THE POETRY OF W. H. AUDEN

by

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A Thesis Submitted For the Degree of
MASTER OF ARTS
In the Department
of
ENGLISH

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

October, 1943

Approved,

20 October, 1943.
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I

POETRY AND THE DEVIL: THE PRINCIPLE OF INCLUSION

Of the many origins which have been ascribed to poetry, most of them have been pictured in celestial terms. W. H. Auden is one of the few practitioners of the art who have fathered poetry upon the Devil.

"The Devil, indeed," wrote Auden, "is the father of Poetry, for poetry might be defined as the clear expression of mixed feelings."¹

"The Devil" in this case is an interesting creation of Auden's own, while the definition, here unexplained and undefended, is a glib summary of an important trend in modern literary criticism, and characterizes in brief the poetic intentions of Auden and many of his contemporaries. Those intentions are to do justice to the complexity of experience, to strive, not for a simple clarity, but for a unity made up of diverse elements, and by the force of imagination to effect, in Coleridge's

words, "the balance or reconcilement of opposite or discordant qualities."  

This thesis is concerned with tracing the forms in which these intentions are embodied in Auden's work. These forms have great variety. Auden's love of novelty and zeal for experimentation mean that his work does not follow a clear pattern of development. There is a distinct break between each of his books, making it desirable that each book be discussed individually. And in each individual book two or more types of development are obvious - types which may approach opposites in technique. As a result discussion of his writing may sometimes go off on apparent tangents, as it follows Auden on one of his enthusiastic sorties into new fields. One characteristic, however, can be traced in varying degrees and diverse forms throughout his work. This is his desire for "inclusiveness".

The general nature of this characteristic is partially indicated by Eliot's description:

When a poet's mind is perfectly equipped

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2. For instance, his first book includes extremely obscure poems and verse whose language is very simple and direct.
for its work, it is constantly amalgamating disparate experience; the ordinary man's experience is chaotic, irregular, fragmentary. The latter falls in love, or reads Spinoza, and these two experiences have nothing to do with each other, or with the noise of the typewriter or the smell of cooking; in the mind of the poet these experiences are always forming new wholes.

This desire for the creation of new wholes by an inclusive description of experience may have many facets. For Auden these include the attempt to express the contradictory emotions or thoughts sometimes present in his mind,—the "mixed feelings" of his definition,—the physical context of an intellectual experience, the use of humor in such a way as to intensify seriousness, the inclusion of impulses which, by a romantic theory of poetry, might be considered destructive to the main impulse, and the desire to say more than one thing at a time, made possible by imagery or by the ambiguous nature of a whole situation or event.

One of the important elements in this striving for inclusiveness is expressed in the phrase already quoted from Coleridge: "the balance or reconcilement of opposite or discordant qualities." A few glances at the evolution

of this idea in criticism, before turning to its application in Auden's work, will throw light on its meaning for Auden.

To Coleridge, "discordant qualities" meant

the sense of novelty and freshness, with old and familiar objects; a more than usual state of emotion, with more than usual order; judgment ever awake and steady self-possession with enthusiasm and feeling profound or vehement... The sense of musical delight... with the power of reducing multitude into unity of effect, and modifying a series of thoughts by some one predominant thought or feeling.  

The phrase, thus, in Coleridge's use, would cover all good poetry.

In Principles of Literary Criticism, I. A. Richards has developed Coleridge's theory, stripped of its transcendentalism. To Richards, however, the idea of the reconciliation of "discordant qualities refers more particularly to the impulses and ideas of the poetry, and leads him to distinguish between two classes of poetry. He has characterized this aspect of poetry quite fully:

There are two ways in which impulses may be organized; by exclusion and by inclusion, by synthesis and by elimination... The structures of these two kinds of experiences are different, and the difference is not one of subject,

1. Coleridge, loc. cit.
but of the relations inter se of the several impulses active in the experience. A poem of the first group is built out of sets of impulses which run a parallel, which have the same direction. In a poem of the second group the most obvious feature is the extraordinary heterogeneity of the distinguishable impulses. But they are more than heterogeneous, they are opposed. They are such that in ordinary, non-poetic, non-imaginative experience, one or other set would be suppressed to give as it might appear freer development to the others.

Of the value of this type of poetry Richards says:

The equilibrium of opposed impulses, which we suspect to be the ground-plan of the most valuable aesthetic responses, brings into play far more of our personality than is possible in experiences of a more defined emotion. We cease to be orientated in one definite direction; more facets of the mind are exposed and, what is the same thing, more aspects of things are able to affect us. To respond, not through one narrow channel of interest, but simultaneously and coherently through many, is to be disinterested in the only sense of the word which concerns us here. A state of mind which is not disinterested is one which sees things only from one standpoint or under one aspect. At the same time since more of our personality is engaged the independence and individuality of other things becomes greater. We seem to see 'all round' them, to see them as they really are; we see them apart from any one particular interest which they may have for us. Of course without some interest we should not see them at all, but the less any one particular interest is indispensable, the more

detached our attitude becomes. And to say that we are impersonal is merely a curious way of saying that our personality is more completely involved.

This definition of poetry of inclusion can have a wide application. It is applicable to poetry of the most diverse types and periods, and while the phrase "opposed impulses" might seem to refer to political or philosophical complexities, such impulses occur equally in lyrical or humorous poetry.

It is, for instance, the use of opposed elements which gives a fillip to Chaucer’s description of Alisoun, when he fills the framework of the courtly love convention with epithets smelling of earth: "As any wesele hir body gent and smal", "Wymsynge she was, as is a joly colt". There is a delicate balance of conventionally contradictory attitudes suggested by the Lady Prioress’s bracelet bearing the words Amor Vincit Omnia. It is this inclusion of complementary impulses which gives the full-bodied character to the Tales, and which enriches Troilus and Criseyde. One of the main characteristics of poetry of inclusion, says Richards, is the fact that it is proof

1. Principles of Literary Criticism, p. 252
3. Ibid, p. 21
against ironic contemplation. I doubt if there ever was a poet less likely to suffer from ironic contemplation than Chaucer.

In the field of the lyric, Autolycus' song,[^1] with its "pure" "When daffodils begin to peer", and its earthy "With hey the doxy over the dale" shows how a song can assimilate diverse elements. Or consider the lyric beginning "Take, oh take those lips away..."[^2]

Empson points out that "The main logical structure of this exquisite song is a contrast; take, but bring; which involves a contradiction, and there is another in the idea of 'returning' a kiss..."[^3]

In a different field, The Rape of the Lock is certainly poetry of inclusion, but Pope is far from expressing a personal conflict. Brooks points out:

Pope is able to indulge in social satire, and at the same time do justice to the charm of the society which he censures. The two judgments are not to be separated from each other...The poem achieves a genuine unity of sensibility...[^4]

This idea of poetry of inclusion does not, then,

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necessarily refer to a poet in conflict with himself or with his time.

The influence of Richards' writings on this subject has been wide. Cleanth Brooks, in his book Modern Poetry and The Tradition, carries Richards' definitions further. While he would apply his ideas as a yardstick to poetry of all periods, his emphasis on the reconciliation of ideas would seem to be related to the fact that most of his examples are drawn from the seventeenth century Metaphysical poets, and from modern writers. For in these two periods, the question of conflicting ideas becomes of greater importance. In these periods opposed attitudes on the most basic questions are present to the consciousness of many writers. They find that a final system of belief is extremely difficult to formulate. Daiches has described the time of Donne as an age of multiple faith:

an age when the poet and his public are equally receptive to two or more different sets of beliefs - as was John Donne, for example, for whom difference did not mean mutual exclusiveness as it came to mean in times that were intellectually more settled.

And he continues:

There comes a point at which multiple belief can scarcely be distinguished from confused belief: the metaphysical influence on the younger English poets of the 1930s, for example, can be interpreted as arising from the latter's intellectual eclecticism.
which has something in common with Donne's Janus-faced quality.¹

Poetry of inclusion now has the difficult task of expressing honestly this multiple belief, of doing justice to its complexity, and of making sure that it is not simply expressing confused belief. Probably Auden would have produced a more exact, though less balanced sentence, if he had written: "For poetry might be defined as the expression of clear mixed feelings."² If conflict is to be expressed, its elements should be clearly understood by the writer.

In contrast to poetry which attempts to effect a unity of diverse elements is poetry of exclusion. Numerous examples can be found in such collections as the Metheun Anthology of Modern Verse, first published in 1921.³ Here poetry of exclusion is achieved by the deliberate exclusion of discordant elements from the poet's consciousness. The method of association was simple. Typically, there was the poet, an oak-tree, leaves, and a sky-lark, blended

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2. There are factors in Auden's personality which lead to the expression of confused feelings - but this is not his intention.

3. London, Metheun & Co. Ltd.
into a poem by a simple affirmation of delight. It was the simple reaction of an "ordinary" man. While such poetry can often be pleasing, it is inadequate because it shows indifference or lack of sensitivity on the part of the poet to the tensions of modern society, or else because it indicates an inability to express anything more than a very small range of the poet's experience.

Such poetry is not to be confused with good "light verse." Auden makes this clear in the Introduction to the Oxford Book of Light Verse, where he explains the emergence of light and complex poetry in terms of social conditions, and looks forward to the time when he or his successors will again be able to write light verse:

As long as society was united in its religious faith and its view of the universe, as long as the way in which people lived changed slowly, audience and artists alike tended to have much the same interests and to see much the same things.

It is not until the great social and ideological upheavals of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries that difficult poetry appears, some of Shakespeare, Donne, Milton, and others...Light verse tends to be conventional, to accept the attitudes of the society in which it is written. The more homogeneous a society, the closer the artist is to the everyday life of his time, the easier it is for him to communicate what he perceives, but the harder
for him to see honestly and truthfully, unbiased by the conventional responses of his time. The more unstable a society, and the more detached from it the artist, the clearer he can see, but the harder it is for him to convey it to others. In the greatest periods of English literature, as in the Elizabethan period, the tension was at its strongest. The artist was still sufficiently rooted in the life of his age to feel in common with his audience, and at the same time society was in a sufficient state of flux for the age-long beliefs and attitudes to be no longer compulsive on the artist's vision.

From this quotation it is obvious that Auden does not make the mistake of glorifying difficult poetry (whether or not he himself over-indulges in it), nor does he overlook the fact that the type of poetry that is being written now, while a natural product of our time, does not establish criteria for judging all other poetry.

Eliot has said of Donne that his ability to convey "his genuine whole of tangled feelings"..."implies a constant inspection and criticism of experience"; it involves "a recognition, implicit in the expression of every experience, of other kinds of experience which are possible." It is a similar expression of his "tangled feelings" which Auden has sought to convey in his work.

The forms which this expression takes are varied. Any brief listing must necessarily raise questions and criticisms - it is impossible to catalogue a poet. The following "types" of methods used by Auden to achieve synthesis or 'inclusion' in his poetry are therefore recognised to be artificial categories, which naturally overlap throughout his work, but which can be isolated for purposes of analysis.

The first is that type of synthesis which Dr. Johnson disparaged by calling "heterogeneous ideas yoked by violence together", which is merely the forming of new wholes out of elements which in ordinary thinking are kept separate, making a pattern which is rather surprising to the average man. This is a union of diverse materials, while a second type of inclusion arises from the union of diverse aspects of the same idea. Though this characteristic applies to almost all Auden's poetry, it is particularly important in relation to his poetry on political subjects, and to his elegies. A third method is his appeal to various levels of response, a type of writing which Empson classes as his third type of ambiguity.1 This is noticeable in many of Auden's

1. *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, p. 143.
poems where the work may appeal on personal, psychological, and political levels of interpretation, and where the different interpretations do not necessarily involve each other. This type of appeal characterises poems as short as the dedications, and as long a work as The Orators. That Auden may be unaware of some possible interpretations of these poems does not detract from the value of this type of ambiguity. The fourth type of synthesis is more often a compound than a complex. It results from putting together attitudes which are only partial truths, and balancing them to make an adequate whole. These ideas may have seemed mutually exclusive until put together in poetry. The result is not so much a fusion of opposed impulses as a delicate balancing of conflicting attitudes, giving just the right weight to each. This is particularly important in the sonnet sequence In Time of War.

But reconciliation of impulses alone is not, of course, a criterion for judging poetry. As Richards points out, the value of it depends upon the level of organization at which it takes place, upon whether the reconciled impulses are adequate or inadequate.¹

Also, the attempted reconciliation may be unsuccessful. In Auden's case failure to integrate diverse material sometimes leads to confusion, in other cases not to confusion, but to amusement contrary to the writer's intention.

This thesis, then, is concerned with the degree of success with which Auden, using these methods, can build his experience and his conflict into poetry. Naturally, no finality is possible in discussing the work of a poet who is only thirty-six, who is at present going through a transitional stage, and who, with valuable experiments and achievements behind him, will no doubt continue to develop. No one can tell which aspect of his poetry to date will be most important in his future work. A thesis on his writing must be suggestive rather than conclusive.

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1. for example, the misplaced buffoonry in the tragic *Charade, Poems*, Random House, New York, 1934, pp.72-74.

2. his celebration of a school football victory in saga style, Ode IV, *The Orators*, Poems, p. 158.
Chapter II

"AN INTELLECTUAL OF THE MIDDLE CLASSES"1

Before turning to the specific application in Auden's work of the ideas described in the Introduction, it seems advisable to indicate the nature of the "tangled feelings" to which he gives expression. These include his political beliefs, and his personal problem of adjustment to the conventions of society. While the latter includes the whole question of the artist who is out of sympathy with many of the prevailing values of the culture in which he lives, it is probable that the aspect of this adjustment with which Auden is particularly concerned is the relation of the homosexual to society. In addition, his knowledge of psychology and science must be considered since they condition the nature of his awareness of experience. A man who

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1. A child may ask when our strange epoch passes,
   During a history lesson, 'Please sir, what's
   An intellectual of the middle classes?
   Is he a maker of ceramic pots
   Or does he choose his king by drawing lots?'
   What follows now may set him on the rail,
   A plain, perhaps a cautionary, tale.

A man who welcomes science is not necessarily free from the danger of writing sentimentalities and half-truths (producing poetry of exclusion), but the nature of his poetry will be different from that of the man who turns his back on science. While in this section it is possible, for convenience, to separate Auden's political from psychological beliefs in order to trace his political development, this again is artificial, since his political and psychological ideas are closely interlocked in his attitude to life.

Poetry of inclusion requires a strongly held belief or beliefs. It requires the driving force of a strong emotional belief to produce a successful fusion of disparate ideas. But while strongly held, such beliefs will not be dogmatically held. The poet is too aware of opposites. For Auden, the situation is much the same as for Donne. As The Double Man, (a role he has played all his life, supplemented by Triple and Quadruple Man), he has embraced situations composed of apparently mutually contradictory elements. And the attempt to fuse those elements has led at once to the strength and to the confusions of his poetry.

Auden began with a strong belief. It seemed obvious to him that the upper class in England was decadent, that all classes were degenerating physically and mentally, and that there was urgent need for a proletarian revolution along Marxist lines. This belief was brought home to him by the problems of industry in Northern England, with its unemployment and ghost towns, and by the lack of community among any class of people, a lack
which he considered destructive of any wide culture. But even at the outset, the adoption of Communism as a solution was far from simple for Auden. He has always been aware of the anomalous position of "intellectuals of the middle classes" and realises that his inclusion in that category prevents any easy merging with the proletariat. It is probable that he would agree with Virginia Woolf's description of his group as "leaning tower poets". Their ivory tower leans to the left, but, conscious of their middle-class birth, of their expensive educations, they cannot come down from it. She writes: "They are profiting by a society which they abuse......The poet is a dweller in two worlds, one dying, and one struggling to be born." In the poem beginning "Get there if you can...." Auden has described how intellectuals seem to sit idly waiting


2. Ibid.

for a revolution to take place, and in the play of their emotions, "Hope and fear are neck and neck."\(^1\) It is an over-statement of his own position, of course. He was eager for revolution, ready to help, but in an entirely individualistic way. Throughout his early poetry he recurred again and again to the idea of violence, but while he recognized the need for the gradual, difficult work of building up a revolutionary party, he had no enthusiasm for the job. To him it meant "The boring meeting, the flat ephemeral pamphlet."\(^2\) Although he indicated a sound knowledge and reasoned acceptance of dialectical materialism in the statement of his philosophy contained in *I Believe* \(^3\), his poetic treatment of revolution, for psychological reasons, often occupied itself with an atmosphere as of school-boys playing at spies, with meaningless violence.

It is possible that Christopher Caudwell was thinking of Auden when he described those artists who enter into an alliance with revolutionary bodies, without joining any proletarian organization:

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1. *Poems*, p. 42
3. ed. by Clifton Fadiman, New York, Simon and Schuster, 1939
Their attitude to existing society therefore can only be destructive — it is anarchist, nihilist and surrealist. They often glorify the revolution as a kind of giant explosion which will blow up everything they feel to be hampering them. But they have no constructive theory — I mean as artists: they may as economists accept the economic categories of socialism, but as artists they cannot see the new forms and contents of an art which will replace bourgeois art.

I do not know whether anyone could possibly foresee the forms and contents of a new art while living under an old system, but the fact remains that the revolutionary artist's instability of position is bound to affect his poetry. In Auden's case it means that the desire to destroy the old system must be expressed, side by side with the desire to preserve what he has gained from it, due to his privileged position; it means that he cannot be quite sure of himself, that symbols must shift their meaning, and that his utterances are often ambiguous. It means that sometimes he feels that he is wrong to hesitate and quibble, so that he rushes into the writing of vigorous doggerel, rough-and-ready, and shorn of subtlety, shouting at everybody to get on with it. In contrast, he becomes wary of over-simplifications, and involves himself in tortuous dialectics.

This conflict, in varying forms, is the basic material for all his books. An outline tracing it must of necessity be greatly over-simplified, but it can have value in indicating the broad outlines. In the first book, *Poems*¹, published in 1930, it was expressed in two ways: first in dramatic and conversational poems in which the counterplay of diverse impulses is rich and subtle; secondly in atmospheric poems wherein the conflict is visualised, rather than intellectually expressed. These are dramatisations of the physical struggle which Auden anticipated with the coming of social revolution, and at the same time, one may conclude, a dramatisation of the personal conflict of Auden's allegiances. *Charade* or *Paid on Both Sides*² is a similar dramatisation of conflict. It is perhaps significant that in this play, as in the shorter poems, nobody wins. The atmosphere of doom prevails. In *Charade* there is a promise of something better, vaguely far off in the future, but it is not a result of the struggle of the opposed parties. It is as if, in spite of his demands for violent revolution, Auden knew the precarious nature of his belief in it, and foresaw the time when he would no longer defend it.

¹. Page references throughout are to the 1934 edition, which includes the poems first printed in 1930, *Charade*, *The Orators*, and *The Dance of Death.*
The Orators, published in 1932, contained several important types of resolution of both political and psychological problems. "Letter to a Wound" is Auden's parable of the capitalist solution, while "Journal of an Airman" attempts solution, politically and psychologically, by conflict. The Dance of Death is a purely political solution wherein Auden's doubts are most thoroughly repressed beneath a program of liquidating the capitalists.

Look Stranger represents a temporary reconciliation of his conflicts, with an accompanying increase in lyricism. Here Auden accepts as fully as before the need for revolutionary action, the need

\[ \text{to hunger, work illegally, and be anonymous.} \]

but he is no longer greatly concerned about his affiliations with the "enemy". The revolutionary spirit has become more impersonal for him, but that spirit is now love rather than hate. "Death of the old gang" is still needed but he is more concerned with the positive value of "some possible dream, long curled in the ammonite's slumber"\(^2\) to be inevitably realized by the efforts of man. Look Stranger is like a breathing space on the edge of a far greater conflict. Under the shadow of vast international war Auden reaffirms his belief in possible progress, and in love.

\[ \text{1. Look Stranger, London, Faber and Faber, 1937, p. 17} \]

\[ \text{2. p. 12.} \]
The Sonnet sequence "In Time of War" is written in the cannon's mouth. Yet in it the reconciliation of impulses is achieved in most finished form.

Another Time indicates two stages in his development. "Spain" is written by a man who took an active part in the war (Auden was an ambulance driver for the Loyalists) and is a superb account of the emotional conflict involved in awareness of that struggle. The other occasional poems in Another Time stress the help given by great men in solving problems. But the "poems of people and places" indicate the shifting of Auden's interests. He is turning away from the idea of revolution—a class movement—to greater interest in the individual. By the time The Double Man was written this turning away from the idea of revolution was completed. Auden had lost his belief.

While his thesis remains the same (society is in a desperate predicament) he has abandoned his antithesis (revolution) so that synthesis is no longer possible. Hitherto he had wanted revolution, even though he was aware of its drawbacks; now, having struck that desire out of his life, he has nothing to take its place. In 1939 he told a Time reporter that he saw one hopeful prospect from the muddle in Europe; a general realisation that violent revolution is as impotent as violent war. With nothing positive to substitute for his belief in

1. contained in Journey to a War. N.Y., Random House, 1939.
revolution, he lost the emotional force which gave unity even to his most conflicting ideas. He is still concerned with synthesis, but it is only intellectually attained; emotional he has no strong drive toward any of the alternatives which face him.

However, while he is no longer sure of the means of attaining them, his positive ideals remain in general much the same. The type of state which is implied in The Double Man is described more fully in his article "Criticism in a Mass Society"¹, in terms of what he calls an "open society". The following description found in this article is in full accord with his earlier ideals:

Occupationally specialized, the range of occupations to choose from would be so wide that there would be no one, however exceptional his nature, who could not find his genuine vocation. Such a community would be tolerant because it found every kind of person useful, and its members socially responsible because of being needed.²

Also, he knows the need for change to be imperative:

We have to adapt ourselves to an open society or perish.³

But how is the development of such an open society to be carried on? He is no longer prepared to say - he

¹. in The Intent of the Critic, ed. by D.A. Stauffer, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1941.
². p. 137
³. p. 129
is even prepared to shove the problem into the back-
ground:

When we use the word democracy we do not
or should not mean any particular form of
political structure, such matters are
secondary. What we mean or ought to mean
is the completely open society.  

True, the political set-up is only a means. But it is
vitally important.

Auden, then, has moved from a belief in proletarian
revolution to a negation of that belief. He is now in
a state of transition.

A similar shift in interest has taken place in
connection with some of the psychological theories which
he has held. While his early poems are filled with
imagery drawn from some rather extreme theories linking
wickedness and disease, in later work Auden rarely
uses such imagery. These ideas were drawn mainly from
the work of Homer Lane, a little-known psychologist who
was superintendent of "The Little Commonwealth", an
experimental community designed to rehabilitate children
who would otherwise have had to go to a reformatory.
After the Commonwealth closed, in 1917, Lane carried

on psychiatric work with adults until his death in 1925. Auden encountered Lane's ideas in Germany where he became friends with a follower of Lane's named Barnard. With typical enthusiasm he adopted Lane's system of thought. While many of his ideas are in agreement with accepted psychological theories, Lane himself has never gained recognition as a psychologist. It is probable that his terminology in describing his cures led many, more scientifically minded people to consider him a fadist or a mystic, while some of his ideas on sickness are expressed in a very extreme form. In spite of his own desire, his success with people seems to have depended more on his personality than on the effectiveness of his theories. The latter can be best summarized in the words of Christopher Isherwood, describing their effect on "Weston", in his autobiography *Lions and Shadows*:

> Every disease, Lane had taught, is in itself a cure - if we know how to take it. There is only one sin: disobedience to the inner law of our own nature. The results of this disobedience show themselves in crime or in disease; but the disobedience is never, in the first place, our own fault - it is the fault of those who teach us, as children, to control God (our desires) instead of giving Him room to grow. The whole problem, when dealing with a patient, is to find out which of all the conflicting things inside him is God, and which is the Devil. And the one sure guide is that God appears always unreasonable, while the Devil appears always to be noble and right. God appears unreasonable because he has been put in prison and driven wild. The Devil is conscious control, and is, therefore, reasonable and sane.
Conventional education...inverts the whole natural system in childhood, turning the child into a spurious adult. So that later, when the child grows up physically into a man, he is bound to try to regain his childhood — by means which, to the outside world, appear ever more and more unreasonable. If the conscious mind were really the controlling factor, God would remain in prison, the world would become a bedlam in a few generations, and the race automatically die out. So diseases and neuroses come to kill off the offenders or bring them to their senses. Diseases are therefore only warning symptoms of a sickness of the soul; they are manifestations of God — and those who try to "cure"them without first curing the soul are only serving the Devil. The disease of the soul is the belief in moral control: the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, as against the Tree of Life.\(^1\)

Lane's philosophy was not new. It is a twentieth century formulation of Blake's attack on repression when he wrote:

> Sooner murder an infant in the cradle than nurse unacted desires.\(^2\)

Blake's attitude toward conventional morals, here summed up by D. Saurat, is similar:

> The moral law being the law given us by this false god (and we shall see later that this false god, Urizen, is the Intellect) the moral law is necessarily evil. It is our duty to rebel against it.\(^3\)

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1. Isherwood, C., Lions and Shadows, London, Hogarth Press, 1938, pp. 300, 301. This autobiography describes Isherwood's friendship with "Hugh Weston" and "Stephen Savage", who obviously represent Auden and Spender. While Isherwood writes that his portraits of them are really caricatures, it is probable that he wrote this warning merely so that he could feel free to write the truth as bluntly and vividly as he wished.


Hillyer, describing Blake's ideas, used terms which approximate Lane's very closely:

The Ten Commandments were written by the Devil. Traits that pass as virtues are just as apt to be disguises of evil. Thus charity is merely a mask for existing injustice.  

Blake wrote:

Pity could be no more,  
If we did not make somebody poor.  

while Lane considered that "one of the greatest evils of our civilisation is the invention of the idea of pity. Pity, consciously induced, loveless and sterile, is never a healer, always a destroyer. Pity frustrates every attempted cure."

Under Lane's influence Weston himself catalogued the psychic causes of various elements: When Isherwood complained of feeling ill:

"You've got to drop all that", said Weston. "When people are ill, they're wicked. You must stop it. You must be pure in heart."

The fact that Isherwood's tonsils were bothering him, meant, according to Weston, that he had been telling lies.

"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.


3. Lions and Shadows, p.

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 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

How long Auden took these categories seriously, it is hard to tell. In Letters from Iceland, describing a cold, he wrote:

"I suppose my It is repenting its sins, which apparently it has to do about every six months, but I wish it wouldn't."²

It should not have been too easy to believe that being "Pure in Heart" was a protection against disease when he considered that Lane died in 1925, of heart failure, following typhoid and pneumonia.

It was typical of Auden to adopt such an arbitrary explanation with immediate enthusiasm, and his first book of poems makes liberal use of its terminology, but it is probable that its value for him soon became a symbolic one. It was particularly valuable to him, not so much because it explained individual illness, but because it provided a parable for the sickness of society. As a result of the decadence of the capitalist system, all society becomes sick. ³

1. Lions and Shadows
3. This is Auden's personal application of Lane's ideas.
Those who are to be blamed, who should be destroyed by revolution, are those who do not care, who refuse to attempt to cure themselves.

Sir, no men's enemy, forgiving all
But will his negative inversion .... 1

The death-wish becomes a potent factor in society. Now it is described in relation to the individual, the rich man, who poised between shocking falls on razor-edge has taught himself this balancing subterfuge of the accosting profile, the erect carriage... 2

Elsewhere it becomes the characteristic of a class which foresees its own downfall, but wantonly goes ahead into degeneration, increasing the contradictions which will eventually end it. Capitalism digging its own grave, as expressed in the introduction to The Dance of Death

We present to you this evening a picture of the decline of a class, of how its members dream of a new life, but secretly desire the old, for there is death inside them. We show you that death as a dancer. 3

It is the duty of the individual to see that a more constructive society results from this disintegration.

2. Ibid, p. 12.
3. Ibid, p. 185.
To Blake, participation in politics would provide no solution, but to Auden, the only way to change the conditioning of the child, which produced repression, was by correctly changing the whole system. Lane had said "it is the fault of those who teach us, as children, to control God..." But obviously the blame could be passed on indefinitely to those who taught them. The only way out therefore is for the individual to try to cure himself and at the same time change the conditions which wrongfully affect others. Disease, thus, is a symptom, but in striving to remove the cause the patient will strike a blow at the foundations of society itself. The choices, "Should one change the individual first, or the state of society?" are not opposed. Both processes must take place at the same time.

Auden's debt to Freud was expressed in the elegy "In Memory of Sigmund Freud"

To us he is no more a person
Now but a whole climate of opinion. 1

That 'climate of opinion' permeates his work. It is shown in obvious technical influences— "in the use of words in associational rather than logical sequence" 2

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1. Another Time, p. 118.

in frequent accounts of dreams, in symbols derived from his reading of Freud. But much more, it affects his whole attitude toward good and evil. In his later work, the terminology with which he discusses this subject moves from the psychological to the theological (he even uses the phrase 'original sin') but the influence of Freud is still strong. However, Auden’s adoption of Freud is similar to his adoption of Lane: it is coloured by a tremendous enthusiasm and a vivid imagination. As a result, Auden sometimes attributes to Freud ideas which Auden has gained elsewhere. For instance in his article "Psychology and the Arts" in The Arts Today Auden listed the following as one of the basic principles of Freud:

Not only what we recognize as sin or crime but all illness is purposive. It is an attempt at cure.

But Freud was concerned only with curing by psychiatric methods those illnesses which he considered to be functional in origin, types of illness which he called psychogenetic. He considered that such mental illnesses were purposive, but their purpose was often a means of escape from life rather than a cure. Producing organic disorders might facilitate such an escape. But these functional illnesses—hysteric, neurasthenic and psychasthenic disorders, constitute only a small branch of all illness or disease.¹

¹ L. p. 17.
Such a misunderstanding on Auden's part would seem to be the result of a careless carry-over from his reading of Lane.¹

The fusion of the theories of Freud and Lane has resulted in confusion for some readers in connection with the nature of neurosis. Sometimes Auden praises slight neurosis, as a source of originality, sometimes he condemns. Critics such as Scarfe² find this inconsistent, without realizing that neuroses can take different forms, and that Auden's ambivalent attitude is based on reasonable distinctions. For instance, in Letter to Lord Byron, Auden states clearly what he considers the harmful effect of making children all grow up the same, and says that neurosis is responsible for creativeness.

Let each child have that's in our care³
As much neurosis as the child can bear.

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1. No specific reference to Freud is possible since Auden is not misquoting Freud, but attributing to his work something that is not there. Freud simply did not concern himself with disease which he considered as "essentially involving organic or structural defect of the bodily organs", as opposed to functional disease. The distinction quoted is from McDougall, Wm., The Outline of Abnormal Psychology, Charles Scribner's Sons, N.Y., 1926, p. 48. McDougall's analysis of functional disorders, pp. 30-56, states distinctions which are similar to the ideas implicit in Freud's work.


But in other cases neurosis leads to escapism, rather than compensation, hence his attack.

Auden's conflict over homosexual feelings has given rise to many poems on the nature of love. However, Auden is never explicit as to how important homosexuality is as a theme in itself, and how much it stands for a more general problem of adjustment. Some of his symbols, for instance, imply homosexuality because of the context, but could also stand for other deviations from custom.¹ His treatment of the subject varies—sometimes he deals with homosexuality as a fact that must be taken naturally, and criticises society for not doing so, as in The Orators, One of the main themes of "Journal of an Airman" deals with the harmful effects of repressing homosexual desires.² Sometimes, as in "The chimneys are smoking"³, he pictures a time when the Urning will be accepted; but often he identifies the uneasiness which it causes him with the general malaise of society. Often he makes a temporarily

¹. For instance, in "Fleeing the short-haired mađd executives", Auden uses the expression "left-handed". Freud quotes Stekel as saying "the left may signify homosexuality, incest, or perversion..The meaning is always determined by the individual moral standpoint of the dreamer." The Basic Writings of Sigmund Freud,N.Y.,Random House, 1938, p. 374.
². This is discussed fully in Capter IV.
³. Look Stranger,p. 38.
satisfactory adjustment, an acceptance, only to find that through disturbing external events, his love loses its natural quality. He identifies his feeling of personal guilt with the guilt which he feels England has incurred in the international sphere. Once

England to our méditations seemed
The perfect setting;
But now it he's no innocence at all.¹

The last sentence applies equally to the country and to his love.

It is really the social scene which makes him feel out of tune with life, but it carries over to love:

Last week we embraced on the dunes and thought they were pleased;
Now lake and holes in the mountains remind us of error.²

It is the isolation and the fear
The mood itself.³

He thinks nostaligically of the Greeks, for whom homosexuality was an accepted thing; in contrast he feels that now only

Small birds above me have the grace of those who founded
The civilisation of the delicate olive,
Learning the laws of love and sailing
On the calm Aegean.⁴

1. Look Stranger, p. 42.
2. Ibid, p. 38
3. Ibid, p. 42
4. Ibid, p. 44.
His love is always threatened:

Oh but what worm of guilt
Or what malignant doubt
Am I the victim of .......

As a result he is sometimes constrained to hide:

For our joy unbounding is, though it hide underground,
As insect or camouflaged cruiser
For fear of death sham dead.

And since our desire cannot take that route which is
Straightest,
Let us choose the crooked, so implicating these acres.

The crooked route sometimes takes roundabout expression, and
Auden's uncertainty at times as to how much he wishes to
commit himself is probably one of the causes of his much-
talked-of obscurity.

The importance of expressing desires naturally, without
mental constraint, is an idea which occurs frequently in
Auden --- for instance in "To Ask the Hard Question is Easy" and
"Fish in the Unruffled Lakes". But as he stresses in his
article "Psychology and Art" he is not advocating an emphasis

1. Look Stranger, p. 61
2. Ibid, p. 40
3. Poems, p. 49
4. Look Stranger, p. 60
5. p. 17
on sex as a cure-all. He is thoroughly opposed to any "Lawrence-ian": "thinking with the blood". Expression of desire is necessary for health---and it must be expression without any sense of guilt (as one of the basic principles of Freud, Auden listed 'At the root of all diseases and sin is a sense of guilt') but it is not glorified, and it is no substitute for intellectual activity.

Lawrence wrote:

Man is immoral because he has got a mind
And can't get used to the fact.

Auden's plea is to use that mind where it belongs, but not to let it become a jailer.

The "poet" of Eliot's definition, as opposed to the "ordinary man" requires a trained awareness of the modern world. Auden's interest in politics and psychology fulfil two of the requirements of such an awareness, but a serious gap would be left by the omission of scientific interest. Here too, Auden is peculiarly well-equipped. His ambition in preparatory school was to become a mining engineer. Isherwood says of "Weston", "his playbox was full of thick scientific books on geology and metals and machines...." 2

1. quoted by Auden in "Psychology and Art", p. 17
2. Lions and Shadows, p. 181
Science for him had a vital exciting quality, very different from the cold, rigid and limiting quality ascribed to it by many poets. This is particularly important at a time when many poets consider it opposed to the world of emotion and belief. Max Eastman explains almost all the development of recent poetry by the poets' fear of science and their retreat before it. In contrast, Auden accepts science, adopts its material and metaphor and blends its most clinical terminology even with his religious thought.

Auden's passionate interest in science enables him to assimilate more of contemporary life than those writers to whom science is alien. He is able to take advantage, without nostalgia, of modern developments in thought, and not waste energy in vague repining.

At the same time the industrial scene becomes natural material for his poetry, not artificially introduced, but assimilated and with emotional overtones. As he says in "Letter to Lord Byron"

Tramlines and slagheaps, pieces of machinery,
That was, and still is, my ideal scenery.

1. p. 51
He is perfectly aware of the temporary difficulties caused by the discoveries of science, which have scotched ancient superstitions without providing an outlet for the impulses they satisfied. This is described in Sonnet XII of "In Time of War". The dragons (symbolizing superstitions) are dead: and

The sudden shadow of the giant's enormous calf
Would fall no more at dusk across the lawn outside.

But unsatisfied impulses simply take different forms:

The vanquished powers were glad
To be invisible and free, without remorse
Struck down the sons who strayed into their course,
And ravished the daughters and drove the fathers mad. 1

In the verse commentary at the conclusion of this sequence he describes a world-without-belief:

In which a host of workers, famous and obscure,
Meaning to do no more than use their eyes,
Not knowing what they did, then sapped belief;
Put in its place a neutral dying star,
Where justice could not visit. 2

But this is a temporary difficulty; there are positive values to be substituted for the old. Rather than bewailing the effects of scientific development, he shows the possibilities of science, properly used by society, for increased moral development:

1. p. 270
2. p. 293
Mechanized it (an "open society") would have conquered nature, but would recognize that conquest for what it is— not the abolition of necessity, but the transformation of much of the external causal necessity of matter into the internal logical necessity of moral decision.

It is with a full awareness of these three fields—political, psychological and scientific—and their effect upon the modern man that Auden is developing his philosophy. "None of the afflictions of humanity are worse than its obsolete moral principles" said Richards, and Auden is particularly conscious of the way in which changing environment changes the nature of morality.

Significant, for instance is the extent to which natural evil and good are changed into moral evil and good. In man each stage of moral freedom can be superseded by a new one. Progress, then, does not necessarily mean an increase in happiness, but it can mean an development of morality. And it is part of the dignity of man that this is so. "Any change toward a greater freedom of action is a morally good change." One reason why Auden accepts science as thoroughly as he does is because he recognizes that it transforms


2. Principles of Literary Criticism, p. 56

3. I Believe, ed. by Clifton Fadiman, N.Y., Simon & Schuster, 1939, p. 3. Auden contributed the statement of personal philosophy (no title) which is printed first in this book.
what was natural necessity into moral choice. As he wrote in the notes to the *Double Man*:

Considered as practical applied activities, all sciences have as their aim the transformation of tribulations into temptations. Why is this desirable? Because it turns an insoluble problem of passive endurance into a soluble problem of conduct, an aesthetic into an ethical problem.

We may suffer more from the temptations than the tribulations, from moral evil, than natural evil, but it will be our own responsibility.

The only choice lies between an external and false necessity passively accepted, and an internal necessity consciously decided, but that is the difference between slavery and freedom.

The experience is pictured in the second sonnet of the sequence "In Time of War":

They wept and quarrelled; freedom was so wild, In front, maturity, as he ascended, Retired like a horizon from the child; The dangers and the punishments grew greater And the way back by angels was defended Against the poet and the legislator.

and it is described in prose in"I Believe":

1. p. 30
2. "Criticism in a Mass Society", p. 147
3. p. 260
"Man's advance in control over his environment is making it more and more difficult for him, at least in the industrialized countries with a high standard of living like America or England, to lead a naturally good life, and easier and easier to lead a morally bad one."

But the solution is not to regret our freedom, as do those who complain about the evils of the machine, but to use it. Hence this conception of morality is an integral part of his political philosophy. It follows that a society is good insofar as:

a) it allows the widest possible range of choices to its members to follow those vocations to which they are suited.

b) it is constantly developing, and providing new vocations which make a fuller demand upon their increasing powers.

Auden believes that "bad environment is the chief cause of badness in individuals and that the environment can be changed"; also that methods of production and distribution could now be adequate to provide a proper standard of life for everybody. These beliefs are the root of his interest in Communism. But given those changed conditions,
there would remain evil and sin, though they would be diminished. What is their nature, and how do they differ?

It may seem inconsistent with the above-quoted statement about environment that Auden should elsewhere write that he agrees with the presupposition "Man is a fallen creature with a natural bias to do evil" rather than the presupposition "Men are good by nature and made bad by society". In this connection he even uses the words "Original Sin". It is unfortunate that in the last quotation he is using conventional religious terminology without defining their meaning for himself. However, in his notes to The Double Man he has explained what he meant by evil:

"To do evil is to act contrary to self-interest. It is possible for all living creatures to do this because their knowledge of their self-interest is false or inadequate." 2

while

To sin is to act consciously against what seems necessity. 3

1. Criticism in a Mass Society, p. 137
2. p. 105
3. p. 35
The society he envisions would make it more possible for its citizens to act according to the interests of their several selves, but it would never be able to do so completely.

The poetry of Auden between 1930 and 1943 is thus characterized by a changing political philosophy, a concern with defining morality, an enthusiasm for science, and a desire to express the intricate nature of his love.
Eliot once wrote: "A thought to Donne was an experience...The result is that surprising reality with which unexpected feeling invests abstractions that usually remain unassimilably outside the day-to-day range of experience."

Poem XXIX, beginning "Consider this and in our time..." is the living body with which Auden clothes his political belief. An examination of this poem is a useful means of introduction to Auden's poetry because it embodies the basic ideas of his work when he first began to publish, and because he has expressed them in it with a high degree of inclusion.

The poem is concerned with portraying a stodgy, complacent type of mind which Auden associates with the upper class, a type of mind which ignores the need for a change in society to improve conditions, and also ignores the warnings of the danger which the probability of revolution offers to the security of the upper class. The effectiveness of this portrayal is achieved in part by Auden's use of symbolism.
Throughout his work, the symbol of a new ice-age recurs, here referred to as a "polar peril"\(^1\). In many of his poems, imagery drawn from his conception of a former ice age is used to heighten his claim that England is passing through a period which, for its deadening qualities, can be compared to an actual ice-age. He stresses the similarity between the destruction caused in the past by such a period, and the abandonment of industry in Northern England, with which he is familiar. Poem XXIX however, does not contain any such "archaic imagery"\(^2\) and makes this comparison in a subtle way, implied in the first verse. Here the members of the upper classes, "in furs, in uniform" have sought as a playground the remnants of an old ice-age which they can watch safely "Through plate glass windows of the Sport-Hotel". But ironically they ignore the fact that this country of glaciers (appropriate to them as representatives of the new ice-age) is static, while danger threatens them from the fens, where blow the stormy winds of revolution.

Consideration of detail is necessary here since the meaning of the poem is conveyed, not by direct statement, but by the relationships of the details, relationships which are implied, not stated. The poem begins?

\(^1\) p. 54, l.7
\(^2\) p. 36, l.17
"Consider this and in our time
As the hawk sees it, or the helmeted airman... 1

and Auden's method of observation really is that of that
of the "hawk" or airman flying high. It enables him to swoop down, to spotlight a scene, or group of people in passing, and to swing swiftly on to others, (for instance the farmers and the upper-class holidayers.)

The scenes are described as if they have no connections but slight physical ones, yet from the vantage point of the hawk — and the reader, it becomes obvious how closely the groups are connected, and how, beneath the apparent calm, conflict between them is smouldering.

Each word plays its part in conveying the relationships implicit in the poem, conveying infinitely more than would be possible in prose. For instance: hawk suggests bird of prey, besides being an excellent simile for Auden's method; airman supplants hawk as simile (the hawk swoops and the airman covers a vast territory, seeing all with the objectivity of an aerial photograph), but airman also suggests immediately the atmosphere of armed conflict which pervades the poem. The phrase "In our time" strikes an ironic note, imbedded as it is in that atmosphere of conflict, an irony high-lighted since its use in the poem.

1. p. 53
by Chamberlain's adoption of the phrase). "The first garden party suggests chilly weather, and the formal small-talk relationships which prevail among those who have time for garden parties, relationships similar to the lack of community between the groups "constellated at reserved tables". In contrast with these latter groups are the farmers, who are closely bound to the upper class by the industrial system, symbolised by radio, but who have nothing in common with them as a class.

The picture is convincing simply because all references to revolution are implicit. When Auden turns to speak to the "great Antagonist", the material is still concrete. He urges the swift demoralisation of the upper classes, by a concentration of all mental illnesses they have bred, into a "polar peril" which even they cannot resist. But there is only a vague hint of the insidious nature of that peril when he shifts to address the Financier directly. The warning is given, ironically, in terms he will understand - "the game is up", "it is later than you think", with its suggestion of well-regulated lives in whose conduct hateness is a serious lapse; the time of revolution is not described in its own terms, because the Financier, in his complacent blindness, would
not understand. It can only be described in negatives: it will not be like a school prize-giving - a comparison which gives an opportunity for the accusation suggested by 'ruined boys'. The implication is vague - but obviously Auden means that they are ruined for living, by their training, possibly that they are perverted\(^1\), and possibly, since the afternoon is distant in the past, he is considering those who died in the first World War to be victims of society.

Poem XVI\(^2\) in its final section uses a similar method of building up significance through an accumulation of apparently unconnected details. In its first three sections however, Auden uses direct statement to express his ideas. In this poem Auden is apparently making a deliberate attempt to synthesise conflicting thoughts on spring and death, eternal loneliness and possible comradeship, "those ducks' indifference, that friend's hysteria", the possibility of escape to life in a cottage, and the facing of revolution, and on the nature and demands of love. The first section begins with the poet's joy in new life, in

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1. In "Address for a Prize-Day", Poems,p. 83, Auden says that the school-system is responsible for the various types of perverted lovers.

2. p. 27
in spring, but he is at once reminded of death by the sight of an old man who makes him think of those whose death is "necessary condition of the season's setting forth". The recognition of this fact symbolises the realisation developed later in the poem that old ways and their defenders must die to make possible a new life for society.

In Part 2 he observes the process of the dialectic in his own life:

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

He thinks of the essential loneliness which comes with the realisation of individuality and of the necessity of love, responsive to more than bodily demands, without dependence, as with children, and without indifference. This foreshadows the end of the poem where he concludes that love

"Needs more than the admiring excitement of union, More than the abrupt self-confident farewell, ...Needs death, death of the grain, our death, Death of the old gang."

Meanwhile, in section 3, he concerns himself with the development of independence, by a synthesis of old and new experiences. This too is related to the problem of evolution. Throughout the poem he is adjusting himself
to the realisation that with revolution will come many new ways, and an abandonment of the old, but at the same time he realises that it is a synthesis of old and new which will create a "new race" and a new delight.

This poem is particularly interesting because it includes in its range several methods of expression, which facilitates comparison. There is first direct statement developed in flexible sentences which maintain prose order and fullness. However, as the experience expressed becomes more involved, Auden's style becomes clipped; he compresses his thought grammatically rather than symbolically, which lessens its effectiveness as poetry. Occasionally this results in jargon, as in

Yet sometimes men look and say good
At strict beauty of locomotive.

The final section, however, requires no such grammatical tricks. Here the relationships of the images are as tightly interwoven as in Poem XXIX, relationships involving the children, the falling leaves, the madmen, and the sick, in their knowledge of the coming "storm", while those who should be aware respond to signs of danger by trivial actions: "The chairs are being brought in from the garden." Depeñning on the irony conveyed implicitly by the imagery, this section combines a fullness of structure with a satisfying rhythm.
These two poems, XVI and XXIX, are outstanding examples of Auden's method of assimilation, and of his methods of association. Poem XXXI, beginning "Sir, no man's enemy..." illustrates his fusion of diverse materials.

Among the "heterogeneous" materials used in poetry in the seventeenth century, were ideas drawn from the new discoveries of science, used to illustrate religious experiences. But while the material was new, and the method of presenting the experience was new, the whole context in which religion existed had not changed. The scientific conceits were a means of adding vividness to an experience which had nothing in common with the methods of science.

Auden's Poem XXX, however, is in contrast to this:

Sir, no man's enemy, forgiving all
But will his 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.

1. p. 55
This is an attempt to pull traditional attitudes into a living relation with contemporary thought. We are accustomed to prayers filled with ancient Oriental imagery, but more significant now is imagery drawn from psychology and war. Part of our cultural lag is a moral lag; most pleas for a change of heart are made in a simplified context, preferably in a rural setting, (or in some aerial region above perplexing modern life); the need for "new styles of architecture" is too often not recognised at all.

In contrast, Auden's poem describes what would usually be considered a purely religious affair in psychological terms, with full recognition of modern problems, and gains by recognising the discordant, the supposedly non-religious elements of life. This habit of seeing morals in a thoroughly modern context is an important feature of Auden's work.

In contrast to this successful fusion of diverse materials might be placed the failure to assimilate found in Ode II of The Orators, dedicated to Gabriel Garritt. Here Auden uses his favorite device of

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1. p. 158
indicating a similarity between Icelandic heroes and schoolboys. Descriptions in epic style contrast humorously with such lines as

The Bryants, major and minor -
Surely their pater the Dean...

The device is intended to imply to the reader "You accept seriously epics on warriors returning from battle - now you will accept one on football players returning from victory." But the effect does not come off. In fact, Auden looks rather silly jumping up and down in the bleachers.

In other poems in this book Auden creates parable or myth to express his thought, while, in some, atmosphere or mood is the dominant quality.

Poem II, with its interesting music:

Doom is dark and deeper than any sea-dingle...

A bird stone-haunting, an unquiet bird,
is an excellent example of the first. Here is an indirect picture of the revolutionary situation. The idea of man's conscious revolutionary activity within the framework of evolution is conveyed by the picture of

1. This is particularly important in connection with Charade, and is explained in Chapter IV.

2. p. 9
early man travelling "a stranger to strangers over undried sea", meeting the new evolutionary conditions, and learning new ways of life from other tribes. So with revolutionary man: fate (doom) brings realisation of new needs; he must learn how to meet them.

voices
Of new men making another love
as he learns of the comradeship of a communist state. The poet prays: Protect him in his learning, in his activity, from reaction ("gradual ruin spreading like a stain"), until his success:

Lucky with day approaching, with leaning dawn.

The archaic imagery is heightened by the Old English devices: alliteration, words like "day-wishing," "cloud-soft", "stone-haunting", and synonyms like "houses for fishes." It is important to the poem because it emphasises that revolution is not a break in tradition but part of the natural continuity of development. Similarly "undried sea" is a vivid phrase affecting the whole poem; in two words it says "The sea was not always here and soon it will have dried again", indicating the constant process of physical change which makes social change seem more in-
evitable.

Poem XXV
1 similarly uses concrete imagery to express an idea, which could be summarized briefly: "The Proletariat are resigned to their position; they are not eager to

endure
Heat of day and winter danger,
Journey from one place to another

for the sake of improving their lot.

Perhaps this poem is the best answer to anyone who criticises Auden for being a propagandist. Here is a situation which he obviously considers unfortunate, but the poem is not an exhortation to the proletariat to change, nor to those who are responsible for the disaster which numbs the poor. It is, instead, an expression of Auden's sensitive reaction to the event, not by describing the concrete physical situation, as Spender has done in descriptions of the unemployed, but by imagery standing for the situation, and creating an artistic equivalent.

Similar to the two just described are a group of poems in which atmosphere seems to dominate. Daiches says that Auden

1. p. 46
does often achieve success in illuminating the individual impulse, the isolated emotion, whose function in the complete pattern is never clear yet which has a separate effectiveness of its own... eg., the impulse for sudden and adventurous action, the sudden sense of futility and doom.  

In these poems, Auden does not alone succeed in illuminating the individual impulse. They are also comments on the revolutionary situation:

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.

They describe those who wonder

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

But the comment seems less important than the mood. One cares little what "the leader" of Poem XXIV stands for. What matters is that it can maintain its unusual music


2. p. 44

3. p. 43
from the beginning:

From scars where kestrels hover,
The leader looking over
Into the happy valley...

through the description of the austere landscape:

The drumming of a snipe
Surprise where driven sleet
Had scalded to the bone
And streams are acrid yet
To an accustomed lip,

to the effective conclusion, with the weight of the
sentence quivering on the word "Alive":

'Leave for Cape Wrath tonight',
And the host after waiting
Must quench the lamps and pass
Alive into the house.

The reader is less concerned with the relation of the
scenes described to a contemporary situation than with
their evocation of timeless moods.

Some poems, such as XXIII, are from the point of
view of the potential revolutionaries, while others, such
as XII, dramatise failure from the point of view of the
reactionary side. The former is noteworthy particularly
for the nature of the imagery, which has a disconnected
dream-like quality:

1. p. 43
2. p. 23
The horns of the dark squadron
Converging to attack;
The sound behind our back
Of glaciers calving.

While it should be emphasized that these poems do communicate experiences independently, it is obvious also that they form a pattern throughout the book, giving it an emotional unity, and helping to round out a full picture of Auden's world.

While it is to be expected that poetry dealing with revolution should use imagery of conflict, this imagery permeates all Auden's early writing, even his love poetry, as in

Sentries against inner and outer,
At stated interval is feature.¹

and

Before this loved one
Was that one and that one²

with its imagery of "frontiers to cross". This ever-present atmosphere of conflict is, no doubt, not only a reflection of external conflict (which is mirrored in the turbulence of his love) but also a symbol of his personal conflict, the product of alternating desires and fears in the political field.

1. p. 25
2. p. 34
When Poems appeared, one of the characteristics to which the critics constantly referred was obscurity. While Auden's method of association makes his poetry particularly satisfying, it can also provide difficulties.

Poem I is typical, illustrating almost all Auden's types of obscurity. Here compression made possible an unusual verbal pattern, while the placing of diverse attitudes side by side in brief space, and the use of the particular for the general made possible the evocation of a wide range of responses. The terseness of the conclusion gave the desired feeling of finality and impersonality in a way that a more drawn out, conversational style could not have done.

But such compression requires omissions. For instance: the first two pairs of lines in prose would be separated by 'or'; so would verses four and five. Since readers are accustomed to having antithetical statements marked off clearly, this placing of contrasting ideas side by side without transition is confusing. However, besides saving words, the omission of 'or' helps to place the two ideas on the same level - i.e. the poet is not trying to convince by any rhetorical device.

1. p. 7
Other difficulties arise from his use of imagery. When Auden says

Will you turn a deaf ear
To what they said on the shore...

he probably has a very clear picture in his mind's eye of an afternoon at a seaside resort when he watched middle and upper class people "enjoying themselves", listened to inane conversations, and became conscious of their lack of vitality and real joy of life. This poem follows immediately upon the dedication to Christopher Isherwood, and Isherwood's book Lions and Shadows does contain a fervently bitter description of such an afternoon. But this image does not communicate such an experience to his readers.

Auden's use of special knowledge provides further difficulty. "Of stork-legged heaven-reachers" could be merely a vivid physical picture of a mental state, but it becomes more effective with knowledge of Homer Lane, and his claim that psychic states produce such physical results. For instance, Auden once remarked that Spender's 6'3 was the result of trying to reach heaven. Verse 4 is also dependent on Homer Lane imagery.

1. p. 244
2. Ibid, p. 303
If you get wise to the rich, yet refuse to become anarchistic, or to be afraid, you have a chance of becoming healthy-minded - and if you are 'pure in heart' said Lane, you won't be infected. But the other alternative is also presented: "Or will you choose to dance attendance on death, by supporting capitalism?" referring to Auden's belief that a death wish predominates among many members of the upper and middle class, due to their unwillingness to make a vital change in society.

Salute with soldiers' wives
When the flag waves

is an example of the way in which Auden uses a particular detail to stand for a general attitude. Similarly "the sewing hands" is a small detail from which the reader must build up a picture of women doing fancy-work, gossiping, and fearing change.

The final verse is typical Auden telegraphese - a statement stripped of all but the essentials:

A neutralizing peace
And an average disgrace
Are honor to discover
For later other.
Such types of obscurity characterise much of Auden's earlier work. In a poem such as I the obscurity is at least partially justified by the unusual verbal pattern which is achieved, but in some of the poems, such as VI, it seriously detracts from the effect. Here thought is stripped of its connecting links, but since the thought is not particularly subtle, and the form, though appropriate to the mood, not outstanding, there is no gain to offset the lack of clarity.

The prime motivation for the obscurity found in these poems probably lay in Auden's desire to achieve the greatest possible degree of inclusion in his writing. He was seeking to compress his ideas tightly together to express more accurately the way he experienced them in his mind, and to put ideas most effectively in juxtaposition with each other, without the prosiness of explaining connections.

In the later books it will be seen that Auden made a conscious attempt to minimise illegitimate difficulty. Before turning toward simplification, however, he experimented with more extreme types of obscurity. Those experiments will be found in The Orators.

1. p. 14
2. Other explanations lie in the fact that Auden felt he was writing for a limited audience. He has also been accused of valuing obscurity for its own sake. This will be discussed in Chapter V.
One of the main aims of such modern poets as Auden is precision of image. The vagueness of image favored by some of the Romantics and pre-romantics is definitely on the proscribed list. The writer must communicate his experience in precise, specific terms. Yet in contrast to this definite image, the reader of Auden's work will find in many of his poems what might be called an undefined theme - that is, work in which the poet was prepared for the reader to find different meanings from those which were in his own mind when writing.

That Auden is prepared for diverse interpretations of his work is shown by his comments on "parables". It is possible that his interest in this type of writing was derived in part from Homer Lane.

In Lions and Shadows, Isherwood, describing how Barnard, Lane's disciple, used this form, says the only advice he ever gave was in the form of parables - stories about other people which you could apply to your
own problems if you liked

It is significant that Auden has described the social function of art in very similar terms. In "Psychology and Art," for instance, Auden wrote:

You cannot tell people what to do, you can only tell them parables; and that is what art really is, particular stories of particular people and experiences, from which each according to his immediate and peculiar needs may draw his own conclusions.

Auden is here emphasising the relation of psychology and art, and as a result overemphasises the result of art in action, but the description of art as something non-definitive, from which each "may draw his own conclusions" helps to explain such sections of his work as The Orators.

On the other hand, Auden has often protested in conversation that too much is read into his poems. An example of this is the poem beginning "Oh what is that sound which so thrills the ear?" According to Auden, this poem is simply a ballad - a description of action

1. p. 304
2. p. 18
3. He made such remarks to Strowan Robertson, a friend of his, at Michigan University in 1942, who quoted them to me, Vancouver, 1943.
4. Look Stranger, p. 20
with no allegorical or symbolical values. Yet to some readers at least this poem represents a parable of appeasement, while Grigson quoted the following lines from it to describe the outbreak of the current war:

Their feet are heavy on the floor, 
And their eyes are burning.

Actually, it is mistake for Auden to protest against such interpretations of his work, providing that those meanings are conveyed to sincere readers. As Eliot says

The reader's interpretation may differ from the author's and be equally valid - it may even be better.

and

There may be much more in a poem than the the author was aware of. The different interpretations may all be partial formulations of one thing, the ambiguities may be due to the fact that the poem means more, not less, than ordinary speech can communicate.2

However, it is possible that such interpretations are forced for the sake of tracing Auden's political or


other theories, and that conclusions thus drawn from the poems, and valid for the reader, are fastened on Auden as beliefs - which would be legitimate cause for complaint.

The Orators is a work with at least three possible fields of interpretation. These are not "levels" of interpretation in the sense that some works of art have a surface meaning and a deeper symbolic meaning, but are meanings applying to different aspects of life. While they are naturally related, they can be separated as themes, and they are expressed in such a way that any one theme might seem sufficient to a reader. At the same time, further applications than these three have been drawn from the work.¹

Charade, on the other hand, is a work with an indefinite theme. It is a story of a feud, but the cause of the fighting is lost in the past. It is as if Auden were carrying the struggle he feels everywhere about him in the world today to an emotional conclusion. Looking back to the war world of his childhood, at the contemporary world of the depression, and ahead to another war, he sees only conflict, but he is not

¹ The Orators, first published after Charade, will be discussed fully later in the chapter.
prepared to individualise any of these struggles, or to apportion blame. He is describing in fable form the collapse of civilisation or capitalism, and portraying a mental waste-land in physical terms. Eliot's references to water are echoed:

Here is no water but only rock
Rock and no water and the sandy road.  

Auden writes:

His fields are used up where the moles visit
The contours worn flat; if there show
Passage for water he will miss it.

John, the hero, expresses the death-wish of civilisation:

could I but see
These woods, these fields of green, this lively world
Sterile as moon.  

But new life will come - what kind no one can say. Only
the last line of the final chorus indicates this hope:

Give up his breath, his woman, his team;
No life to touch, though later there be
Big fruit, eagles above the stream.

The feud probably expresses fairly well Auden's

2. p. 85
3. p. 68
4. p. 85
attitude to imperialist wars: the people of both sides are ignorant of the real causes of the fighting; many of them would prefer to be pacifists but see no way out. The marriage of John and Anne could symbolise the Peace of Versailles - a peace that didn't solve anything. But the general character of the play retains a strange, adaptable vagueness.

Strangest of all the features of this play is the multiplicity of styles. There is the terseness of a heroic saga, there are parts that might resemble a boy's school story in *Chums*, there are imitations of Shakespeare - and there is poetry in Auden's own style. There seems little connection between verse like

```
Day was gone Night covered sky
Black over earth When we came there
To Brandon walls Where Red Shaw lay...
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and the chatty conversation between Kurt and Culley

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How is the Hugger going?
All right, thank you. We have not got a bad team this season.
```

or between either of these and the Shakespearean touches:

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John: Oh see, he is impatient
To pass beyond this pretty lisping time:
There'll be some crying out when he's come there.
```

1. p. 66
2. p. 64
3. p. 60
and

Last night at Hammergill
A boy was born fanged like a weasel. I am old.¹

It is unlikely that Auden used this variety of styles, as Eliot used Elizabethan poetry in "The Waste Land", to highlight the bleakness of the contemporary scene. If so, the attempt was a failure.

Equally odd is the fact that Auden moves from the point of view of schoolboys to parents and back again: when the "boys" speak as parents, it is almost as if they were boys pretending to be grown-up. A possible explanation of the juxtaposition of the epic style and the style found in boys' school stories is found in Lions and Shadows. "Weston" had enjoyed reading the Norse sagas, and one day it occurred to him that there was a close resemblance between preparatory schoolboys and the saga heroes with their feuds, their practical jokes, their dark threats conveyed in puns and riddles and deliberate understatements. This idea became the source of a private world for Auden and Isherwood, the subject for many of their jokes and fantasies. According to Isherwood,

¹. p. 65
Weston produced a short verse play in which the two worlds are so confused that it was almost impossible to say whether the characters are epic heroes or members of a shool O.T.C.

This remark could apply very well to *Charade*. Such a style must have been used mainly for the satisfaction of Auden himself, and of his close friends, since few readers would realise that Old Norse heroes are like school boys. Such a personal element, and the jarring notes of the farcical scenes (for instance, when Father Xmas enters immediately after the Chorus' best speech) inevitably detract from the play. Furthermore, it is probable that Auden was not very clear as to what he really wished to express by the fable.

In *The Orators* Auden probably knew what he wanted to express, but was not quite sure how clearly he wanted to express it. *The Orators* is a much more complex piece of work than *Charade*. It is the story of "particular people", but too often these particular people are Auden's personal friends, and matters that would be obvious to his friends are not made clear to the general reader. It is as if Auden said: "Here is their particular story, in the form in which I wish to give it. Whether or not it's clear
to you, whether you see in it what I see, you will probably be able to find material in it which will mean something to you."

It is probable that the chief value of The Orators to Auden was in the exposition of a personal problem. Yet there are two other basic themes which seem implicit in the material, and which satisfy independently of the former. One could be termed psychological, and the other political. Auden's treatment of his personal problem is of course psychological also, but it is specific, and separate from the broader psychological theme. The interwoven character of these themes can be indicated only by somewhat detailed analysis.

The plan of The Orators is as follows:

Prologue

Book I: The Initiates

1. "Address for a Prize-Day"
2. "Argument"
3. "Statement"
4. "Letter to a Wound"
5.

Book II: Journal of an Airman

Book III: Six Odes

An Epilogue.
The three themes are worked out most fully in "Journal of an Airman", and will not be found in detail in each section.

"Address for a Prize Day", which is an ambiguous interweaving of Auden's political and psychological ideas, is the death-warrant of a class delivered in the style of that class. Auden parodies the style of a speaker at a school prize giving to express his opinions on the kinds of defective lovers which our present form of society (shown in miniature in the school system) creates, and to express his denunciation of the system. The effect of this denunciation in the enemy's own terms is particularly insidious: it is as if the Headmaster's old school tie had turned into a snake and choked him. As usual, Auden combines his ideas on sickness and the need for political action, setting the key-note of the Address by the rhetorical question which the speaker puts to his audience:

What do you think about England, this country of ours where nobody is well?

"Letter to a wound" gives an insight into one of the individuals who is ill. It has been described as effecting "a sort of ironic resolution for Book I."

Here, vividly, intently, is shown the "solution", the
temporary contentment, of the diseased described in the preceding sections. This is what the perverted lovers come to. "Letter to a Wound" is like a landing, the momentary resting place of the diseased elements, their abortive solution.

But "The Letter" is a story that satisfied for its own sake. Taken in isolation, and superficially, "The Letter" could be considered a very sensitive portrait of a neurotic who has fallen in love with his illness - the story of an individual, not a class.

"When people are ill, they're wicked." said Weston to Isherwood.¹ If you refused to make use of your creative powers, you produced a cancer instead. This man, his creative powers stultified by present social conditions, has produced his own disease. It is at once a symptom and a means of escape. As a symptom of his mental illness, it should indicate to him the need for a radical change in his life. But the sick man refuses to see this. Instead, the disease becomes a source of importance, he falls in love with his own

¹. Lions and Shadows, p. 302
hurt, and conceives a strong death wish.  

But the "hero" of "The Letter", while he can be viewed as an individual, is obviously the representative of a class. He stands for the non-creative, upper classes, for capitalism in general, which Auden sees as having come to the end of its development. Here the elements shown are not those which make a strong last stand in fascism, but the weaker elements which have fallen in love with all that produces their own downfall. This idea is indicated, but not elaborated, by the remarks of the sufferer: "Looking back now to that time before I lost my health" would be the hey-day of the Victorian era. "Of course the change was really gradual. Over and over again in the early days when I was in the middle of writing a newsy letter to M, or doing tricks in the garden to amuse R. and C., you showed your resentment by a sudden bout of pain"—refers to industrial disturbance, the first indications of contradictions within the system, while "The wireless says that the frost is coming." could symbolise revolution.

1. "The Letter" is actually a realistic study of the mentality of such a man. Stekel, describing similar types, writes: "In the dreams of these patients, their illness often appears symbolised as a friend. (When treated) They dream they are going to lost an old friend, who — it is true — has hurt them, but who has been very faithful... There is always the fear of
But these parallels could be pushed too far. This is no precise allegory. Auden suggests the parallels, and then gives free rein to his imagination. His humor is personal rather than politically satiric. As a result, "The Letter" will be able to stand on its own merits, when the political situation it describes is in the past, and will be read for its ironic touches:

"We have sat here. You'd better not."¹

and the conclusion:

"Better burn this."²

It is on these levels that I find "Letter to a Wound" satisfying. Yet it is possible that they were not of initial importance to Auden. From another point of view "The Letter" can be seen as a study of a homosexual, detailing his gradual absorption in his "wound", the suffering from which increases his sensibilities and broadens his sympathy. But it is a morbid sensibility. He is a man who has neither been able to sublimate his desire, nor to accept it as natural. He resembles Gide at the time when he wrote:

losing the precious illness." Stekel, W., Disguises of Love, New York, Moffat, Yard and Co., 1922, p. 98. So in the "Letter", p. 113: "You are so quiet these days that I get quite nervous, remove the dressing. No, I am safe, you are still there."

¹ (p. 74) p. 111
² (p. 74) p. 111
³ p. 113
¹ p. 113
² op cit
I was like my own Prometheus ill-bound who could not understand how it was possible to live without an eagle; or without being devoured by it. For that matter, I unconsciously liked my eagle.

In Si le Grain ne Meurt? Gide describes how he began to come to terms with his eagle. "Journal of an Airman" is an account of Auden's similar attempt.

"The Journal" is a combination of cryptic scientific notes, psychological diagrams, verses, and diary extracts. The connections between this apparently diverse material can be indicated best by summarizing the story which emerges. To do so, however, one must omit the sections which have no connections. Reading "The Airman" is like crossing a bog where one must leap from hillock to hillock. It is a peculiarly unselective piece of writing. Its method suggests that Auden kept a notebook in which he jotted random comments, and, when writing "The Airman", imported some of this material, relevant or not, into his work. It is possible that he had a key for himself which linked some of this material, but if so, he was not concerned with conveying it to the reader. Nevertheless,

there is a coherent pattern running through "Journal of an Airman", and there is a close linking between some of the apparently random items.¹

Book II, then, is the diary of a young man who is homosexual. Auden, however, is not prepared to say so directly, but conveys the idea by snatches of the Airman's thoughts, in which Freudian symbolism plays a large part. The idea of homosexuality, as emphasised in Chapter II, is important not only for its own sake, but also because it stands for other problems of adjustment to society, and serves as a specific example in illustrating Auden's ideas on the harmful effects of repression.

The fact that the writer of "The Journal" is an airman introduces the sexual theme at once. Auden may have even remembered consciously or unconsciously the passage in Freud, where, speaking of dreams of flying, he says:

Where is the uncle who has never made a child fly by running with it across the

¹ For instance, between the Mendelian diagram, p. 121, and Auden's comments on his "real ancestor", p. 135, etc.
room with outstretched arms, or has never played at falling with it by rocking it on his knee and then suddenly straightening his leg...?...Not infrequently sexual sensations are excited by these games of movement which are quite neutral in themselves...The "exciting" games of childhood are repeated in dreams of flying, falling, reeling and the like, but the voluptuous feelings are now transformed into anxiety.

Flying is doubly important to the airman because it symbolises not only sex, but also sex cut off from current practice, "up in the air". Social disapproval of such unconventional conduct is conveyed by "the people's satisfaction at crashes. If the Lord had intended people to fly He'd have given them wings." But the Airman adds that they dream of looping the loop, etc.: signs of unsatisfied sex. He says in effect: "They disapprove of what I do, and look at the result: They're repressed!" This can also have a political meaning: "They won't take part in my revolutionary activity, but look at the mess they're in!"

And yet, he reminds himself:

You are a man, or haven't you heard
That you keep on trying to be a bird?

2. p. 121
3. McDougall, Wm., Outline of Abnormal Psychology, p. 177
4. p. 122
He feels that he should satisfy himself overtly, and not continually in dreams or by means of flying symbolism. It also implies that he should carry out necessary political action.

At the same time, the Airman continually refers to his attempts to conquer his kleptomaniac tendencies. "Yesterday positively the last time" , he writes. "Hands to remember always please." Psychoanalysts usually explain kleptomania as an unconscious substitution for a repressed sexual act.  

1. McDougall, Outline of Abnormal Psychology, p. 330

Apparently the Airman is repressing his homosexual desires, and in consequence finds himself unable to control kleptomaniac impulses. Again and again he strengthens his resolution:

Never to funk but to return everything, no matter how distasteful the explanations.

He is trying to cure by an effort of will the symptom (kleptomania) as well as the cause of the symptom, (homosexuality). But he has no success:

Again. Always the same weakness. No progress against this terrible thing.

The idea that trying to conquer a habit by will-power often simply increases the desire is part of the theory

1. McDougall, Outline of Abnormal Psychology, p. 330

2. p. 137

3. loc cit
of both Freud and Lane. Blake expressed a somewhat similar sentiment metaphorically when he wrote:

He who desires but acts not, breeds pestilence.

Starting on page 139, it is as if The Airman had decided that will-power was not getting him anywhere, and had gone to a psychiatrist to be psycho-analysed. He is talking as thoughts come into his head - an attempt at free association. At the end he says "I should have said the word by now to have convinced you." i.e. "I should have given you the clue to the repressed matter."

And he has. There is Do-a who loved to bathe before breakfast with Uncle Dick, and there is the memory of the dentist's where "Something had just been done to me without my knowledge.", recalling Freud's case of the homosexual dreamer who "then puts his hand in his mouth and draws out two of his teeth." "A hydrocephalic cry" suggests that feeling of bigness one sometimes has when falling asleep, as if blown out like a balloon, experienced also when taking gas, and possibly associated with the champagne at the uncle's flat.

"I'm coming", "I was almost there" of course have a

sexual connotation.

The episode gives further clues to his association of homosexuality with his uncle. But uncovering of the origin of his desire does not provide any solution while his desire is still unsatisfied. A little later he reports "The rose bowl from Ardencaple still unreturned". ¹

Finally, his problem is worked out symbolically by brilliant descriptions of a fantastic coup d'état.

"This coup is intended", says Spender, "to upset the private mental associations of the enemy, and thus destroy his faith in himself." ²

But who is the enemy? Auden refuses to be explicit. Basically, however, the enemy is the upper-middle-class man characterized by the face of the stone in the rain, the condor stoop, and the dead yam hand. ³ He is the pillar of society who lays down the restricting laws of behavior which Homer Lane fulminated against. He is the type who would excommunicate the airman because he is homosexual, just as he would oppose any decisive political action. The whole conclusion to the "Journal" can be understood only in relation to Auden's devotion to Homer

¹ p. 147
³ p. 129
Lane's theory. The enemy thrives on apparent "reason"; with cold conventional logic he trains children to suppress their natural impulses. But if his faith in his reason was shaken, if he began to distrust the control of his conscious mind, he would no longer be able to maintain this repression. His rigid conventions would go by the board. And the Airman would be free. Accordingly, the Airman begins breaking down the associations of the Enemy.

Practical jokes consist in upsetting these associations. They are in every sense contradictory and public, e.g., my bogus lecture to the London Truss Club. Derek's seduction of Mrs. Solomon by pretending to have been blessed by the Pope.¹

The first Day of Mobilisation is calculated to strike a devastating blow at the enemy's logical framework, the repressor of the vital force. The magnificently fantastic tactics of the Airman should destroy such framework if anything could. If every householder learns at breakfast that the most respectable pillars of society are guilty of "jingoism, keeping disorderly houses, mental cruelty, loitering, nepotism, onanism, piracy on the high seas, quixotry, romping at forbidden hours, and tea-drinking" — what is the use of listening to Mrs. Grundy any more?

¹ p. 124
But Homer Lane, in the person of the Uncle, seems to disapprove of this violent plan of action. The Airman becomes aware of his incredible blindness when he should have known that "The power of the enemy is a function of our resistance."¹

He has been trying to interfere with their lives, when one of their "enemy" qualities was that they interfered with his. And this interference on his part meant that he had to take on some of their characteristics.

That is, to be capable of fighting them, he had to repress his natural tendency to homosexuality, else "What would Derek think of me?" and "If the enemy ever got to hear of it, my whole work would be ruined."

As a result, he shows symptoms of illness - kleptomania.² His hands "stole to force a hearing": to give notice of this repression.

His experience resembled that of Gide who wrote:

My natural propensity which I was at last forced to recognise, but which I would not yet assent to, was increased by resistance; I merely strengthened it by struggling; and in despair of vanquishing it, I thought I might succeed in cheating it.³

¹ 151
² The Airman is in the position conservatives require of a man like Bertrand Russell: "You may express your ideas on marriage, but of course you must be rigidly conventional yourself if you expect us to listen to you!"
³ Gide, André, Si le Grain ne Meurt, p. 272
The Airman had also failed in controlling his desire — and in cheating it.

Finally he realises:

The true significance of my hands.
'Do not imagine that you, no more than any other conqueror, escape the mark of grossness.' They stole to force a hearing.¹

He accepts his homosexuality. This acceptance is accompanied by a feeling of absolute rightness, of certainty that it is the solution of all his problems. Gide's experience was similar: he had a sense of light, of almost religious sublimity, when he could say finally "I resist no longer".²

The Airman allows himself "Three days to break a lifetime's pride." His pride in his resistance had been unjustified, harmful. So Gide:

At last I realised how much pride lay concealed in this resistance of mine to what I had once called temptation, but which I called so no longer, now that I had ceased to fight against it.³

The Airman therefore concludes that rather than attempting to affect the lives of others, he must adjust his own.

The psychological side of this fable, then,

¹. p. 151
². Si le Grain ne Meurt, p. 280
³. op cit, p. 271
enabled Auden to express the working out of his private problem: what attitude should he take toward his homosexuality? - repress it? try to shock the world until they give up their moral code? or take it naturally? He decides that accepting it, ceasing to struggle against it, is the only feasible and healthy solution.

In broader terms the fable also enabled him to express Homer Lane's psychological theories. The significance of the Airman is not limited to the specific repression resulting from homosexuality, but to all the types of repression found in modern society. "The Journal" dramatises Lane's theory that the repressed impulses are the ones that have to be followed out. "God just loves us all, but means to be obeyed."

Shock-tactics are no help. The Airman's position during the coup d'état is very close to that of the Surrealists, when they planned to destroy the associations of the capitalist class by means of surrealist paintings. Scarfe, describing this plan, says:

Early in their development the surrealists adopted Marx and Engels, but hardly M. Stalin, and asserted that by spiritual means they would achieve the liberation of the human mind, the demolition of the bourgeois mentality, by upsetting all pre-
conceived capitalist ideas of the world, thus hastening the progress to the ideal communist state of life.¹

This attempted process is exactly what the Airman envisioned. His coup d'état closely resembles a surrealist field day. "The Journal" itself, however, is more a dramatisation of surrealist techniques than an employment of them. It is too tightly knit to be a product of the unconscious. Where free association occurs it is used only within a dramatic framework. But in Parts II and III of Book I of The Orators, Auden seems to have let go the reins. In Lions and Shadows, Isherwood describes how he and "Chalmers" used to practice automatic writing, and the samples which Isherwood prints are not very different in style from Parts II and III. It is quite likely that they initiated Auden into the game. Isherwood admitted that he cheated, and the stricter surrealists would probably accuse Auden of doing the same. Yet considering that his dominant ideas would recur naturally even in "unconscious" writing, Parts II and III might require little editing, since the recurrence of his ideas of a leader, of conflict, and of amusing psychological comment are the only logical pattern that emerges. If the "Journal of an Airman" was partially

¹ Scarfe, F., Auden and After, p. 146
intended as a dramatisation of surrealist methods, the Airman's rejection of shock-tactics would parallel Auden's abandonment of a strongly surrealist style in poetry.

Running through the psychological themes are political implications. Auden's condemnation of society psychologically is inevitably linked with political criticism. The enemy who would criticise Auden for deviation from homosexuality is also the conservative type who would oppose revolution. He represents the class whom Auden holds responsible for wars:

His collar was spotless; he talked very well,
He spoke of our homes and duty and we fell.

The Airman and his friends represent the small group who challenge the status quo. Auden's treatment of these individualistic, non-proletarian revolutionary characters is typical of him: while accepting many of the principles of Marx, Auden habitually modified and interpreted them to suit his own temperament.

These political implications, however, are not carried through consistently to the end, with its apparent advocacy of pacifist theory:
1. The power of the enemy is a function of our resistance, therefore

2. The only efficient way to destroy it - self-destruction, the sacrifice of all resistance, reducing him to the state of a man trying to walk on a frictionless surface.

3. Conquest can only proceed by absorption of, i.e., infection by, the conquered. The true significance of my hands. 'Do not imagine that you, no more than any other conqueror, escape the mark of grossness'. They stole to force a hearing.

The literal meaning of this, applied politically, would indicate either an abandonment of belief in revolutionary violence, or the advocacy of passive resistance, in opposition even to fascism. Neither is consistent with Auden's beliefs as expressed in his other work at the time, and it seems probable that in expressing his psychological themes he simply dropped the political parallel when it failed to coincide with his more urgent ideas.

In addition to the meanings already discussed, there is Spender's application of The Journal. To him it expresses the plight of the modern artist, and while it is uncertain whether or not Auden intended such a parallel, it is interesting as an example of the

1. p. 151
variety of meanings the work has for different people.

In The Destructive Element Spender wrote:

The Airman is particularly interesting because he is, in fact, in much the same position as the contemporary writer who hates the social system under which he exists and lives, and writes in a dream of violence on behalf of himself and his friends. He is ignored by the greatest part of society, and neither directly nor indirectly does his work penetrate to it. Yet he may represent the most intelligent and critical forces in society. Supposing that he is living in a society that is self-destructive and actively preparing for war, he seemsst to be completely powerless. His elimination is no loss to society, as Fascist governments have discovered who have been able to dispose of all the groups representing culture in their countries, because this culture had no deep roots in the life of the whole people. The airman and the artist is, like Roderick Hudson, just dangerously and acutely himself, apart from the rest of the world, isolated in his sensibility. Yet without him civilisation is only a name.

He has, therefore, like the airman, got to defeat the enemy. There are two methods of attack. The first is to become an active political agent, to take part in the immense practical joke of destruction. But then he is using the enemy's own weapons; he will become an enemy to the enemy; and, besides that, his hands steal. The second is to learn how he may escape from his own isolation; not to resist the enemy, but to absorb him. To make an art that is infected by - that is about - society, and which it is impossible for society to discard, because it is essentially a part of it; and to make it a part which will transform the whole.¹

¹ p. 273
That such writing as is found in *The Orators* can become a parlor game for intellectual snobs is only too evident. *The Orators* was an interesting experiment, but it is significant that Auden did not carry this line of experiment any further. What is more, in indicating those sections of his work of which he no longer approves, Auden has crossed out the more personal parts of "Journal of an Airman", for instance the section made up of free association, beginning "I'm afraid it sounds more like a fairy-story..."1

In connection with such writing as this, where the reader cannot be sure of the writer's intention, it is too easy to criticise unfairly, but it seems justifiable to say that where Auden tends to obscure his meaning simply because he does not really wish to be understood. In spite of the resolution of conflict suggested by the conclusion of "The Airman" Auden is not prepared to discuss the problem of homosexuality normally. He is half eager to flaunt himself, and half determined to keep the whole thing a secret. Now he stands out in clear view, now resorts to camouflage. As a result the writing falls between two

1. p. 139
stools. Thus the two alternatives (flaunting and concealment) are not only described in The Orators, they are demonstrated in the writing, and the decision arrived at in the book cannot yet be put into effect in practice. Obviously all such confusion makes for weakness in a poem. While the ambiguity is interesting, and allows for individual interpretation, it is sometimes a product of weakness, not of design. It is one thing to experience a conflict, and to express it, with all its conflicting values. It is another to allow social inhibitions to prevent you from expressing that conflict clearly. That is a violation of Auden's own definition: "The clear expression of mixed feelings", and is the basic criticism which must be made of The Orators.
Chapter V

THE TREND TOWARD SIMPLICITY - LOOK STRANGER

One thing was immediately obvious after the publication of Auden's Poems: that he was advocating a revolution which would involve, and be dependent on, the masses of the people. Why, many asked, does a man holding such beliefs not write for a wider audience? Such a question does not imply that he should write propaganda - Auden himself had written:

Poetry is not concerned with telling people what to do, but with extending our knowledge of good and evil, perhaps making the necessity for action more urgent, and its urgency more clear, but only leading us to the point where it is possible for us to make a rational and moral choice. 1

But if he is concerned with thus clarifying issues, it is more important that this should be done for a large group than a small one.

That Auden is aware of this is shown by his introduction to the Poet's Tongue:

Artistic creations may be produced by individuals, and because their work is only appreciated by a few it does not necessarily follow that it is not good; but a universal art can only be the product of a community united in sympathy, sense of worth and aspiration; and it is improbable that the artist can do his best except in such a society. 2

He was facing a situation similar to that which caused William Morris to write:

2. loc cit.
Popular art has no chance of a healthy life, or indeed of a life at all, till we are on our way to fill up this terrible gap between riches and poverty. Doubtless many things will go towards filling it up, and if art must be one of those things, let it go. What business have we with art at all, unless all can share it? I am not afraid but that it will rise from the dead, whatever else lies there.

But throwing art away would not close up that gap, as when the Roman patriot jumped armed into the abyss.

The issue was rather between a difficult poetry, and one which could appeal to a wide audience.

Auden would have replied "There is no audience."

Spender had said "At Christmas poetry is a necktie." and Auden decided not to thrust in gifts where they were not wanted. Accordingly he started writing for a relatively narrow group of friends. His attitude at this time is indicated by such a dedication as that to The Orators:

Private faces in public places
Are wiser and nicer
Than public faces in private places.¹

and in "Letter to Lord Byron":

Art, if it doesn't start there, at least ends
Whether aesthetics like the thought or not,
In an attempt to entertain our friends;
And our first problem is to realise what
Peculiar friends the modern artist's got.²

¹ Poems, p. 87
² p. 103
Auden was not satisfied to remain cooped up with his peculiar friends. Besides, even strangers were interested. So a process of simplification did set in. How much this was due to a conscious desire to widen his audience, how much to an ebullience which delighted to experiment with diverse forms, no outsider can tell. His use of rhyme royal and ballad metres is probably due to the latter cause, but the whole trend of simplification (up to the devil's dialectics of The Double Man) must in part be due to the first desire. That his shift in attitude had some effect can be seen in Scarfe's tribute:

...it is Auden who broke down the new snobbery of intellectualism which was in danger of creating a minority poetry. He also enlarged, quite definitely, the poetry-reading public.

But this remark should be qualified. It is true that Auden broke down part of the snobbery of intellectualism in poetry, but it was basically a snobbery of content that he broke down, not of technique. At least until the Double Man, with its French rhymes, irreverent notes, and paraphrased quotations, he substituted modern everyday properties for the fashionably obscure literary references. But while he did experiment with easily understood ballad forms, the major effect of his style has been in the direction of intellectual obscurity.

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Eliot says "Poets ...at present must be difficult. Our civilisation comprehends great variety and complexity, and this variety and complexity, playing upon a refined sensibility, must produce various and complex results. The poet must become more and more comprehensive, more allusive, more indirect, in order to force, to dislocate, if necessary, language into his meaning."¹

Whether or not difficulty is inevitable, it is fairly evident that no poetry of wide appeal and yet high quality is being written.² Yet how tremendously valuable, and how eagerly welcomed poetry that was at once simple and honest would be. For it cannot be said that there is no audience for easily understood poetry that touches vital interests.³

---


2. The faults of poets such as Sandburg or Millay, who have attempted to meet this demand are mainly those of exclusion; where Sandburg attempts inclusion, he is usually unable to assimilate diversity into a poetic whole.

3. A local and recent example is seen in the eagerness with which working class progressives read the verses of a man like Joe Wallace, a Canadian who recently published a book of verse entitled Night is Ended, Winnipeg, Contemporary Publishers, 1942. Becoming acquainted with his work because they know he was willing to suffer for his progressive beliefs in an internment camp, such readers value his verses because they feel they're "true", they're "real", failing to realise that
Assuming, however, that poetry of inclusion, written at present, may require a subtle and somewhat difficult style, what place is there for simpler poetry? Is Cowley, for instance, justified in accusing Auden of "whispering to a crowd", in writing:

Looking back on the decade, one feels that the "social" poetry would have been more effective if they had used suitable techniques - for example, those of ballad or folksong or Skeltonian doggerel or neat Swiftian satire.\footnote{Cowley, M., "Spender and Auden", \textit{New Republic}, 80, Sept. 26, 1934, p. 189-90.}

The forms he suggests might have been more "effective", but would they have produced as good poetry? The value of such poetry would depend on whether or not, by simplifying, it reduced itself to an emotional appeal requiring a sympathetic audience. For example, the religious poetry of Donne and several of his contemporaries has an appeal for atheists that "Crossing the Bar", a popular poem, could never have.

\textit{\footnote{cont'd: that in their simplicity they are false to experience - to Wallace's experience, and to his readers. Yet if Wallace was to be honest in his writing, and if he were capable of expressing adequately the actual conflicts of his mind, his work might become far more complex than Auden's, since his whole life is a tremendous imperfect synthesis: he is at once a member of the Communist Party and the Catholic Church.}
Auden had experimented with such forms, and in Poems they were certainly not among his most successful work. Here, an attempt to write down to people placed side by side with poems made difficult by the rich, compressed fusion of attitudes. The book also included poems made difficult for clique reasons, poems which cut themselves off in advance from a wide audience for fear there was none. Both the writing down and the clique writing were of course unfortunate. Auden might have remembered that Lenin deprecated clique art, and criticised Mayakovsky for becoming too esoteric, but he should also have remembered that Lenin said that the standards of art should not be lowered to make a wide appeal; education was necessary; "bring the people up to the art." 2

In the two books which followed, Look Stranger, and Another Time, Auden attempted to widen his audience without making his poetry superficial. To do so, he took two roads: the writing of subtle poems, which are less compressed, less elliptical, than those of the first two books, and which are accompanied by increase in lyricism,

1. An example is "Get there if you can and see the land you once were proud to own" with its ironic echo of "Locksley Hall". Auden has since commented that this is one of the poems he wants forgotten. He feels the same about "It's no use raising a shout", a poem whose deliberate banality is appropriate to the characterisation, but which remains banality. He has indicated the revisions which he wishes made in any new edition of his work, in copies of his books belonging to Strowan Robertson, Vancouver.

2. Quoted by Eastman, M., Artists In Uniform, pp. 217 seq.
and secondly, the writing of conversational poems, which are often sprawling and chatty, but which manage to pass without jarring from informal personal pictures of the poet to impressive and universal comment. Both types rely on direct statement, rather than implication, far more than most of the writing in Poems, and the result is sometimes diffused and wordy, but that this is not necessarily so is shown by some of the more perfect lyrics.

The change in manner is well illustrated by the Prologue, which is definitely less dramatic, more lyrical and descriptive than comparable poems in the first two books. It is an invocation to "love" considered as "a vast process of life working itself out through generations and centuries" 2 - Auden's view of evolution - and as such can be readily contrasted with Poem 111 of the 1930 poems, in which the process of evolution is represented as speaking to a member of the capitalist class.

Poem 111 is a dramatic monologue. The tone of the speaker shifts through sympathetic understanding, pride, humorous mocking, scientific interest, and emphatic warning. It contrasts the apparently successful, intensely personal adjustments of the capitalist class through psychoanalysis, etc.

1. Look Stranger, p. 11
2. Lehman, J., New Writing in Europe, Penguin Books, 1934, p. 35
3. p. 10
Remembering everything you can confess,
Making the most of firelight, of hours of fuss...
with the impersonal inevitability of their downfall. It is ambiguous because it applies the broader idea of the evolution of species in the biological sense to a class of men in the political sense. Yet this is not a use of pathetic fallacy, or forced metaphor, to prove a political conclusion. The development of man's organization within a century is evolution, just as is biological development within a period of aeons.

The Prologue, on the other hand, is outstanding, not because of such a dramatic quality, but because of word-patterns:

Inspire them with such a longing as will make his thought 
Alive like patterns a murmuration of starlings Rising in joy over wolds unwittingly weave;
vivid imagery:

Leaving the furnaces gasping in the impossible air,

and the beautiful and impressive conclusion:

And out of the Future into actual History, 
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.
The change is not only in construction. "The unwavering keel" is much more characteristic of these poems than of the earlier ones. Here the pressure of omnipresent conflict lessens. Auden always accepted the atmosphere of conflict - sometimes with the air of a boy playing cops and robbers, sometimes bitterly - but here his acceptance has a different character. He writes as one who knows that conflict is inevitable, but appreciates a lull that may never come again - a lull that enables him to enjoy England and love and lyrical poetry:

That later we, though parted then
May still recall these evenings when
Fear gave his watch no look;
The lion grief's loped from the shade
And on our knees their muzzles laid,
And Death put down his book. 1

Now he is concerned not only with England, "this country of ours where no one is well", but with England's guilt in the international field, which presents an imminent threat to temporary peace:

Nor ask what doubtful act allows
Our freedom in this English house,
Our picnics in the sun. 2

But this turning outward is accompanied by a lessening of the internal conflict over revolution. This conflict can be admitted, and the result accepted calmly, as something inevitable, and known to be better:
For what by nature and by training
We loved, has little strength remaining:
    Though we would gladly give
The Oxford colleges, Big Ben,
And all the birds in Wicken Fen,
    It has no wish to live.

Soon through the dykes of our content
The crumpling flood will force a rent,
    And, taller than a tree,
Hold sudden death before our eyes
Whose river-dreams long hid the size
    And vigours of the sea.¹

And he recognizes that:

These moods give no permission to be idle,
For men are changed by what they do.²

Thus his thoughts on revolution are stated simply and
directly. What difficulty there is, is provided by the
homosexual theme. Here too he uses more direct statement
than formerly, but its significance is not always
immediately clear simply because he is expressing ex­
periences seldom honestly described. As described in
Chaper 11, it becomes a symbol for political and social
dissatisfaction:

    But now it has no innocence at all;
    It is the isolation and the fear,
    The mood itself.

Here the emotion is unfamiliar to most readers, but
effective because sensitively expressed, and because it is
capable of expressing the wider theme. It is also the
source of some beautiful lyrics, which trace the nature of
his love. These are grave, finished, and musical.

¹. p. 15
². p. 46
Some have a metaphysical quality. In A Hope for Poetry Day Lewis wrotethat "the strength of the lyric lies in the complete statement of a single selected facet of experience. Logic, wit, introspection, emotional complexity are alike foreign to it." It is not surprising that Auden accepts no such limited definition of the lyric. In Look Stranger it is true that he abandons the complex logic of the shortlined poems of the first book, but even those poems which are primarily lyrical have a background of "introspection and emotional complexity" which removes them far from the Georgian variety. Typical is XXVII which begins:

Fish in the unruffled lakes
The swarming colours wear...

a beautiful love-poem containing lines such as:

We must weep and sing
Duty's conscious wrong,
THE Devil in the clock,
The Goodness carefully worn
For atonement or for luck;

which indicate the "trained self-consciousness" which Auden seldom loses. This attitude is shown in the choice of words; as in the intellectually startling, yet philosophically correct (though transferred) adjective "innocent" in the following lines from the same poem:

And the great lion walks
Through his innocent grove.

1. p. 67
2. p. 60
In a class with the perfection of this poem are the
Songs for Benjamin Britten,¹ the song beginning "Let the
florid music praise", ² the beautiful "Look, stranger, at
this island now" ³ and the poem beginning "Now the leaves
are falling fast" ⁴ with its conclusion:

Starving through the leafless wood
Trolls run scolding for their food;
And the nightingale is dumb,
And the angel will not come.

Cold, impossible, ahead
Lifts the mountain's lovely head
Whose white waterfall could bless
Travellers in their last distress.

But the new clarity in the more conversational poems
is accompanied by a diffuseness very different from the
compressed poems of the first book. While the exact
meaning is much clearer, the range of implication is
limited, and the wordiness often causes unsatisfactory
flat spots in the poetry.

In 1934, Day Lewis wrote:

The deliberate insertion into a lyrical
context of pieces of slang and 'prosaic'
words: the juxtaposition of highly-
charged 'poetical' images and dull,
commonplace images, the use of bathos and of
carefully selected banalities; all these
have been taken over from the Symbolists,
largely through the instrumentality of
Eliot, and the verse that results offers an
uneven, conversational surface shot through
with gleams of lyricism rather than a
uniformly lyrical texture. ⁵

¹ p. 53 ⁵ Day Lewis, C., A Hope for Poetry, Oxford,
² p. 18  B. Blackwell, 1936, p. 35
³ p. 19 ⁴
This was written before the publication of *Look Stranger*, but the final half-sentence applies very well to many of these poems. Sometimes this unevenness is successful, as when Auden passes from the conversational:

> This then my birthday wish for you, as now
> From the narrow window of my fourth floor room
> I smoke into the night....

...to the mixed metaphor:

> The little pianos are closed, and a clock strikes.
> And all sway forward on the dangerous flood
> Of history, that never sleeps or dies,
> And, held one moment, burns the hand. 1

But sometimes the patches of 'flatness' detract seriously from the merit of the work as poetry. This use of commonplace material is very different from Eliot's *Prufrock*, where squalor and drabness is an important part of the poem. It is not Auden's use of 'unpoetical' material that provides flat spots, but the lack of metaphor, the prosaic tone, the carelessness in choosing the sounds of the words, which causes patches of dullness, so that the reader dismisses the first two stanzas of *X*, as versified prose, while accepting the next two lines:

> But deaf to prophecy or China's drum
> The blood moves strangely in its moving home, 2

---

1. p. 66
2. p. 28
because of the pattern of the vowels. This "alternation of flatness and lyricism" is noticeable in II, X, XVII, and XXX.

It is true, as Auden maintains, that chat belongs to poetry as well as incantation or lyrical statement, but it does not necessarily result in as good poetry. When he simplifies, Auden often becomes too careless. His doggerel can be witty:

The expert designing the long-range gun
To exterminate everyone under the sun,
Would like to get out but can only mutter
'What can I do? It's my bread and butter.'

But it can also contain such lines as:

Gosh, to look at we're no great catch;
History seems to have struck a bad patch.

which, even accepted as deliberate banality, seems a very bad patch indeed.

Representative of Auden's determination to eliminate unnecessary obscurity is the fact that personal imagery of a type which would not communicate his idea clearly to the reader has been greatly reduced. For instance, in Poem XXX, to Christopher Isherwood, he describes the time when:

Our hopes were set still on the spies' career,
Prizing the glasses and the old felt hat.

The earlier Auden would have spirited in the glasses and the old felt hat without the explanation.

1. p. 47
2. loc. cit.
3. p. 64
The great variety found in each of Auden's books means that generalisations applied to him will almost always leave loop-holes. For this reason it is impossible to give a satisfying summary of conclusions in each chapter. One can only follow Auden off on his various tangents, seeking to point out the success or failure of the methods with which he experiments. But on sitting back to take stock, one is confronted with a series of tracks in the sand which wander into the distance in many directions. In Look Stranger, for instance, Auden wrote more poems whose most important characteristic is their lyrical quality. To achieve greater clarity he wrote with less compression of thought than he did in his earlier poems, and made a deliberate attempt to widen his audience. But his changes in technique cannot be seen as part of a progressive pattern of development, carried on in the books which follow. Auden advances by zigs and zags, not in a straight line. On the completion of one book, Auden seems to turn immediately to experimentation with new techniques. The search for increased clarity is thus the only important characteristic which Look Stranger shares with its successor Another Time.
Chapter VI

"ANOTHER TIME"

Another Time is a further demonstration of Auden's amazing versatility. In this book he speaks in varying voices to a far wider audience than ever before. This involves both losses and gains. "Spain" well represents the latter.

If one had to prove through a single poem the genius and contemporary importance of Auden that poem might well be "Spain". Here Auden's historical sense makes possible an excellent synthesis of past, present, and future, which results in a maintenance of perspective, and yet in a strong focus on the important moment.

In the first six verses, Auden with brilliant discernment presents a picture of the social and economic development of man in the time that he continually reminds us is past, because now the present is so vitally important. Only a person who understood the nature and interrelationships of all those social and economic forces which have influenced the course of man's development could attempt to highlight this development as Auden has. And few could succeed in doing so within so short a compass. The effect of the details selected
is extraordinarily vivid.

Yesterday all the past. The language of size
Spreading to China along the trade-routes; the
diffusion
Of the counting-frame and the cromlech;
Yesterday the shadow-reckoning in the sunny
climates.

.....

Yesterday the abolition of fairies and giants;
The fortress like a motionless eagle eyeing the
valley,
The chapel built in the forest;
Yesterday the carving of angels and of frightening
gargoyles.

.....

Yesterday the belief in the absolute value of
Greek;
The fall of the curtain upon the death of a hero;
Yesterday the prayer to the sunset,
And the adoration of madmen. But today today the
struggle.

Then swiftly Auden comes to the present, and emphasises
again the immediate issue: "But today the struggle."

First he shows how the struggle in Spain touches
everyone, regardless of whether they will it or not.
It touches the poet "startled among the pines"; the
scientist at his research, anxious about his friends;
it affects the masses, "the poor in their fireless
lodgings". Men call for miraculous help, but life
hurls back the challenge:
'0 no, I am not the Mover, 
Not to-day, not to you. To you I'm the 

'Yes-man, the bar-companion, the easily-duped: 
I am whatever you do; I am your vow to be 
Good, your humorous story; 
I am your business voice; I am your marriage. 

'What's your proposal? To build the Just City? 
I will. 
I agree. Or is it the suicide pact, the 
romantic 
Death? Very well, I accept, for 
I am your choice, your decision: yes, I am Spain.'

Auden's view of the motives of those who fought in Spain is inclusive. True, many are fighting to "build the Just City", but others fight because they are adventurers, or because they are indifferent to, or even anxious for death. And many ignore the urgency of the call, who will eventually face the consequences. Auden pictures those who come to 

that arid square, the fragment nipped off from hot Soldered so crudely to inventive Europe, 

men who "clung like burrs to the long expresses," 

travelling by way of the unjust lands. 

As he does not falsify motives, so he does not romanticise the job itself. The impulses opposed to action are incorporated into the poem. These are not only the dignified and impressive:
Today the inevitable increase in the chances of death;  
The conscious acceptance of guilt in the fact of murder.

They include also:

the expending of powers

On the flat ephemeral pamphlet and the boring meeting.

-aspects of action often more likely to discourage men than the thought of death.

The poet is impersonal, in Richards' sense, but the effect on the reader is profoundly emotional. There is no glorification of the Loyalists, nor even mention of their name. "Spain" does not urge any belief - simply the acceptance of necessity and the necessity of action. If siding with the Loyalists means to the reader the continuation of the best in the past described, if it is the necessary step to the future, then that is what "life" requires. The devices of the poem - the repetition of "yesterday..." and the liturgical effect of the repeated "But today the struggle" stress the urgency of decision. But the decision belongs to each individual. Auden

1. See p. 6 of this essay.
concludes:

The stars are dead; the animals will not look:
We are left alone with out-day, and the time
is short and
History to the defeated
May say Alas but cannot help or pardon.

Without rhetoric, with clear understanding of the issues
involved, Auden has produced what is probably the finest
anti-fascist poem yet written.

In contrast to "Spain", with its pattern of
assimilation, is the group of poems which Auden labels
"Lighter Poems". These include the bitter ballads of
Miss Gee, James Honeyman, and Victor, songs, satire,
and blues. Misled by the caption, Scarfe says:

for instance, there is the ballad of John
Honeyman, who invented an explosive and was
obliged to sell it to a foreign power, the
result being that he and his family were
wiped out by his own invention. Here Auden
laughs loudly, and we are also invited to
laugh. But we reflect: the struggle for
education by John Honeyman, far from being
ridiculous, is pathetic, and is typical
of thousands of struggling young men today.
And the fact that scientific talent should
be wasted in creating engines of destruction
is no laughing matter. And the fact that
such things can be bought and sold, and

1. p. 73
2. p. 76
3. p. 82
used against victims who, by force of circumstance, connived at their invention and production, is one of the greatest tragedies of modern times.

But Auden knew the tragedy involved - that is the reason for his preoccupation with politics - and while he mocks, it is bitter mocking, made more effective by the understatement of the old ballads (the dying man always said "I'm weary wi' hunting, and fain would lie down") and by the contrast between the feeling of inevitability and fate of the old ballads, and the social responsibility of the modern tragedy. Scarfe might also label the plight of "Miss Gee" pathetic - Auden would call it tragic. So is the Frankie and Johnnie story of Victor. These poems are included under the heading of "Lighter Poems" not because they are thoroughly humorous or carefree, but because their treatment is slighter than that of the other poems.

The rest of the poems are different both from "Spain", and from the "Lighter Poems". "Spain" does not, in a sense, belong in the book. For it is a

1. Scarfe, F., Auden and After, p. 16
poem of certainty, of passionate conviction, (a feeling which is implied, but never stated), and in the rest of the book it becomes evident that Auden has abandoned his certainties. As a result the book is more general, more scattered in its interests, than those which preceded it. Because Auden lacks certainty in his own life (even a certainty divided by conflicts) he now turns to the lives of others, to noting their achievements and failures. He is not groping in these poems; he is not yet suffering from any feeling of rootlessness. But he prefers to linger in territory where his indecision as to the best form of social action will not be too acutely felt. He turns to analysis of character, and of individual adjustment, writing poems on Matthew Arnold, Pascal, Voltaire, Lear, Housman, and others. The book also includes elegies on Freud, Toller, and Yeats.

For this type of writing he has peculiar qualifications, and also, at the time, disadvantages. He is fitted to be what Spender has called "an unofficial poet laureate" simply because of the structure of inclusion which characterises his work. Official poet-laureatehood is

1. It is possible only in a limited sense to say that Auden ever had certainties', but he had beliefs about which he felt very strongly, giving them the quality of certainty, even though they were opposed by other impulses.
is too often concerned with the exploitation of one impulse - the correct emotion. Not so Auden. It is his desire for inclusion which makes his elegy in memory of Sigmund Freud so good. His feeling for Freud is strong, but it does not blind him to his human weaknesses; they are necessary for a complete picture.

In many of the other poems in this book, however, Auden has turned away from the subjects which have the deepest meaning for him, to topics which interest him, possibly greatly, but in connection with which he does not feel any strong emotion. As a result he sometimes indulges in a superficial cleverness which adds nothing to the poetry. The most important characteristic of these poems is his use of witty metaphor - in some cases, the poem is the metaphor - but it is not necessarily used, as in the best metaphysical poetry, as a means to a serious intensity, simply because there is no emotion of intensity in the poems. There is only the play of the intellect.

In the sequence "In Tims of War" metaphor plays an

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1. This sonnet sequence is contained in Journey to a War, and will be discussed fully in Chapter VIII. Its imagery is discussed here because it provides a useful contrast to the imagery found in Another Time. For the same reason the sequence called "The Quest" which is found in The Double Man is discussed later in this chapter.
equally important part, but there his consciousness of
the urgency of the human situation prevented Auden from
showing off. The imagery was thoroughly functional.
An example is the simile in the poem describing the
unknown Chinese soldier, which begins

Far from the heart of culture he was used:
Abandoned by his general and his lice,
and continues

(he) added meaning like a comma, when
He turned to dust in China...¹

The phrase places the man better than any other figure
could do, because of the shifting character of the
symbol. For commas often are ignored, as the coolie has
been all his life. But every schoolboy knows jokes
illustrating the importance of the comma. (The teacher (,)
said the inspector (,) is a fool) So in crisis the
importance of the man changed. Alone, that would be
ironic and tragic. But it is not importance, alone, but
significance, that the coolie like a comma gives to
the sentence of his rulers, and it is to that significance
that Auden pays tribute.

¹ p. 276
Sonnet XV, describing the pilots of Japanese bombers, contains a type of simile which fulfills a double function:

Engines bear them through the sky: they're free
And isolated like the very rich;
Remote like savants, they can only see
The breathing city as a target which
Requires their skill...

Both the phrases "like the very rich," and "remote like savants" illustrate the airmen, but they also indicate that the rich in their isolation, and abstract thinkers, when they eschew responsibility, can do as much harm as pilots bombing cities.

Thus the imagery plays a vital part in giving this poetry structure of inclusion. It makes possible the expression of attitudes which would be very difficult to express in any other way.

Some of the Another Time imagery is as successful as this. But sometimes it has the "quaintness" of

By mourning tongues
The death of the poet was kept from his poems,² or the inappropriateness of

While elected by the heart

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1. p. 273
2. Another Time, p. 107
Out of sentiment, a lamb
With haemorrhages night and day
Saved enthusiastic souls,¹

which is not irony, but crude satire.

In these poems Auden has carried further the devices
used in "In Time of War": the personifying of emotions
or abstractions as in

His gift knew what he was - a dark disordered
city.²

and

The crooked custom take its final turning
Into the truth it always meant to reach.³

or the expression of an abstract idea in physical terms:

Toward the end he sailed into an extraordinary
mildness,
And anchored in his home and reached his wife
And rode within the harbor of her hand...⁴

Sometimes he uses slang effectively:

(he) put the money of his feelings on
The uncritical relations of the dead,⁵

while sometimes he uses personification to indicate that
a man is acted upon by his inherited characteristics:

Yet like a lucky orphan he had been discovered
And instantly adopted by a Gift.⁶

Such devices make for concreteness and compression,

¹. Another Time, p. 122
². Ibid, p. 58
³. Ibid, p. 39
⁴. Ibid, p. 35
⁵. Ibid, p. 24
⁶. Ibid, p. 38
and make possible the expression of subtle analysis of character without prosiness. But this use of figurative language is not always functional. For instance,

But no lie has only friends
Too polite to ask for proof

is merely a personalised way of stating a fact, to which metaphor adds little. Here the device is little more than a trick, which becomes wearing.

This personifying of abstractions is carried to an extreme in the sonnets (or semi-sonnets) of the Double Man. Here an abstract idea is conveyed not in terms of the intellectual milieu in which it would work itself out, but by a description of a physical event. Nothing is described in terms of itself. For instance, preparation for revolution is described in terms of a party of explorers:

All had been ordered weeks before the start
From the best firms at such work; instruments
To take the measure of all queer events,
And drugs to move the bowels or the heart.

A watch, of course, to watch impatience fly,
Lamps for the dark and shades against the sun;
Foreboding too, insisted on a gun
And colored beads to soothe a savage eye.

1. p. 122
2. The Double Man, p. 166
These devices provide a peculiarly satisfying surface for these poems, but they have a quality which makes one wary of a trick. For many of the sonnets are little more than surface, while the devices they employ sometimes give an impression of profundity. At the same time they distract the reader from the initiating idea. This is not to disparage their attractiveness. "The Average"¹, for instance, contains an extremely simple observation, stated in straightforward terms in the first two verses:

His peasant parents killed themselves with toil
To let their darling leave a stingy soil
For any of those smart professions which
Encourage shallow breathing, and grow rich.

The pressure of their fond ambition made
Their shy and country-loving child afraid
No sensible career was good enough,
Only a hero could deserve such love.

But the conclusion is made vivid by the physical image:

So here he was without maps or supplies,
A hundred miles from any decent town;
The desert glaring into his blood-shot eyes;

The silence roared displeasure; looking down,
He saw the shadow of an Average Man
Attempting the Exceptional, and ran.

The conclusion of The Door"² is also particularly effective:

By happening to be open once, it made
Enormous Alice see a wonderland

1. The Double Man, p. 175
2. Ibid, p. 165
That waited for her in the sunshine, and, 
Simply by being tiny, made her cry.

But some, while vivid, seem the product of unimportant, 
even immature thought (for instance "The Lucky\textsuperscript{1}"), and 
the majority seem to make pretensions of saying more 
than they really do. Read singly, this might not seem 
serious, but as a sequence, the impression that Auden 
has built up a "false front" for these poems, grows. 
In such cases the figurative language does not con­
tribute particularly to the structure of inclusion; the 
image is used for its own sake, (as in "The Average"), 
not because it is the best way of expressing the idea.

Another Time is probably the most diversified of 
Auden's books. In it his talent has ranged from mocking 
ballads to tender madrigals, from such an extremely 
beautiful love lyric as "Lay your sleeping head, my 
love"\textsuperscript{2}, to sincere elegies. In many poems Auden's ideal 
of inclusion has been less zealously sought than in his 
former work; this has enabled him to write lighter poems. 
Sometimes the central impulse of his poetry has been 
dissipated by superficial cleverness. But at his best, 
as in "Spain", and the elegy to Freud, he has achieved 
 inclusion with a new clarity and effectiveness.

\footnotesize{\begin{tabular}{l}
1. The Double Man, p. 179 \\
2. p. 43.
\end{tabular}}
Chapter VII

SATIRE AND SYNTHESIS

It is almost inevitable that Auden should write social and political satire, but some of the very qualities which made his use of irony successful raise problems for him in this field. His aim is often accurate, but he is forced to hurl his missiles while balancing somewhat precariously on the point of a pin. For from what solid ground can a leaning tower writer carry on satire? He is not prepared to identify himself with any group, yet he cannot stand off from society as an individual and lampoon mankind in general, since he really has high hopes of its eventual progress—a belief which is the root of his urge to satirize.

As a result his satire runs the risk of being labelled "indiscriminate" as it has been by a writer in "The Bookman" who says:

Marx insisted that an effective revolution must be international in scope and proletarian in character. It is useless attempting to avoid the implication, and when Auden indulges in his sneers at all classes he misses the point.¹

This critic is apparently objecting because Auden

satirizes the working class as well as the upper class, as he does in the "Ode to John Warner". But Auden feels that every group in society at present is liable for satire - and none more than his own. Such an awareness leads to the kind of satire which Roberts described in the introduction to New Country:

For there are two kinds of satire; that which is directed at the known external enemy, and that which is intended to free us from our own preoccupations and indulgences, so that we may stop the pitiful waste of thought and energy, which has made us as powerless and contemptible as we are.

Unfortunately, many of the poems in which Auden attempts such satire do not qualify for the name of poetry. Such are Poem XXII, beginning "Get there if you can..." Ode IV, and "Brothers, who when the sirens roar". In these he has written satire of a bellicose directness, but of such low quality that he includes them among works that he prefers to have forgotten.

Here he is shouting criticisms at the tpp of his

1. Poems, p. 166
3. Poems, p. 39
4. Ibid., p. 166
5. Look Stranger, p. 34
lungs, and they are not very convincing because of stylistic weaknesses. But even in better work, how much conviction can his satire carry? Hazlitt, for instance, contended that satire "does not contain or attempt a formal proof" of truth,

but owes its power of conviction to the bare suggestion of it, so that if the thing when once hinted is not clear in itself, the satire fails of its effect, and falls to the ground...Before we laugh at a thing, its absurdity must at least be open and palpable to the common apprehension. Ridicule is necessarily built on certain supposed facts, whether true or false, and on their inconsistency with certain acknowledged maxims, whether right or wrong.

But Auden is not concerned with ridiculing general traits of human nature, such as pride or greed, which an audience will readily recognise, (in others) nor is his main satire directed at showing the incongruity of profession and performance. His is the far harder task of questioning the accepted ways in which these traits are expressed - ways which have been accorded the social approval of the majority, although they have long lost their value.

As he writes in the Dog Beneath the Skin:

Man is changed by his living, but not fast enough. His concern today is for that which yesterday did not occur. In the hour of the Blue Bird and the Bristol Bomber his thoughts are appropriate to the years of the Penny Farthing; He tosses at night who at noonday found no truth.¹

Auden's satire is concerned with showing that discrepancy in thought. It is a subtle and difficult task, for one can satirize only in relation to a scheme of values, and Auden's values are not immediately obvious, and can be made so only by the stating of his positive ideas.

Accordingly, he has adopted various methods of satire. In The Dance of Death² he has accepted the limitations of satire as stated by Hazlitt, and has not attempted to prove anything, but merely to illustrate, by ballet and amusing pageant, a conclusion which has already been worked out. As a pageant it is highly successful. The verse is amusing, and the take-offs clever. But such satire, working solely on the principle of exaggeration and exclusion, will be effective only for those who are fully in accord with its premises. It is like a series of cartoons by Low. And just as political cartoons can only be appreciated by sympathetic

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² Poems, p. 183
readers, so *Dance of Death* requires an audience which will accept its postulates; otherwise the symbolic portrayal of modern life will fail to convince. Also, resolution of ironic contrasts, if there is to be any, must arise out of the material of the poem or play itself. Thus, Karl Marx marching on to the stage is not an adequate conclusion to *The Dance of Death*, nor is the party of revolutionaries marching off the stage a completely effective conclusion to *The Dog Beneath the Skin*.

It is interesting to notice that Powell criticises *The Dance* because "it takes on too accurately the character of what it burlesques." In *Poems*, particularly in "The Address for a Prize-Day", this has been seen to enhance the irony, to be a kind of fighting with the enemies' weapons. In some of the boy-scoutish odes it became annoying. Here it is due to the fact that Auden is relying on the ability of the audience to appreciate the incongruity implicit in much fascist dogma, which is obvious to democrats in its naked form, even when

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presented by a fascist sympathiser. For instance, the average man's reaction to the adoption of the Japanese by the Germans as Aryan brothers is immediately satirical: the incongruity of profession and fact is obvious to anyone. Thus the speech of the Announcer in *The Dance of Death*, when he speaks as the demagogue is very effective, but the "satire" is mainly in the reader's mind. The speech contains nothing that might not have been selected from an authentic fascist talk. The awareness of the audience can be relied on to supply the incongruity.

*The Dog Beneath the Skin* employs more pointed satire. The action is made up of scenes which are primarily burlesques, but this simplified type of satire is supplemented and enriched by the choruses. They provide as background a description of that England most hated by Lady Chatterley, and comments on the failure of man's morals to evolve fast enough. They include psychological comment indicating the subtle and complex problems which lie behind each subject satirized, ironic lines in alliterative style, of ladies

1. p. 196
Veiled and valued, through revolving doors,
Paid to be pretty, pumped into cloth,
and culminate in the final slogan modified from Marx:

To each his need: from each his power.

Thanks to the poetry of the Chorus, this conclusion,
in spite of the superficiality of the action, is less
glib than that of The Dance of Death. The following
verse indicates that Audenis fully aware of the complexities involved, and does not see revolution as a cut and
dried solution:

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.

The main object of his satire is the reaction of England
and Europe to the impasse of modern civilisation. He
shows the ability of reactionaries to sell out progressives
while maintaining socialist slogans, the madness of
fascism, the limitations of capitalist wealth, various
types of escapism, by means of poesie pure, sentimentality,
and invalidism. He is violently satirical of symptoms

1. p. 119
2. p. 138
of decadence in English society, such as the commercialization of sex, lack of culture, and faulty attitudes between the sexes. Finally he shows how easily fascism might grow in England, and concludes with his heroes forming a revolutionary party.

Here the incongruities are not left to the imagination as in The Dance of Death, but are greatly heightened. For instance, the slogan from the King's speech has been addresses the workers who are about to be executed:
"Are we not all socialists nowadays?" has been used many a time to pave the way for a reactionary proposal, (particularly by Mussolini), but the scene is made farcical by the ceremonial gestures and crocodile tears with which the execution is carried out.

Similarly, in this play the fascist state is not represented by a ship heading for the rocks, but by a lunatic asylum.

2nd Mad Lady: The Leader says that next year he's going to put all us women into coops, like hens. And if we don't lay properly we shall be fattened for the Christmas Market.

3rd Mad Lady: Oh, what a lovely idea!

2nd Mad Lady: Yes, isn't it. And so beautiful too. I mean, it will really make Motherhood sacred.
Or take the rhetoric of the 1st Lunatic:

No foreign brand of madness, however spectacular, however noisy or pleasant, will ever seduce us from the grand old Westland Mania. What was good enough for our forefathers, we declare, is good enough for us! We shall continue to go mad in the time-honoured Westland way.¹

The exaggeration fits. It is equally applicable in the scene in the cabaret:

A solitary diner with an eye-glass beckons the waiter.

Diner: Bring me the third girl from the right.

The waiter catches her head under his arm as though she were a fowl and holds her so that the Diner can pinch her thigh.

Waiter: Will you have her roast, sir, Or on Japanese Toast, sir? With Sauce Allemagne, sir? Or stewed in white wine, sir?

Diner: Stewed, I think....²

The Dog Beneath the Skin is, rather obviously, a thoroughly moral satire. Its effectiveness, Wyndham Lewis to the contrary, is not lessened by that fact. In his essay on Dryden Lewis wrote that "unmoral satire" is the most effective, in fact the only effective kind of satire, since it denies the object of the satire the pleasure of qualifying for the Satanic School.

¹. p. 67
². p. 113
Some of Byron's satire, particularly in *Don Juan*, would seem to be of this type. This is satire directed at showing the incongruity of profession and practice, but it is concerned, not, as is moral satire, with influencing increase of practice, but with eliminating profession. Byron had no objection to men sleeping with other men's wives; he objected only to their being hypocritical about it. His attack was directed against their dullness, resulting from their empty conventions. And the anger which greeted his satire is similar to the rage referred to by Lewis, discussing Dryden.

But Lewis, without defining it, is here equating the word 'moral' with the idea of *accepted* morality. For instance, he says:

> It could perhaps be asserted, even, that the greatest satire cannot be moralistic at all: for if for no other reason, because no mind of the first order, expressing itself in art, has ever itself been taken in, nor consented to take in others, by the crude injunctions of any purely moral code.

Byron - and Auden - direct their satire against dullness. Neither could be said to be taken in by the crude injunctions of any purely moral code. But both in

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much of their writing, are profoundly moral satirists. Morality, to Auden, is that form of conduct which gives greatest potentialities of life to oneself and to others. And I think Byron, if he were to acknowledge Auden's letters, would agree. When Byron satirized tyrants and those who engineer wars, it was because they were destroying the lives, either physically or mentally, of the masses of people.

So Auden. But a problem remains. The moral satirist, who does not satirize from the point of view of an established set of morals, faces the responsibility of providing a positive feeling for the type of living he desires. As Lewis points out: "Satire can only exist in contrast to something else..." And Auden can satirize only from the point of view of the future. In many of the poems considered elsewhere the satire and the hope for the future are effectively interwoven. In *The Dance of Death* its presence is mechanical; but in *The Dog Beneath the Skin*, though little is definitely said, a feeling of the contrasting, positive life is at least partially conveyed. "Letter to Lord Byron," however, attempts no such synthesis.

This Letter, employing many of the humorous devices
of Don Juan, is a thoroughly successful piece of light satire. It makes its points by sudden contrasts:

Again, our age is highly educated;
There is no lie our children cannot read—

or by the typically Byronic trick of juxtaposing important and unimportant items:

Men had stopped throwing stones at one another,
Butter and father had come back again.

or by transferring business idioms to aesthetic matters:

Joyces are firm, and there there's nothing new.
Eliots have hardened just a point or two.
Hopkins are brisk, thanks to some recent boosts.
There's been some further weakening in Prousts.

Cautious modification is also effective:

England, my England, you have been my tutrix—
The Mater, on occasions, of the free,

as is the breezy approach:

Mother looks odd today dressed up in peers,
Slums, aspidistras, shooting-sticks, and queers.

It is simple satire, and while it touches on Auden's usual subjects, commenting on our present plight, and

1. p. 52
2. p. 207
3. p. 54
4. p. 233
5. p. 233
the danger of fascism, it is more concerned with their incidental aspects than with any theory, and lacks the belligerency of his very broad satire. With its straightforwardness and light touch it succeeds where some of his more ambitious attempts failed.

Satire with a greater structure of inclusion would be less obviously satire. Giving the full context of an idea, its causes, development, and favourable side, would destroy the cruder type of satire, dependent as it is on highlighting an absurdity. But it would make possible the type of satire that merges with tragedy. While in his next two plays Auden lessens his pre-occupation with the cruder types of satire, this is for the purpose of including non-satirical themes, but not of changing the character of the satire itself. These two remain hybrid creations. In The Ascent of F6 the type of satire remains much the same as in the earlier books, but it is relegated to the position of background to a serious, rather pontifically treated psychological theme. This is the problem of the lust for power, and in the hero's case, of its relation to the Oedipus Complex. Those who deliberately seek power, in politics or the press, are satirized with the brilliant exaggeration of Auden and Isherwood's usual style. But Ransom, whose urge to power has been repressed and denied,
is sympathetically treated. He is one to whom "a mountain is a mother", and the question of his motives in tackling the dangerous mountain and in leading men, and winning fame, are the core of the book. Secondary is the satiric revelation of the devices an imperialist country will employ to mask its aggressive aims. Mr. and Mrs. A., the sounding board for the propaganda, form a tragi-comic chorus. The main weakness of the play lies in its lack of unity. While the major part of it is relatively realistic, the end employs a superfluity of florid symbolism. The juxtaposition of Ransom's soliloquy with its echo of Macbeth, with more colloquial styles, and the confusion of symbols - the veiled Figure, the Dragon, the chess game, the court-room scene - detract from the intensity achieved earlier. While these made it possible to express the theme overtly, a simplification of the ending would very probably have been more effective.

The satire in On the Frontier remains broad and obvious—to those who understand the dramatists' views. A divided stage is used to indicate homes in Ostnia and Westland, the two countries which are drawn into war, and the lives of the two enemy families who speak alternately, stress their common humanity. But such a device is a serious over-simplification. It is good satire in that it
shows up the rhetoric that hides the real motives of those concerned in the reciprocating war, but as satire on the origin of war it is exceedingly shallow. In 1938, as well as today, it was necessary to emphasize differences between states, as well as similarities. The actual outbreak of the war is very unsatisfactorily described. There is no particular importance or subtlety in indicating that the actual outbreak may be traced to an accident, with no more blame to be attached to one side than the other.

The play has other structural weaknesses. The writers express two beliefs — in pacifism and in communism — and fail to work out a proper relationship between the two. While the conclusion refutes pacifism in a line or so, and praises communism, the weight of the book is devoted to pacifism, making the conclusion seem highly arbitrary. It does not arise naturally from the characters and events. It is spoken from theory, not experience:

Yet we must kill and suffer and know why.
All errors are not equal. The hatred of our enemies is the destructive self-love of the dying,
Our hatred is the price of the world's freedom.

The result is confused satire.

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1. Page 121
Such confusions of effect are characteristic of all the plays of Auden and Isherwood. They appreciate the complexity of the problems they treat, but have difficulty in expressing that complexity, in drama, in a manner convincing to the reader. It is structure of inclusion which they find difficult to achieve. In addition, their particular dramatic ability seems to lie in the brilliant presentation of individual scenes and humorous portrayals of types. These scenes are too often jumbled together with too slight an attempt at unity. But their major difficulty lies in the fact that they are trying to convey positive values as an accompaniment to their destructive mocking; that they are forced to satirize from the point of view of the future.
With the sonnet sequence "In Time Of War", Auden's poetry moves onto a different plane. Here are thirty-two sonnets in which Auden's characteristic faults—exhibitionism, unnecessary obscurity, slapdash construction—are abandoned. The wavering confused impulses of his own conflict are not in evidence. In contrast these sonnets have the calm, the finality, of truthful statements made by an impartial observer. And yet in spite of that impersonal quality they have, too, humanity and pity.

The sonnets deal with the development of man since the childhood of that race, indicating the factors in that development which contribute to the present crisis. These are followed by some excellent poems on the war in China and then a verse commentary summing up the problems of modern civilisation.

The scope of the poems presents dangers. It is easy for a poet to skim over a long period of development with glib generalisations, eliciting only the most simple of stock responses. It is difficult to write of death in war without sentimentality or superficial rhetoric. Auden makes
neither mistake. The important feature of the sonnets is the extent to which Auden assimilates a diversity of attitudes into the briefest of phrases, often so effectively that a whole series of books would be required to set out the full range of the thought expressed. The work of Korzybski, Ogden, and Chase, is compressed into the conclusion of Sonnet III, on language. Yeblen’s *Theory of the Leisure Class*, some of Marx, Lawrence, and countless contemporary writers into Sonnet VIII, on the Bourgeois. The irony, which in prose would have been eliminated in so brief a statement is heightened in sonnet form. While Auden’s own conflicts are not expressed there are elements of even greater diversity to be unified; in such large subjects, a balance must be attained between the various elements. In these sonnets the weight of each phrase counts in gaining the effect.

The first sonnet from "In Time of War" is an excellent balancing of conflicting attitudes. It is a statement of the scientific fact that man is born with a modicum of instinctive abilities and a great capacity for acquired learning. Behind it is the awareness of what man might achieve, and the necessity of facing the reality that he has made. Another poet might have made it a lament or a glorification of Moral Freedom. Auden approaches it with the objectivity of a scientist, and the emotional unity of a poet. His devices make the poem vivid, concrete and easily
pictured. The personification of species makes the process pass swiftly before the eyes like a Disney cartoon. The metaphorical phrase "Their only time at College" transferred from human life is a very vivid way of expressing instinctive ability. Metaphor here is very far from Housman's concept of gratuitous decoration. It is an integral part of the poem, and, in addition to the richness which it provides, it enables the poet to express the subtle shades of his thought, as non-metaphorical language could never do.

The poem begins by highlighting the advantages of being ruled by instinctive behaviour:

The instinctive creatures "were successful at the first endeavor". The poet implies "Good! how lucky for them -- if only we could do as well!" "The hour of birth", "Their only time at college", stresses the fact that they, unlike humans, did not have to struggle all the time to learn. But here the first hint of dissatisfaction is given; in spite of difficulties, one of our greatest joys is acquiring knowledge. The poet adds "they were content"--which we never are. Then comes a shift in emphasis with the damning phrase "And knew their station" which implies servility an attitude which, in spite of all rationalisations of English class distinctions, proud man does not wish to exalt. The description of the instinctive creatures concludes with the fact that they "were good for ever". This has a horribly smug, priggish sound. How dull, Auden suggests,
it would be to be good for ever.

The same double picture is given of man: the poem emphasises that man is conditioned as the instinctive animals are, only in a different way—by conditions after birth. "What's the difference?" he implies, "who says there is free will?"

Man is also "continually mistaken", "envied his few friends"—but, the other side is strong too: he "looked for truth", and "chose his love".

Thus the poet suggests the argument that man is a better creature than the animals rests mainly on the two foregoing phrases. They mean a great deal to us, but they should not be sentimentalized. Take them for what they are worth.

Sonnet II is an example of a poem in which three levels of meaning exist together. The first is the surface meaning—the description of Adam and Eve, used allegorically but satisfying in itself, because the reader feels that the picture developed is psychologically acute, even within the myth. It supplies a vivid picture as background to the more abstract second meaning, which describes man's confidence in his ability to use each advance of knowledge to make worth a new Eden.

Thirdly, hovering in the background, is the realation of the myth, not only to the growth of the race, but to the childhood of the individual, suggesting the belief of
many children that if only they had the power of grown-ups
they would be able to solve all adult problems simply, and
be completely happy. The second of course is dominant. Man
is sure that with each new advance he will be able to con-
trol his life, but, finds that with the widening of choice,
"the dangers and the punishments grew greater". This is
what the optimists of the Nineteenth century did not know.
Increasing knowledge is accompanied by loss. "The stream
was dumb"—as Wordsworth found when he sighed for pagan
gods.

All the sonnets have this quality of rich compression.
Look, for instance at the line:

"And found the notion of equality",
in the poem describing the bourgeois. The brief ironic phrase
calls to mind the period when the middle classes, in their
opposition to the nobility did struggle for "equality".
"Notion" suggests that it was a useful concept to them—
then, but that they are less vehement in its pursuit now.
Or consider the concluding lines of Sonnet IV:

The townsman thought him miserly and simple,
The poet wept and saw in him the truth,
And the oppressor held him up as an example.

This is effective poetry of assimilation. Here it is not
a question of resolving violent contrasts, but of setting
different attitudes beside each other, and showing that
all are partially true, that they supplement each other.
Wordsworth, writing poetry of exclusion, glorified the simplicity of the natural man (Auden would say that he was characterized by natural good, not moral good)—Auden balances that sentiment with the other aspects of the situation.

It is thus, structure, that I find most important about these sonnets. As elsewhere, the form is an integral part of that structure. The liberties that Auden has taken with the sonnet, (modelling his freedom on Rilke) should be of great significance in the development of the sonnet. Certainly his variations on the traditional form of the sonnet are in perfect harmony with the content. For instance; in Sonnet IV, describing the farmer, the lines describing the city-dwellers are followed by two short lines describing the farmer:

And he changed little,
But took his colour from the earth.

The very short line conveys excellently the impression of stolidity and lack of change. Similarly in V the long line underlines the sense, "But suddenly the earth was full, he was not wanted". The concluding lines of each sonnet contribute to the effect of "objectivity" that is so characteristic of these poems. The feeling of inevitability, of

1. Sonnets to Orpheus
"hanging in space" is increased by the lightness of the last line, and the lack of emphasis on the last word of the last line. This effect is in contrast to the emphasis of one who tries to drive a point home.

The total effect is one of calmness, a calmness which sets these sonnets off from most of Auden's work, for it is not one of his usual characteristics. These poems have a much more finished quality than most of his others; they speak with a quiet finality, as if they had been written by a man whose philosophy was completely integrated, who looked at the world and its people, saw their weaknesses, and understood, who had made the most of what was known about the world, even while recognizing the limitations of that knowledge, and who, by understanding necessity (one of Auden's favourite phrases) had found Freedom.

How does this picture compare with the self-portrait of Auden to be found in his other books? It is a picture of only half of Auden, the Double Man. As an intellectual with a brilliant mind he has, in theory, a well-integrated world view. He understands evolution and the development of language; he knows also the newer theories of physics and chemistry, the nature of relativity and what is known of the

1. The presence of this calmness here can be understood only in relation to the nature of his subject matter in the sonnets and will be explained at the conclusion of the chapter.
composition of matter.

Certainly the growth of the fore-brain has been a success:
He has not got lost in a backwater like the lampshell
Or the limpet; he has not died out like the super-
lizards.

His boneless worm-like ancestors would be amazed
At the upright position, the breasts, the four-
chambered heart,
The clandestine evolution in the mother's shadow.¹

These theories form a coherent pattern in his mind, and be-
come part of the way he feels the earth. He even knows,
with the psychologists, why this pattern may not be com-
pletely satisfying.

Never before was the Intelligence so fertile,
The Heart more stunted. The human field became
Hostile to brotherhood and feeling like a forest.²

We wander on the earth, or err from bed to bed
In search of home, and fail, and weep for the lost
Before Because became As If, or Rigid Certainty
The Chances Are........

And he knows, in a general way, the meaning of justice,
good, and truth. This is known by the sonnets and by the

¹ "In Time of War" Page 289
² Page 293
³ Page 294
verse commentary which follows, with its concluding plea to construct at last a human justice,
The contribution of our star within the shadow
Of which uplifting, loving, and constraining power
All other reasons may rejoice and operate.

There is no conflict in him over these matters. His is not a mind which finds any clash between the world of science and religion. When a new theory is promulgated it is stimulating, not disturbing. In this world of the intellect all is seen clear and balanced and sure. But this detachment is achieved only by a bifurcation of personality. The world in which Auden experiences conflict still exists. He can face the problem of the whole world with calm, but the relation of his own group to other classes in society sets up tensions; the specific application of justice has painful complexity. But there is no falsification in writing as he does in the sonnets. He is expressing honestly part of his view of life. And the result is some of the best work he has done.

1. Page 301

2. By expressing "half of himself" as he does in these sonnets, Auden is not over-simplifying or writing poetry of exclusion. A whole field of interest is expressed in all its complexity—it is simply not involved with another field of interest (which would quite probably disturb it.) This is a limitation in subject matter, but within its limits, the sequence is satisfying.
Chapter IX

"THE DOUBLE MAN" - INTELLECTUAL SYNTHESIS

The Double Man represents an important shift in Auden's approach to life. In his earlier work he was concerned primarily with the relation of the individual to society. In The Double Man he has deepened this interest to a concern with the relation of the individual to the universe. This is connected with a shift in his conception of the relation of the individual to society: Auden has lost his belief in the Marxian means to revolution, while still desiring the ends. Since he does not find it possible to identify himself with any type of existing society, or with any group plans for future society, he is doubly eager to understand the relationship of the individual to life as a whole.

The time in which he sets out on his quest for meaning is a particularly disturbing one. As a result, The Double Man gives expression to the questionings and doubts which beset any sensitive individual in war-time, and which particularly disturb the intellectual who is unable to see war as a simple clear-cut conflict between
good and evil. He is conscious of the import of war apart from its immediate effect. While he is strongly opposed to fascism he cannot help being concerned with the psychological effect of war on the Allied nations, and also with the guilt they share with the enemy in making a war situation possible. As a result he is deeply concerned with the need for a vital change in ways of thought and basic attitudes to life.

Highlighting the serious theme are the flashes of wit with which Auden presents his ideas. His use of irony lends a peculiar vividness to his observations. He can pass swiftly and brilliantly from a bouffe picture of our plight to profoundly serious comment.

While his emphasis has shifted in this book, many of the ideas stated in *The Double Man* were contained in his earlier work. One of the basic ideas discussed in "The Double Man, and also in the sonnet sequence "In Time of War" is the importance of the full view. It is "The Devil" who attempts to prevent us from attaining it. When we begin to see the flaws in an idea which we have held, it is he who urges us to an equally false position by arguing that the direct opposite is true, luring us from one extreme to another, as when the over-emphasis on
reason is replaced by an over-emphasis on instinct and the unconscious.¹ Throughout the book Auden implies that his advocacy of communism came from seeing only half the picture; now he is seeking to avoid the opposite half-truth of reaction, and to find the proper synthesis of the partial truths of each camp.

Another dangerous intellectual habit (represented by the Devil) is false association:

Induce men to associate
Truth with a lie, then demonstrate
The lie, and they will, in truth's name
Treat babe and bath-water the same.²

Thus an appreciation of the complexity of experience is shown by Auden to be vitally important in any solution of our predicament. Yet The Double Man, while stating this principle, fails to illustrate it, while In Time of War failed to state it, but illustrated it most impressively. In the sonnet sequence it was part and parcel of his way of thinking; here it is consciously stated, but Auden's frequent failure to apply it is a serious defect in structure.

The responsibility of every human being is also an old cry. In The Double Man Auden emphasised the important point that

1. p. 31
2. p. 36
Upon each English conscience lie
Two decades of hypocrisy,
And not a German can be proud
Of what his apathy allowed.¹

This was also the tenor of the sonnets:

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.²

The solution in The Double Man, besides intellectual understanding, is love:

We need to love all since we are
Each a unique particular
That is no giant, god or dwarf,
But one odd human isomorph.³

Love has always been an integral part of Auden's philosophy, though he has used the term with varying meanings. Apart from its personal connotation, he has used it, particularly in Look Stranger, to refer to the process of evolution:

O love, the interest itself, in thoughtless heaven...⁴ but it is a process dependent upon man:

1. p. 60
2. "In Time of War", p. 271
3. p. 69
4. p. 11.
Thus, he indicates, the spirit of love which we like to imagine animating the universe, making for evolutionary progress, is a concept, given body only by the love of individual man in action. In the first two books he emphasised the love which is born of a spirit of comradeship, felt by those who were working for a new form of life; it involved much more than subjective feelings:

We know it, we know that love
Needs more than the admiring excitement of union,
More than the abrupt self-confident farewell,
The heel on the finishing blade of grass,
The self-confidence of the falling root,
Needs death, death of the grain, our death,
Death of the old gang...

In The Double Man it is still an evolutionary possibility which we must work out; and we cannot put all the blame on others

For all those customs that frustrate,
Our own intention to fulfill
Eros's legislative will.

But it is not comradeship. Auden has concluded that

1. Look Stranger, p. 51
2. Poems, p. 32
3. p. 59
No longer can we learn our good
From chances of a neighbourhood
Or class or party, or refuse
As individuals to choose
Our loves, authorities and friends,
To judge our means and plan our ends...

Thus he has finally accepted a fact which has been forcing itself on him all his life - that he is incapable of aligning himself wholeheartedly with any class. Instead of recognising, however, that this is a personal characteristic, he generalises it into a characteristic of the period, and claims that it is impossible for anyone to have solidarity with a group.

It is true, as he says, that

Aloneness is man's real condition,
That each must travel forth alone
In search of the Essential Stone...

But, as he continues, this has always been so, and while diversity is greater now than ever before, it is only for men like Auden, to whom individualism is so important, that identification with a group has become impossible. It is probable that this difficulty in identifying himself is intensified by his separation from England.

He does not, however, prescribe laissez-faire individualism of the old-fashioned variety, for he
condemns those who view their liberty as giving
the right to lead alone
An attic life all on her own.¹

Finally, he remakes the naive discovery that

We cannot, then, will Heaven where
Is perfect freedom...²

and realises that all progress simply raises greater
problems. But he was not nostalgic about this fact
when he discussed his philosophy in I Believe; he saw
the increase in choice as a gain, even though it
involved greater difficulty. At that time he didn't
fall into "dreams of glory", and suffer disillusionment
with each increase in knowledge, waking to find himself

Back on the same old mountain side
With only guessing for a guide.³

Ironically enough, the weaknesses of the poem
result from the very types of over-simplifications
which Auden is concerned with condemning. In spite
of the erudite brilliance of much of the work, Auden,
while making a plea for sharper weapons of thought,
lays himself open to the charge of not always using

¹ p. 61
² p. 45
³ p. 46
Sometimes these simplifications result from the desire for neat couplets, resulting in lines which seem complete in themselves, whereas they can not be taken out of context. This means that a great many misleading quotations are going to be made from this book.

For instance, lines 81 - 98 are simply a paraphrase of what he said about the nature of art in *The Arts Today*, yet

Art is not life and cannot be
A mid-wife to society

seems such a complete thought that it is bound to be isolated without the qualifying remarks which follow immediately upon it. Auden is merely repeating what he had said before, that art cannot tell men exactly what they should do because it is concerned with particulars, but from particulars men may sometimes draw conclusions which apply to their own lives. He continues:

Each life must itself decide
To what and how it be applied.

These lines obviously give art a social function, yet

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1. Of course, any over-simplifications which Auden does commit loom in unusual prominence simply because of his pre-occupation with the fault.

2. discussed in Chapter V.

3. p. 17
Scarfe writes:

It is depressing to find Auden passing into a reactionary (defeatist) camp of art for art’s sake as he is now doing.\footnote{1. Auden and After, p. 27}

The nature of \textit{The Double Man}, wherein the doggerel form is obviously subordinate to the ideas, is evidence that if Auden is tempted in that direction, it is in theory only, not practice. Yet Walter Allen, in an essay on Flaubert, likewise quotes these lines with relish in favor of an out-of-this world art. It seems that Auden was seduced by the neat sound of this glib little couplet, so that he couldn't bear to cut it out, even if he had to take away its meaning in the next two lines.

Other simplifications are more troublesome. In Part II, for instance, the description of most men's inability to recognise the inevitable process of change, of our tendency to go from one false extreme to another, of the Devil who is "a part of evil, yet creating good", the description of Marx - all are primarily objective and inclusive. Some of the material seems to be made unnecessarily difficult, but the reader is willing to accept that in order that a complex subject may be adequately expressed. Then he comes upon the lines:
We hoped; we waited for the day
The State would wither clean away,
Expecting the Millenium
That theory promised us would come,
It didn't.

This is not only a simplification; it is untrue, and there is little doubt that Auden knew it, but did not take the trouble to be more exact. Who knows as well as Auden that "millennium" is a word that is negated by Marxist theory? That, as he himself wrote in I Believe, "No society can be absolutely good...but some are better than others."²

In the same section he causes confusion by identifying himself with those who are playthings for the "Devil",

Who knows that nothing suits his look
So well as that hang-over look,
That few drunks feel more awful than
The Simon-pure Utopian.³

Naturally, Auden was never that, but by lumping himself with that group, he implies that intelligent revolutionaries such as himself were fooled as much as Utopians. However, he distinguishes himself from that group by the realisation of how ridiculous it is to rush over

1. p; 40
2. p. 8
3. p. 41.
to the opposite extreme, and becomes a huge question-mark as he tries to figure out how he can synthesise the "half-truth" of socialism with the "half-truth" of reaction. "But why and where and when and how?"¹

Despite the unfortunate impression created by such careless statements, The Double Man is basically an honest attempt to evaluate the meaning of the present struggle, in relation to ethical standards which Auden is seeking to define for himself. In trying to do so, he lays bare his own weaknesses, doubts, and searchings. He is like a man who seeks catharsis by describing his conflicts to a psychologist.

While he could achieve no finality in his synthesis of the partial truths of prevailing theories, he has made a courageous attempt to

set aside
Terror, concupiscence and pride,
Learn who and where and how we are,
The children of a modest star.²

¹. p. 48.
Chapter X

CONCLUSION

This essay began with a quotation from Auden defining poetry. The rest of that quotation will serve for conclusion. Auden continued: "The poetic mood is never indicative."¹ Here he is giving in brief Richards' idea when he wrote: There is a suppressed conditional clause implicit in all poetry. If things were such and such then...and so the response develops."²

These quotations would seem to attempt to put the question of the truth or falsity of the belief expressed in poetry beyond discussion. On the other hand, Auden wrote elsewhere:

False beliefs in fact lead to bad poetry, and bad poetry leads to a falsification of beliefs.³

He is not, however, contradicting himself, nor implying that the truth or falsity of an opinion about politics or God or science affects the value of a poem. But if false beliefs characterise a writer's whole attitude to life and to mankind they will naturally affect the quality of his poetry. Scarfe has said that a fascist or a communist could write an equally good poem about the

¹. Auden, W. H., The Double Man, p. 116
². Richards, I.A., Principles of Literary Criticism, p. 276
present war. This is possibly true - but the success or failure of the fascist (technical skill being equal) would depend on whether or not his theoretical beliefs or dogma put a serious limitation on his view of the world. These might be so rigid as to preclude the production of good art. Similarly a sentimental approach or a romantic idea of man's nature will limit artistic success, simply because they would blind the writer to certain aspects of experience, and prevent him from recognising its real complexity. The result would be faulty structure - poetry which suffered from a principle of exclusion - just as a "false aesthetic" would result in faulty structure. For instance, those who believe that poetry should express only one aspect of an experience run the risk of falsifying their beliefs by over-simplifying them. Spender showed himself to be the victim of a false aesthetic when he wrote:

The German-Soviet pact has made nonsense out of most of the left-wing writing of the last ten years.

The literal truth, then, of Auden's beliefs about politics or psychology need not be discussed. What is important is the fact that his poems do not require

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1. Scarfe, F., Auden and After
2. This applies also to anyone who has a dogmatic belief - but the fascist is the extreme case because much of the material of his beliefs is particularly limiting to his objective view of the world.
illegitimate dependence on the beliefs they express. No false support is drawn from the reader's sympathy with his beliefs. This is particularly important since so much of his poetry deals with crucial contemporary questions. Interest in Auden has often centered on his ideas. One reason for his meteoric rise into prominence was the fact that when he began writing many people who were interested in poetry were also taking an interest in the social questions which he treated in his work. But the attraction lay not in the fact that he discussed such subjects, but that he treated them without propaganda, and with a high degree of poetic ability.

It would be wrong to draw any final conclusions about Auden's work. It is immensely varied, immensely uneven, and it has many potentialities yet to be realised. Its many facets forbid facile judgments. The range of his poetry has covered radical experimentation and the revivifying of traditional forms. His later work has been away from the extreme forms of experimentation, and also from the obscurity which some of his readers seem to have valued for itself when he began to write. In

1. At present Auden is working on a book to be called The Sea and the Mirror, which employs symbols from The Tempest. The turn which Auden's work may take here is an interesting question.
contrast to the novel forms found in the first book of poems is his choice of the octosyllabic couplet for use in *The Double Man*. While Auden has abandoned the obscurity of his earlier work, it is significant that the poems of that period which he now rejects are those characterized by crudity rather than obscurity. He no longer indulges in such undisciplined work as "Journal of an Airman"; his discrimination has improved, and he is more conscious and more regretful of the times when

I...have slubbered through
With slip and slapdash what I do,
Adopted what I would disown,
The preacher's loose immodest tone.¹

The last line is important; while he will record his own searchings, he is even less inclined than before to suggest a solution. The development of his thought has included the rejection of some of his earlier political beliefs, and his implication in *The Double Man* is that such beliefs were immaturely held. It is possible that his increased interest in the relation of the individual to the universe will give him a broader approach to life in his poetry. But as he is still definitely in a period of transition it is impossible to generalise about the effects of such a shift in interest.

¹. *The Double Man*, p. ??
His poetry has been valued by many because it unifies materials which they have not emotionally assimilated. His importance lies in the fact that, at his best, he has handled such material with a structure of inclusion, with a high degree of technical skill, and that he has treated such topics as death in war with a trained sincerity - that is, a sincerity which thinks the experience through and presents it without any forced emotion. His influence has been great; critics are already referring to him as the grandfather of the new generation of poets. Sometimes imitation of him has meant the borrowing of properties - ice-age glaciers have cluttered up youthful poems (including Canadian ones) since the publication of his first book of poems. But in general his influence has been away from sentimentality, toward greater variety in form, awareness of one's time, and an inclusiveness which has given greater body to the poetry of the last thirteen years.

In many ways he has fulfilled the description of the poet given by Michael Roberts in the Introduction to New Signatures:

The poet is, in some ways, a leader...and it is his function not only to find the
rhythms and images appropriate to the everyday experiences of normal human beings, but also to find an imaginative solution of their problems, to make a new harmony out of strange, and often apparently ugly material.¹

In The Double Man he described the effect of music in time of war:

For art had set in order sensēg
And feeling and intelligence.²

Toward that "setting in order" his own contribution has been notable.

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1. London, L. and V. Woolf, 1934, p. 11
2. p. 16.
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