., p. 381

The fundamental presupposition of 'romanitas', secular or sacred, is that virtue is prior to liberty, i.e., what matters most is that people should think and act rightly; of course it is preferable that they should do so consciously of their own free will, but if they cannot or will not, they must be made to, the majority by the spiritual pressure of education and tradition, the minority by physical coercion, for liberty to act wrongly is not liberty but licence. (1)

Significantly, Auden seems more interested in the fact that the tyranny to which this presupposition had led in the Europe of 1946 made use of methods originating in egalitarian America ("it took the technique of mass advertising, eliminated the competitive element and changed the sales object from breakfast foods to political passions")⁽²⁾ than in the tyranny itself! And the argument that democratic snobbery or race prejudice "is uglier than the old aristocratic snobbery because the included are relatively so many and the excluded relatively so few"⁽³⁾ ignores the degree of power enjoyed by an aristocratic minority or its pressure-group equivalent as compared with the homogeneity and apathy of the majority.

To accept the principle of liberty before virtue is, in Auden's view, to invite a compendium of disasters: a 'Society' "in the collective inclusive sense, that is as neutral to values (liberty is not a value but the ground of value) as the 'nature' of physics",⁽⁴⁾ an educational system in which the recognition of authority lies entirely with the pupil, a system for the individual which aligns him

(1) DH., p. 318

(2) Ibid., p. 319

(3) Ibid., p. 320

(4) Ibid., p. 321

with the Wandering Jew, a prey to "the loneliness and anxiety of having to choose himself, his faith, his vocation, his tastes".⁽¹⁾ Such pessimism may seem a heavy price to pay for seven years living in America, but Auden's apparently extreme conservatism is mitigated by the vivacity of his closing 'vignette' of America and his analysis of its ultimate, psychological effect on at least its temporary inhabitants. America is so much the nearer now than Henry James suspected to:⁽²⁾

....the 'hereditary thinness' of the American Margin, to 'the packed and hoisted basket' and 'the torture rooms of the living idiom', nearer to the unspeakable juke boxes, the horrible Rockettes and the insane salads, nearer to the anonymous countryside littered with heterogeneous 'dreck' and the synonymous cities besotted with electric signs, nearer to radio commercials and congressional oratory and Hollywood Christianity, nearer to all the 'democratic' lusts and licences, without which, perhaps, the analyst and the immigrant alike would never understand by contrast the nature of the Good Place nor desire it with sufficient desperation to stand a chance of arriving.⁽³⁾

It is hardly surprising to learn that this is the most poetical expression Auden achieves of life in America; it is, indeed, perhaps his single most effective piece of 'descriptive' prose, being unique in combining excitement with a sense of the drab factual quality life shares with prose.

Poetry, Nature, Society and Culture are all treated both as subjects for poetry and as matters of ideological contention. As such they are eminently suited to the baroque style or, it is eminently

(1) DH., p. 321

(2) The passage from which this analysis of America is taken originally formed an introduction to James's The American Scene, (New York, 1946)

(3) DH., p. 323

suited to them---this doubt as to whether style or subject comes 'first' being a fundamental part of the poems' effect. In the same way, the degree of intellectualisation applied to each subject not only varies arbitrarily but is itself disguised by the natural convolutions of the baroque. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that when ideas alone are dealt with Auden tends by way of compensation, to turn the full force of pragmatic realism upon them. This applies most directly to ideas in their most practical form, that is, operative theories. Auden takes the example of Communists who go on insisting that the issues separating them from the Capitalists are revolutionary rather than party matters. In Auden's view the difference between them is merely one of means to the universally desired end, material prosperity; today, indeed, "there is only one genuine world-wide revolutionary issue, racial equality".⁽¹⁾ Paradoxically, however, this tendency of interested parties to regard their manifesto as of revolutionary importance necessitates a less liberal rather than a more liberal reaction, for:

....the greatest threat to freedom is not dogmas but the reluctance to define them precisely, for in times of danger, if nobody knows what is essential and what is unessential, the unessential is vested with religious importance (to dislike ice cream becomes proof of heresy).⁽²⁾

Thus Auden's ideological wheel comes full circle. He is reiterating an idea first proposed in 1932 identifying the fault of

(1) DH., p. 87

(2) 'Port and nuts with the Eliots', The New Yorker, XXV, (1949) p. 86

liberalism as its unwillingness to face dogmas or personal power.

"And so unconsciously the liberal becomes the secret service of the ruling class, its most powerful weapon against social revolution".⁽¹⁾

The enemy was then the existing bourgeois social structure: the enemy now is the potential, tyrannous idiosyncracies of governments and especially, it may be presumed, revolutionary governments.

The logical extreme of this view in general terms is to make knowledge itself equivalent to dogma. Precisely this tendency is apparently under attack when Auden identifies the basis of scientific knowledge as ultimately authoritarian; to-know in the scientific sense means, in fact, to-have-power-over. But, obviously, "to the degree that human beings are authentic persons, unique and self-creating, they cannot be scientifically known"⁽²⁾ and Auden now regards the most important educational role of poetry and the other arts as being "to assert that the verb 'to know' can be used in another sense than that in which the experimental scientist uses it".⁽³⁾

Auden undermines his argument, however, by taking it to the extreme of dogma itself. The logical corollary of art's preservation of knowing in the sense that 'Then Adam knew Eve, his wife'⁽⁴⁾ is a redefinition of science to accommodate the moral forced upon our attention by a universe of inanimate, unknowing objects, that "if nothing in creation is responsible for our existence then

(1) 'Private Pleasure', Scrutiny 1, (1932), p. 193

(2) DH., p. 270

(3) Review of W. Jaeger's Paideia, The Griffin, VII, 3 (1958), quoted by Spears, p. 299

(4) Quoted in DH., p. 270

we are responsible for all created things".⁽¹⁾ He seriously proposes that not only has every electron as much 'right' to exist as we have but that the ultimate aim of science should be to discover what an electron "wants to become".⁽²⁾

An equally extreme and dogmatic view of knowledge is evinced by Auden's criticism of the modern tendency to retain useless or irrelevant information issuing, through the media, from ever more specialised sources.⁽³⁾ Whilst specialism itself is largely to blame for inducing this casual acquisition and lax familiarity with the material of expertise in the populace at large, Auden seems clearly to be implying that any knowledge gained and held for no purpose is wasteful if not dangerous.

The criterion of pragmatic if not philistine realism is applied no less thoroughly, if less apparently, to the more exclusively theoretical areas of Auden's enquiry. When psychology succumbs to pragmatism what emerges is a brand of philosophical categorisation removing the dichotomies Auden has adopted from Freud or Kierkegaard and substituting a theory which mixes the objectivity of the former with the subjective approach of the latter. The psyche is now thought of as "a unity-in-tension of four modes of being: soul, body, mind and spirit".⁽⁴⁾ Corresponding to these somewhat unclinical agents are three modes of awareness:

(1) 'Do You Know Too Much?', Esquire, (Dec. 1962), quoted by Spears, p. 300

(2) Loc. cit.

(3) Ibid., quoted by Spears., p. 299

(4) DH., p. 65

- (a) A consciousness of the self as self-contained.
- (b) A consciousness of beyondness, of an ego standing as a spectator over against both a self and the external world.
- (c) The ego's consciousness of itself as striving-towards, as desiring to transform the self, to realise its potentialities. (1)

The overall effect of this tripartite arrangement is to polarise the facets of the psyche more absolutely than ever before. In terms of the first mode of perception the self so observed is diverse and anonymous, "not a unique identity but a succession of various states of feeling and desire"⁽²⁾, whereas "the 'I' which observes is unique, but not individual, since it has no characteristics of its own"⁽³⁾.

The second mode of perception is doubly polarised for one of its components is divided against itself and the other is self-contained. The volitional ego has two contradictory desires: it wants to be free "of all demands made upon it by the self or the conscience or the outer world"⁽⁴⁾ but it also wants to be important, to find its existence significant, "to have a 'telos'"⁽⁵⁾. On the other hand the cognitive ego, because it is the only channel of understanding, cannot be 'wrong': "it is impossible for me to act in ignorance, for my world is by definition what I know".⁽⁶⁾ The Socratic axiom that to know the good is to will it is therefore valid "if by knowing one means

- (1) DH., pp. 65-6
- (2) Ibid., p. 171
- (3) Loc. cit.
- (4) Ibid., p. 113
- (5) Loc. cit.
- (6) Ibid., p. 172

listening to what one knows, and by ignorance, wilful ignorance".⁽¹⁾
Not surprisingly Auden is forced to seek respite from these mutually exclusive definitions in paradox itself. Thus he now holds 'wilfulness' to be "the most prominent human characteristic"⁽²⁾ and proposes as the only escape from the contradiction of divided volition and infallible cognition the pure assertion of the 'acte gratuite', the description of which demands the old, simplified terminology of self and ego:

....his ego resents every desire of his natural self for food, sex, pleasure, logical coherence, because desires are given not chosen and his ego seeks constantly to assert its autonomy by doing something of which the requiredness is not given.⁽³⁾

The extreme of Auden's philistine realism is revealed in his attitude to conventional psychology. Two features stand out: his criticism of Freud and a renewed confidence in psychosomatic theory. Freud is attacked on the grounds that he regards the norm of health as based on 'regularity',⁽⁴⁾ speaks of civilization as if it were "a morbid growth caused by sexual inhibition"⁽⁵⁾ and attacks conventional morality in the belief that energy goes in repression which should go in creation. (The more fundamental criticism that psychiatrists treat man as if he were the logical entity he is not⁽⁶⁾, obviously depends upon the definition of logic held by the individual or his psyche rather than by the analyst.)

(1) DH., p. 127

(2) 'Opera Addict', Vogue, CXI, II (1948), p. 101

(3) DH., p. 167

(4) 'Sigmund Freud', The New Republic, CXXVII (1952), p. 17

(5) Loc. cit.

(6) Howard Griffin, 'A dialogue with W.H. Auden', The Hudson Review, III (1951), p. 589

Auden now returns to the psychosomatic theories of Wilhelm Reich and propounds them more fully and with greater conviction than ever before. A typical theory concerns the face:

After 30 the face exposes, bit by bit, what lies behind it, the flesh being as it were a kind of negative and on that surface we see the fears, disappointments, spiritual powers coming out. Sin shows itself in the face. Guilt and history are revealed in the body;(1)

In addition he puts forward his own idiosyncratic theories, explaining male obesity as the physical expression of a wish "to withdraw from sexual competition and, by combining mother and child in his own person, to become emotionally self-sufficient".(2) Similarly, "solid food is to the drunkard a symbolic reminder of the loss of the mother's breast and his ejection from Eden", (3) and all fabrication "is an imitation of motherhood"(4), (a more drastic denigration of the artistic process than any Freud proposed).

The subject in which Auden's speculations culminate and for which the relation of ideology to style is most crucial is Christianity. As such it stands opposed to Nature, for whereas the latter would accept the widest possible range of stylistic treatment but could not, without distortion, be subjected to elaborate theoretical analysis, Christianity, while it is susceptible of infinite ideological modification, places definite restrictions on its poetic embodiment.

(1) Howard Griffin, 'A dialogue with W.H. Auden', Partisan Review, XX (1953), p. 77 See above, p. 61 for a discussion of the psychosomatic theories of Lane and Groddeck.

(2) DH., p. 196

(3) Loc. cit.

(4) Ibid., p. 440

Existentialism had interpenetrated the poetical and ideological successfully though with implicit bias towards the latter. In reaction against it, Auden arrives at his own kind of pragmatic Christianity. Its negative aspect is the dismissal of Existentialism because its description of the process of choice is interesting "as dramatic literature"⁽¹⁾ but untrue in practice. Looking back on the decisive choices of his life he concludes that at the time he had little sense of the seriousness of his options and that, in any case, "in a reflective and anxious age, it is surely better, pedagogically, to minimize rather than to exaggerate the risks involved in choice".⁽²⁾ A second criticism of Existentialism is that its opposition to all systematic philosophies which would "reduce all individual existence to general processes"⁽³⁾ has led it to evolve an 'anthropology' from which "all elements like man's physical nature, or his reason, about which general statements can be made, are excluded".⁽⁴⁾

Positively, Auden seeks to propound the necessary correspondence of man's moral obligation and his intrinsic nature, as it were, making the best of the polarisation his logic has imposed upon the map of the mind. He takes from Kierkegaard the concept of seriousness⁽⁵⁾ to convey this combination of instinctual necessity and spiritual commitment, hence, what is essentially serious to man is his physical nature, his body and his will power. (To speak of someone having

(1) DH., p. 103

(2) Loc. cit.

(3) Loc. cit.

(4) Loc. cit.

(5) Kierkegaard applies it to the artist; see above, p. 273

great will power, Auden points out, is to assess how his will functions not the intrinsic power of some innate quality called 'will'.) The philosophical equivalent of this is neatly found in Wittgenstein's assertion that 'Ethics does not treat of the world. Ethics must be a condition of the world like logic'. Auden quotes the dictum and adds a graphic illustration of his own:

it is a purely human illusion to imagine that the laws of the spiritual life are, like our legislation, imposed laws which we can break. We may defy them, either by accident, i.e., out of ignorance, or by choice, but we can no more break them than we can break the laws of human physiology by getting drunk.⁽¹⁾

This benevolent necessity provides the connection between goodness and happiness so long sought by Auden, for now happiness is to be regarded not as a right but as a duty: "to the degree that we are unhappy, we are in sin".⁽²⁾ Happiness cannot be pursued because, like a duty, "its imperative applies to the present instant, not to some future date".⁽³⁾ So too, the decision to forgive another person should not be regarded as indicative of an act of personal choice, but as describing "a state of feeling which has always existed".⁽⁴⁾ The sense of sin itself is, in fact, merely the feeling of guilt at there being an ethical choice to make, "a guilt which, however 'good' I may become, remains unchanged".⁽⁵⁾

(1) DH., p. 273

(2) Ibid., p. 432

(3) Loc. cit.

(4) Ibid., p. 200

(5) Ibid., p. 157

The actual expression of Christianity in poetry is dependent first upon some means being found to distinguish the religiously from the poetically sacred. The problem is not clarified by Auden's belief that the voice of Agape, of Holy Love, must inevitably speak in the comic vein, for "in what other mode than the comic could it on earth truthfully speak?"⁽¹⁾ The reasoning behind this (not illuminated by another statement that "the sacred is that at which we do not laugh"⁽²⁾) appears to be the same as that which led him in his early 'philosophy' to declare that love was funny and must be handled by the poet with a bitter smile, and has always made him hypersensitive to the unintentionally humorous line in poetry, namely an assumption that laughter is the most radically differentiating connotation which can be attached to any subject.

If it were reserved exclusively for the subject of Christianity the baroque style might well endow it with the unique, revolutionary character of comedy, but it has already appeared so ubiquitously as to give an overwhelming impression of stylishness or none at all. The most likely effect of the baroque style in fact, is to cast doubt on the writer's seriousness, to suggest that he is indulging his love of 'high' style, intellectual play and verbal slickness. It is arguable that, if not exactly intentional, this impression serves Auden's ultimate purpose by taking the concept of seriousness to its

(1) DH., p. 145

(2) Ibid., p. 389

logical extreme, making it a matter of faith. Now, however, it is the reader who must have faith in Auden's integrity, a faith dependent, ultimately, on an appreciation of his poetic consciousness, the personality of the whole of his past work. In this sense it is a devastatingly comprehensive demand, one of positively Kierkegaardian proportions.

In practice, though, Auden's approach places the reader's faith under considerable strain not only in the religious sense but aesthetically. Even such an innocuous proposal of celebration as:

Deserving nothing, the sensible soul
Will rejoice at the sudden mansion
Of any joy.⁽¹⁾

may sound unscrupulously hedonistic when it is exemplified by references to "the volitional joys of a seraph" engendered by the height and speed of "Roller-Coaster or Ferris Wheel"⁽²⁾. Little reassurance is offered by Auden's obvious fondness for creating deities of Grecian fickleness:

....godling or goddessling
Plead in heaven the special case of their place.⁽³⁾

A similar sort of gratuitous picturesqueness is the basis of a new kind of pseudo-definition. 'Insignificant Elephants'⁽⁴⁾ is based on

(1) 'Music is International', N., p. 64

(2) 'Fairground', CW., p. 91

(3) 'In Transit', N., p. 19

(4) CW., p. 95

the characterisation of Christ as "the most Insignificant of the Elephants"⁽¹⁾ found in The Bestiary, while Auden's own definition of 'boring' as opposed to 'a bore' ('boring' is a subjective judgement: a bore is a universally recognised phenomenon) produces a heretical-sounding definition of God as "not boring but absolute bore"⁽²⁾. Interestingly, Auden now seems to identify hell and the Devil with boredom: the 'Song of the Devil'⁽³⁾ ends, the Devil having complacently run the gamut of his temptations, with a declaration of his real attitude to humanity:

I'm so bored with the whole fucking crowd of you
I could scream!⁽⁴⁾

Here, perhaps, is a clue to his present attitude, namely that to poetry God is a bore, for as the Absolute Subject he can never be recognised universally. This may seem an exceptionally literal application of theory to poetry and, in any case, it is necessarily compromised by Auden's innate predilection for statements of daemonic unconventionality, and also by his striking success in at least one short Christian poem. 'Friday's Child'⁽⁵⁾ considers, beneath the aegis of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's death, our disposition to violence and consequent inability to understand God's patience:

What reverence is rightly paid
To a Divinity so odd
He lets the Adam whom He made
Perform the Acts of God?

(1) CW., p. 95

(2) DH., p. 387

(3) CW., p. 48

(4) Ibid., p. 49

(5) HC., p. 77

It is, in fact, the essence of our relation to God that we are free:

To guess from the insulted face
Just what Appearance He saves
By suffering in a public place
A death reserved for slaves.

The success of this poem seems in no small part due to the quietness of its form, both stanzaically and in its choice of words. Its didactic method is the equally unobtrusive one of presenting simple paradoxes, amplified by the insertion of an ostensibly trite idiom (the notion of saving face).

As in his treatment of the City and bucolic Nature Auden eventually turns in his 'poeticising' of Christianity to the long sequential poem. The intrinsic weight and conservatism of the form is more apparent with a religious subject than a secular one, perhaps because religion is actually ritualistic and therefore any imposition of poetical formality in the large sense will seem to overburden it. Auden may appear to have anticipated this objection by adopting perhaps the most secular and ancient of Christian devotional forms, the offices of the Benedictine liturgy. Its seven hours for worship (the liturgy does not include the night office of Matins) thus form the seven sections of 'Horae Canonicae'.⁽¹⁾ Fuller concludes that "the framework, in itself supplies the necessary devotional intensity, leaving the actual poems free to range widely in their attempt to define that continual

(1) SA., pp. 61-80 ('Prime' and 'Nones' appeared in Nones.)

awareness of the guilt and sacrifice which is the foundation of the Christian's efforts to re-establish any temporal community".⁽¹⁾

Spears presents part of Auden's own explanation of the poem in a lecture given at Swarthmore College in 1950.⁽²⁾ The poem, planned in the summer of 1947, was intended to deal with the relation of nature and history. 'Prime' was written in August 1949, in Italy, and reveals Auden's growing interest in syllabic metres, stimulated by reading Marianne Moore, Horace, French verse and Valéry's prose meditations on waking. Hence the original beginning of the poem was:

Simultaneously as at the instant
Word of the light the gates of the body,
The eyes and the ears open
Into its world beyond,
The gates of the mind, the horn gate, the ivory gate,
Swing to, shut off
The nocturnal rammage of its angry fronde,
Crippled and second-rate,
Still suffering from some historical mistake.

But, Spears explains, this was too free; a more rigorous form was needed:

Auden found this partly in following the syllabic principle strictly, alternating nine - and seven - syllable lines (with full elision, i.e., eliding contiguous vowels and 'h'), and partly in employing an elaborate pattern of rimes, with both end rimes and internal rimes irregularly placed, so that the line stop and the rime stop do not coincide regularly but are counterpointed.⁽³⁾

This complexity of rhyme scheme not only introduced greater precision into the diction of the poem but helped to suggest suitable words,

(1) Fuller, p. 236

(2) Spears, pp. 317-321

(3) Ibid., p. 318

and thus modified, the poem begins:

Simultaneously, as soundlessly,
Spontaneously, suddenly
As, at the vaunt of dawn, the kind
Gates of the body fly open
To its world beyond, the gates of the mind,
The horn gate and the ivory gate
Swing to, swing shut, instantaneously
Quell the nocturnal rummage
Of its rebellious fronde, ill-favoured,
Ill-natured and second-rate,
Disenfranchised, widowed and orphaned
By an historical mistake.

'Compline' and 'Nones' share the same stanza form, 'Terce' consists of unrhymed lines varying irregularly from eight to twelve syllables, 'Sext' is in three parts composed of pairs of unrhymed lines predominantly of nine syllables, and 'Vespers' is in prose. 'Lauds' takes the form of the medieval Spanish 'cossante', the complexity of which is worth specifying:

In the 'cossante' the lines are grouped in assonanced distiches or couplets, the odd couplets having an 'i' assonance and the even an assonance in 'a'. In between each couplet there is a single-lined refrain which does not change.....But the 'cossante' has also a sense pattern which conflicts with the rhyme pattern. According to this the even couplets repeat the sense of the odd couplets, whilst every odd couplet except the first begins by repeating the second line of the preceding odd couplet and then introduces a new line to rhyme with it.....By this device, known as the 'leixa-pren', ('laisser prendre'), a term taken from the dance, a slow, gradually uncoiling movement is set up. (1)

Little relief from an enveloping sense of technical elaboration

(1) Gerald Brenan, The Literature of the Spanish People, (Cambridge, 1951), p. 54; quoted by Spears, pp. 320-1

is afforded by the inference that 'Lauds' embodies what is an underlying theme throughout 'Horae Canonicae', the principle of 'perichoresis', the mysterious unity of the Trinity, to which Charles Williams gives the name 'co-inherence'.⁽¹⁾

The motto which appears beneath the title of the sequence, 'Immolatus vicerit' ('the martyr will conquer') supplies the final and perhaps the main constituent of ambiguity as to the 'level of personality' implied in 'Horae Canonicae': in what sense is it a religious poem?

'Prime' appears to do no more, ideologically, than assert man's inevitable sinfulness, guilty as soon as he draws breath and re-enacting with every conscious movement his fall. The poem ends with the poet re-identifying himself:

.....my name
Stands for my historical share of care
For a lying self-made city,
Afraid of our living task, the dying
Which the coming day will ask.

If this is the dying-to-self required of the Christian it has, surely, already been fully accomplished: literally, by a night of sleep and spiritually, by the poet's present reflections. If, as 'Terce' (where the anonymous speaker of 'Prime' has become hangman, judge and poet) suggests, it is the execution for which he will be unprepared that troubles him, he might be forgiven since execution is not a daily ritual at which the believer is expected to officiate.

(1) The Descent of the Dove, (London, 1939), pp. 234-6

It is, indeed, the introduction of civilian offices and their relation to the divinity which is equivocal precisely in the context of Christ's death. The judge, for example:

...does not know by what sentence
He will apply on earth the Law that rules the stars.

The fact that all officials are united in the prayer:

'Let me get through this coming day
Without a dressing down from a superior,
Being worsted in a repartee,
Or behaving like an ass in front of the girls.'

would seem neither to condemn nor recommend but to place them among the myriad Audenary personalities who at any time are to be found deviating from different norms!

Into this ideological chaos falls 'our victim', a chimerical figure who, but for the civic bodies he spurs into action, has every appearance of being the symbolic embodiment of our other selves.⁽¹⁾

'Sext' carries the depth of paradox in 'Terce' to a similar level of irony. Its three sections present three aspects of man's civilisation. The first is that fundamental psychological drive, that "eye-on-the-object look" which was responsible for producing the machinery essential to urban life; the second is the more sophisticated concept of authority: not the satisfaction of getting one's own way, but of being right, which may be the prerogative of scoundrels but is nonetheless necessary to eliminate popular

(1) See below, p. 437

superstition. Thirdly, and most ambiguous of all, is man's crude sense of community, best embodied in the behaviour of a crowd, whose vacuity Auden conveys by repeatedly qualifying every statement made about it:

the crowd stands perfectly still,
its eyes (which seem one) and its mouths

(which seem infinitely many)
expressionless, perfectly blank.

The crowd does not see (what everyone sees)
a boxing match, a train wreck,

a battleship being launched,
does not wonder (as everyone wonders)

who will win, what flag she will fly.

Irony becomes cynicism, in Christian terms at least, when the crowd becomes equivalent to human community itself:

Only because of that can we say
all men are our brothers.

Finally, man's superiority over animals may be gauged by the fact that, unlike us, they do not stop to worship "The Prince of this world"; nor could they bring to "the occasion of this dying" the agents, authority and crowd which man's character naturally forms.

In 'Nones' the sense of guilty helplessness prevails, the murder having been committed. This mood is not Auden's 'forte' and he now suffuses it with rather naive imagery; "the day is too hot, too bright,

too still, / Too ever, the dead remains too nothing", and anomalous echoes of Eliot:

The Madonna with the green woodpecker,
The Madonna of the fig-tree,
The Madonna beside the yellow dam,
Turn their kind faces from us.

In this poem especially, the city parallelism, though brief, is grandly incongruous, with "pile-driver, concrete-mixer,/ Crane and pick-axe" following immediately upon the three Madonnas.

The fourth stanza alludes to the victim again as "this mutilated flesh", further substantiating personal-psychological undertones or, at least, confusing the reader used to Auden's habitual dichotomy of the Flesh and the Mind. This confusion is increased by the proposal of the penultimate stanza that we should seek to emigrate, via a series of romantically conjured locales, to a room "where our Double sits /Writing and does not look up". Smoothly as this personage would fit into the sinister poems of the early 1940s, he now seems out of place and quite unfit for the roles he appears to have in this context of 'alter ego' and diverter of consciousness combined. His efficacy in the latter means:

That, while we are thus away, our own wronged flesh
May work undisturbed, restoring
The order we try to destroy, the rhythm
We spoil out of spite.

The rest of the stanza applies this prescription literally by

describing the various glandular secretions and the renewal of cell tissue which, presumably, consciousness has interrupted. In all this the sense of 'flesh' is lost.

By contrast 'Vespers' is clear but lifeless. It reiterates the familiar dichotomy of Eden versus New Jerusalem⁽¹⁾ in a manner reminiscent of the Hermetic-Appollonian categories of 'Under Which Lyre'.⁽²⁾ In relation to the victim, each type acts as a mutual corrective:

(but for him I could forget the blood, but for me he
could forget the innocence).

The very obtrusiveness of this antithesis, however, precludes any response more profound than the light and intellectual.

'Compline' returns us to sleep in tones as measured and tightly reflective as 'Prime'. Sleep connotes death:

For the end, for me as for cities,
Is total absence: what comes to be
Must go back into non-being
For the sake of the equity, the rhythm
Past measure and comprehending.

The poem moves jerkily from this sort of Eliot-like repose; so dependent upon the exact choice and positioning of words like 'equity' (but not 'equity') to authentic, Auden-like odd honesty-in-curiosity:

Can poets (can men in television)
Be saved ?

(1) See above, p. 434

(2) See above, p. 326

This devolves into an awkward prayer, passionate but coy, using liturgical latin to intercede for a friend whose intimacy demands an anonymous capital letter, 'C', and its repetition in brackets with the addition of a simple endearment, "('dear C')". The prayer extends its spiritual and calligraphic range by including "all poor s-o-b's who never/ Do anything properly" and concludes with a reference to the principle of self-inherence, amalgamating two images dominant in Romantic poetry:

With nothing to hide, join the dance
As it moves in perichoresis,
Turns about the abiding tree.

'Lauds' concludes the sequence in the neat, unexceptional form of a series of brief, mainly pastoral, scenes, accompanied by the refrain 'In solitude, for company' which is, perhaps, too artificial an oxymoron.

'Horae Canonicae', however, gains its spiritual authenticity from this nakedness and infelicity, the very features that diminish it aesthetically. It resurrects, in fact, the 'felix culpa' paradox which was encountered and accepted as an entailment of Existentialism but has never, apparently, been faced in a poem. 'Horae Canonicae' faces it only in the obtuse way of allowing literary skill and religious conviction to undermine each other surreptitiously. Little wonder that an optimistic axiom should often appear now : Sidney Smith's advice

to 'Take short views, hope for the best, and trust in God'.⁽¹⁾

It is uncomplicated by theology and uncompromised by style.

The dichotomy of the baroque style and the attitude of philistine realism into which the poetic and ideological expressions of this period are channelled has one other, formal manifestation, namely those essays of predominantly literary criticism found in The Dyer's Hand. Here Auden is seen as an 'objective' thinker in the sense that his personal predilections, though, naturally, they appear, are not the 'raison d'être' of the essays, nor is the writer obliged to ensure that his conclusions fit in with ideological systems he has established elsewhere, although, again, this must be implicitly true of any opinion he voices.

He begins with remarks on the most basic feature of criticism itself, namely its traditionally continuous form in the writer's mind and on the page. He thinks there is something "lifeless, even false, about systematic criticism"⁽²⁾ and tries to reduce his writing to a set of notes wherever possible.

Types of extant critic are next examined at length. There are, he concludes, four kinds of bad critic: the prig, "for whom no actual poem is good enough since the only one that would be is the poem he would like to write himself but cannot"⁽³⁾; the critic's

(1) Auden quotes it, (as 'Trust in God and take short views'), in 'Ambiguous Answers', The New Republic, CIV, (1941), p. 862, and in 'Under Which Lyre', N., p. 57. He quotes a passage of Smith's writing in which a similar idea is propounded in 'Portrait of a Whig', English Miscellany, III, (1952), pp. 142-3

(2) 'Foreword', DH., p. xii

(3) Ibid., p. 48

critic, whose analysis "is so much more complicated and difficult than the work itself as to deprive someone who has not yet read it of all wish to do so"⁽¹⁾; the romantic novelist, whose "happy hunting ground is the field of unanswerable questions, particularly if they concern the private lives of authors"⁽²⁾, and, "jolliest of all", the maniac ("my favourite is the John Bellendon Ker who set out to prove that English nursery rhymes were originally written in a form of Old Dutch invented by himself").⁽³⁾

What of Auden's own virtues as a critic of particular works or writers? The Dyer's Hand contains three sections which exhibit the character and range of his appreciation: 'The Shakespearian City', 'Two Bestiaries' and 'Americana'. He prefaces an essay on Falstaff with a reference to the axiom that critics of Shakespeare tend to reveal more of themselves than of their original, an observation which serves equally as forewarning and enticement to Auden's own interpretation. With Falstaff he is predictably allegorical:

Overtly, Falstaff is a Lord of Misrule; parabolically, he is a comic symbol for the supernatural order of Charity as contrasted with the temporal order of Justice symbolized by Henry of Monmouth.⁽⁴⁾

This must be understood by reference to Auden's further distinction between the two concepts:

(1) DH., p. 49

(2) Loc. cit.

(3) Loc. cit.

(4) Ibid., p. 198

Temporal Justice demands the use of force to quell the unjust; it demands prudence, a practical reckoning with time and place; and it demands publicity for its laws and its penalties. But Charity forbids all three ---we are not to resist evil, if a man demand our coat we are to give him our cloak also, we are to take no thought for the morrow and, while secretly fasting and giving alms, we are to appear in public as persons who do neither.⁽¹⁾

The strain placed upon the notion of parable by the application of these criteria to Falstaff is exposed when Auden makes specific claims such as that Falstaff's idleness and drinking, representing a "surrender to immediacy and the refusal to accept reality"⁽²⁾, are actually signs of the Unworldly Man as contrasted with Prince Hal, symbolising worldliness at its best. In addition, Falstaff not only "radiates happiness" but by his "untiring devotion to making others laugh becomes a comic image for a love which is absolutely self-giving".⁽³⁾

If 'The Prince's Dog' says more about Auden's idea of Charity than about Shakespeare's idea of character, 'The Joker in the Pack' fulfills a genuinely Shakespearean obligation to interpret in a way which is coherent yet eccentric, asserting Auden's own personality in contradistinction to Shakespeare's, to write about Shakespeare, in fact, "as if he were not Shakespeare, or could possibly be Shakespeare".⁽⁴⁾ Auden bases the view of Iago as a practical joker

(1) DH., pp. 201-2

(2) Ibid., p. 204

(3) Ibid., p. 206

(4) John Bayley, 'Our Northern Manichee', Encounter, XXI, (1963), p. 79

the singlemindedness with which his essay pursues Iago by, as it were, removing the spirit of pure, virtuous passion which alone could compete with his dedicated, scientific evil to dominate the play.)

If 'The Joker in the Pack' reveals the extent of Auden's virtuosity, 'D.H.Lawrence', the first of the 'Two Bestiaries', demonstrates his honesty, specifically in "his benign indifference to personality"⁽¹⁾: he, unlike many critics who nonetheless pretend otherwise, does not attack the man under the guise of attacking his work. In dealing with Lawrence this is all the more remarkable since, in Bayley's words, "one would expect Auden to dislike Lawrence, and all he stands for".⁽²⁾

The initial tenor of the essay is struck by Auden's admission that the poems of Lawrence's he likes could never have been written "had he held the kind of views about poetry of which I approve".⁽³⁾ Nonetheless, Auden actually concedes Lawrence the artist very little. While obviously approving his attack on conventionality of response (his own early theories were largely formed by it) he points out that in Lawrence himself this led to "a false identification of the genuine with the novel".⁽⁴⁾ In the same way, his loathing of the French tendency during the second half of the nineteenth century to consider Art the true religion, leads him, Auden says, to condemn

(1) John Bayley, 'Our Northern Manichee', p. 75

(2) Loc. cit.

(3) DH., p. 278

(4) Ibid., p. 281

outright any writer in whom he detects its influence, and hence to identify art with life, making with action. Auden quotes Lawrence's 'manifesto' offering the reader 'a bunch of pansies, not a wreath of immortelles',⁽¹⁾ identifying in it "a false analogy between the (2) process of artistic creation and the organic growth of living creatures":

An artist who ignores this difference between natural growth and human construction will produce the exact opposite of what he intends. A natural object never appears unfinished; if it is an inorganic object like a stone, it is what it has to be, if an organic object like a flower, what it has to be at this moment.⁽³⁾

Yet, as Auden himself goes on to show, the relationship between form and content is itself one which Lawrence regards as organic rather than consciously determined. It is most clearly reflected in the attitudes to language Auden attributes to the writer of free verse as opposed to the writer of formal verse:

The difference between formal and free verse may be likened to the difference between carving and modelling; the formal poet, that is to say, thinks of the poem he is writing as something already latent in the language which he has to reveal, while the free verse poet thinks of language as a plastic passive medium upon which he imposes his artistic conception.⁽⁴⁾

Auden considers that Birds, Beasts, and Flowers contains Lawrence's finest poems, all of them written in free verse and the best of his later poetry adopts the 'genre' of satirical doggerel (which on the free verse-modelling analogy is equivalent to 'objets trouvés',⁽⁵⁾).

(1) DH., p. 283

(2) Loc. cit.

(3) Ibid., p. 284

(4) Ibid., p. 287

(5) Ibid., p. 294

He has long since seen Lawrence's politics for what they are, fascist, and this knowledge seems to jaundice even his view of Lawrence the humanitarian. The genuineness of feeling about which he concedes Lawrence did "care passionately"⁽¹⁾ is actually seen to extend through a very limited gamut:

As an analyst and portrayer of the forces of hatred and aggression which exist in all human beings and, from time to time, manifest themselves in nearly all human relationships, Lawrence is, probably, the greatest master who ever lived. But that was absolutely all that he knew and understood about human beings; about human affection and human charity, for example, he knew absolutely nothing.⁽²⁾

Auden's diagnosis of Lawrence is that he actually "detested nearly all human beings if he had to be in close contact with them"⁽³⁾, his notion of human relationship being simply an idealised daydream. Ironically, it appears that Auden is here forgetting his own discrimination of artistic from life realism and hence ignoring the possibility of actually incorporating this very idealising bent into the protagonists of a novel, the feature which, perhaps, stands as Lawrence's great achievement.

This misunderstanding should (but almost certainly does not) prejudice the reader against accepting Auden's valuation of Lawrence's greatest success for it arises directly from it --- his charity

(1) DH., p. 281

(2) Ibid., p. 288

(3) Loc. cit.

and affection for non-human life:

Whenever, in his writings, he forgets about men and women with proper names and describes the anonymous life of stones, waters, forests, animals, flowers, chance travelling companions or passers-by, his bad temper and his dogmatism immediately vanish and he becomes the most enchanting companion . imaginable, tender, intelligent, funny and, above all, happy.(1)

The essay on Marianne Moore complements that on Lawrence as exactly as their respective subjects would seem to be opposites.

Marianne Moore has all the formal niceties desiderated in Lawrence:

"the distaste for noise and excess.....the fastidiousness.....the love of order and precision.....the astringent ironical sharpness".(2)

Above all, she likes the human race, so that her poems about animals are really about the Good Life and because of their formal accomplishment, seem to resolve one of Auden's main dilemmas, the relation between art and morals; though the connection is one that can only be tentatively declared:

.....they delight, not only because they are intelligent, sensitive and beautifully written, but also because they convince the reader that they have been written by someone who is personally good.(3)

(The number of poems Auden writes during this period using the technique of counting syllables rather than stresses, exemplified in Marianne Moore's poetry, is the best indication of the nature and degree of

(1) DH., p. 289

(2) Ibid., pp. 298-9

(3) Ibid., p. 305

her practical influence on him.)

Two of the essays of 'Americana' are on poetry, one being on American poetry generally and the other on Robert Frost. Whereas Lawrence was an early ideological influence and Marianne Moore a late technical one, Frost, whom he read shortly after discovering Hardy⁽¹⁾, is a writer whose influence is indivisible. This statement is not contradicted by Auden's placing of Frost in the category of Prospero-dominated writers (those more concerned with truth than technical skill) nor by his designation of Frost's style as 'Good Drab' (the term is C.S.Lewis's). The quality Auden admires in Frost is his reticence, a quality he now regards as inseparable from authenticity of the most fundamental kind.⁽²⁾ It is free from the excessive emotion of youth, "the speech of a mature mind, fully awake and in control of itself; it is not the speech of dream or of uncontrollable passion"⁽³⁾, is 'chaste' verbally ---"except in reported speech, interjections, imperatives and rhetorical interrogatives are rare"⁽⁴⁾ --- though not lacking in feeling:

...again and again, one is aware of strong, even violent, emotion behind what is actually said, but the saying is reticent, the poetry has, as it were, an auditory chastity.⁽⁵⁾

(1) See Isherwood, 'Some Notes on Auden's Early Poetry', New Verse, 26-7, (1937), p. 4

(2) It is important not to confuse the reticence approved by this middle-aged Auden and the exhortation to austerity which marked his early work. Barbara Hardy's essay, 'The Reticence of W.H.Auden', The Review, 11-12, (1964), fails to distinguish the two.

(3) DH., p. 343

(4) Loc. cit.

(5) Loc. cit.

Conclusions drawn from the whole of Auden's writing would either be too generalised to be useful or too specific to be general. John Bayley has suggested that perhaps no poet "has ever been more determined to be conscious of what he is doing and his reasons for doing it".⁽¹⁾ It may be said that Auden exposes consciousness by embodying it uniquely; he is the most truly Wordsworthian of twentieth century poets (ironic though Auden's antipathy to that poet makes such a description) by writing in such a way that, as it were, the reader is made aware that his reactions are to play the vital part in the meaning of what he reads. In The Orators this took the stimulating but relatively crude form of shocking the reader by tempting him to condemn attitudes which were then shown to be inherent in exactly that sort of condemnation. In the final Christian period of his work Auden tempted his audience to believe that he had abnegated a large part of his poetic responsibility to religion, thus placing it in the same need of faith vis-à-vis his work as he himself was to God.

It is above all as a 'corpus' that Auden's work has its effect, a body comprising criticism as well as poetry. The dichotomies he has produced and circumvented are legion, united chiefly, perhaps, by his own personality. He himself suggested the correct critical response to good art as "'Mr. A's work is more important than anything I can say about it'"⁽²⁾. Cavalier, irresponsible and fortuitously

(1) The Romantic Survival, p. 145

(2) DH., p. 8

designed with his own initial, this conclusion needs only the complement of a stanza desiderating the aim of poetry as he considered Yeats to have fulfilled it:

In the deserts of the heart
Let the healing fountain start,
In the prison of his days
Teach the free man how to praise. (1)

(1) 'In Memory of W.B. Yeats', The New Republic, LXXXVIII (1939), p. 123

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