

W.H. AUDEN'S LATER POETRY

WORDS AND THE WORD: ART AND CHRISTIANITY
IN
W.H. AUDEN'S LATER POETRY

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis focuses on W.H. Auden's last four major volumes of poetry: About the House (1965), City Without Walls (1969), Epistle to a Godson (1972) and the posthumous Thank You, Fog (1974). The later poetry has not drawn much scholarly attention or praise, and my study should go part way to redressing the balance.

My thesis is that Auden's Christianity profoundly affected every aspect of his later poetry, though most of it is not overtly religious. Many features peculiar to this poetry -- the giving of praise for even the simplest things, the delight in words from the slangiest to the most esoteric, the love of challenging prosodic difficulties, and the comic and playful exuberance -- are all influenced by (or are actually the result of) the practice of a form of Christianity known as the Affirmative Way. Two main elements of this Way are a concentration on the goodness of all creation and an attempt to see every aspect of existence in its relation to God. Auden manifests a counterbalancing asceticism in aesthetic matters, however, in his rejection of mellifluousness for its own sake, of the pleasures and self-indulgence of "confessional" writings, of the excitements of hierophantic utterance, and of any idea or element of style he felt to be subversive of the truth.

The attempt to find the dynamic and necessary link between an expansive vision of life and the guidance of a vigorous discipline is the keynote to Auden's career. It extends into all the antinomies around

which his thought was organized, and for which he attempted to discover reconciliations -- the "Spirit" of Christian love and the "Letter" of Mosaic law; freedom and necessity; history and nature; the subject ego and the predicate self within each person; soul and body; and, though hardly exhausting what could be a very long list, the words of man and the Logos, the Word of God. All this is reflected in Auden's love of writing within the restrictions of formal verse patterns, and Auden takes the idea of patterning one step further by organizing three of his later volumes into fairly complex, overall structures. These are all designed to frame a particular element of the Christian story, and again reveal the extent of Auden's desire to make his words bear witness to the Word.

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CHAPTER I

WORDS AND THE WORD: ART AND CHRISTIANITY IN W.H. AUDEN'S LATER POETRY

My thesis is that W.H. Auden's Christianity profoundly affected every aspect of his later poetry, although most of it is often not remarkable for its overtly religious subject matter. Features of the poetry, ranging from the giving of praise for even the simplest things in life to the use of a strange diction taken from many different fields of experience (which includes the resurrection of obsolete terms), can all be traced back, at least partially, to a form of Christianity known as the Way of Affirmation or the Positive Way.¹

This way begins with an affirmation of the goodness of God's creation, and attempts, ultimately, to make the idea of God and His love present to man in every object and action that he beholds. The modern age is more familiar with the Negative Way, in which Christians are seen as coming dangerously close to denying the goodness of creation in their rejection, for example, of the pleasures of the world and the flesh. But both Ways are, ideally, methods of subordinating man's will to God's, and both are actually interdependent. Charles Williams, who had a major influence on Auden's thought, writes: "No Affirmation could be so complete as not to need definition, discipline, and refusal; no Rejection so absolute as not to leave necessary (literally and metaphorically) beans and a wild beast's skin and a little water."²

The praisegiving, the delight in all kinds of words, the revelling in the rhythms of language, the sheer playfulness and comic exuberance in much of Auden's later poetry all reveal the effects of "Affirmative Christianity." At the same time, Auden's rejection of mellifluousness for its own sake, of indulgence in the vague and mysterious realm of hierophantic utterance, and of imagery intended more to shock than to further our understanding of a given subject, are all indications of a counterbalancing asceticism, asceticism that rejects any idea or element of style running counter to the truth. This rigour in attempting to ensure that truth is never subverted for the sake of aesthetic effectiveness is also responsible for much of the negative criticism that has been directed at Auden. But it is important to remember that the flatness of some of the later poetry can never simply be attributed to a collapse of talent or a diminution of intellect. At all times Auden is very much the master of his house, intellectually speaking, and it should also be remembered that his attempts at reconciling poetry with Christianity are responsible for a goodly number of his most persuasive and enjoyable poems.

The attempt to harmonize the promptings of the Spirit with the strictures of the Law in Christianity has its counterparts both in daily living, in which certain functions and actions are either free or necessary, and in writing, in which the freedom of speech runs up against the limitations of language and the demands of the particular form one is attempting to write in. One can not give total subservience to the Law, which "kills the Spirit," makes one an automaton in daily life and

makes writing mechanical. Nor can one believe that one is completely a child of the Spirit, which can lead to the extremes of pride and demagoguery in religion, total irresponsibility in daily life and a self-indulgent welter of noises in writing. A pair of Auden's best-known lines are addressed directly to this theme, and also give some idea of what Auden thought his duties as a man and a poet were: "In the prison of his days / Teach the free man how to praise."³

The great irony in this whole process of attempting to discover the right relationship between all the antinomies in our experience, of which Spirit and Law, freedom and necessity, and expression and form are just a few, is that the acceptance of limitations has a transforming and life-giving series of effects. Auden quotes Goethe on this subject: "Unfettered spirits will aspire in vain to the pure heights of perfection. He who wills great things must gird up his loins; only in limitation is mastery revealed, and law alone can give us freedom."⁴ This is a simple truth about poetry; most of the greatest poems have been written in the prison of a set of metrical rules carefully adhered to. It has an added significance for Auden, however, in that it is analogous to a larger affirmation, that man's freedom and happiness are founded on a subjection to the will and the commandments of God.

Auden ultimately came to think of metrics as having a spiritual significance: "Blessed be all metrical rules that forbid automatic responses, / force us to have second thoughts, free from the fetters of Self."⁵ The kinds of forms and structures that Auden chose for his poems are also, on occasion, specifically affected by Christian topics.

For example, the seven poems in both "Bucolics" and "Horae Canonicae," the two sequences in The Shield of Achilles,⁶ are clearly meant to be associated with the seven days of creation. Auden loved the challenge of working within these longer sequences and developing his ideas within large, overall patterns. This is obvious in his many longer poems, dramas, oratorios, and libretti for operas, but the volumes containing shorter poems, or a combination of longer and shorter poems, are also often ordered to reinforce and frame their main themes. This is quite clear in, for example, The Double Man (1941) and The Shield of Achilles (1955). Monroe K. Spears writes that, in the former, Auden withholds the revelation of a full commitment to Christianity until the epilogue, and that "New Year Letter" and "The Quest" (a sonnet sequence) are full of the hesitation and "shifting perspectives" appropriate to the vacillations of a "double man."⁷ Spears also writes: "The volume exhibits, then, a kind of spiritual progression, which seems to correspond generally to the change in Auden's own beliefs." Such an orchestration of material is much more explicit in The Shield of Achilles, which begins with an exploration of the interconnections of nature and human nature in "Bucolics." The seven poems of this sequence are meant to be compared and contrasted with the seven of "Horae Canonicae," which deal with the themes of nature and history within the more specific locus of the events of Good Friday. Between the two sequences is a section of fourteen poems entitled "In Sunshine and in Shade," which contains many points of correspondence with the sequences and within itself. For example, the first poem of the middle section, "The Shield of Achilles,"

is specifically linked with the last, "Ode to Gaea." They deal with the themes of history and nature and with the contrast between human visions of the good life and what life actually is. They both begin, too, with images of reflection. Thetis hopes to see a rosy future reflected in the shield Hephaestos is making, and our view of the earth from an airplane is the view that Gaea "would / admire could she look in a glass"

One of the most delightful aspects of three of Auden's last four volumes is that they, too, are organized into overall structures, but these are a little more complex and more detailed than any of the previous volumes. These structures, at times, strongly influence the way that individual poems can be read, and are also important in that they help focus attention on themes that Auden considers central to each volume. Before anything more concrete can be said about them, however, a certain amount of groundwork should be done. In the next few pages, then, I would like to define the area of this study; give a more detailed review of the characteristics of Auden's later poetry; have a brief look at the criticism, both negative and favorable, his poetry has drawn; review Auden's defenses of his later poetic practices; and, finally, provide a fuller discussion of Auden's world-view and the way it affects his poetry.

1. Considerations of Approach

This thesis focuses on the last four volumes of poetry, About the House (1965), City Without Walls (1969), Epistle to a Godson (1972), and the posthumous Thank You, Fog (1974).⁸ The choice of beginning with About the House is intended generally to correspond with Auden's

"Kirchstetten period", beginning with his change of summer residence from Ischia, Italy, to Kirchstetten, Austria, in 1958. A few poems collected in Homage to Clio (1960) were written after the move, but they are, with several exceptions, excluded from the present study, as is Academic Graffiti (1971), which is little more than a re-issue of the last section of Homage to Clio.

It is again true of Auden's later poetry (as it was for the earlier) that one is required to work a little harder and on a wider variety of tasks than with the writings of most other poets. One thinks primarily of the necessity of having the Oxford English Dictionary⁹ at hand for a large number of his poems, which certainly ranks as one of the greatest reasons for his lack of mass popularity. Other poems prevent a smooth reading with a number of wild grammatical convolutions and sudden shifts of thought linked only, as it initially seems, by a principle of free association. There are also the occasional appearances of riddle-like passages which are a little more than momentarily baffling -- one thinks of "lives / must know the meaning of If" in "Prologue: The Birth of Architecture" (AH) and the two stanzas concluding "Epistle to a Godson" with such lines as "Be glad your being is unnecessary" and "Can we hang a robber / who is not there?"

Many of the poems also presuppose a certain kind of knowledge, and one's appreciation of Auden's poetry is often initially diminished by the philosophical spadework that must be done simply to gain a cursory understanding. Stephen Spender writes:

That truth of Auden's poetry rests partly in the fact that, however dazzling the effects, it offers at

every point a paraphrasable prose meaning, and it can always be traced back to the systems of ideas from which, in its different stages, it derives. No doubt there are readers for whom this poetry of imagination which is always material for intellectual understanding is explicit. But there are many other readers -- among whom I count myself --¹⁰ who often feel in reading Auden that they need a guide.

This implies that the poetry too often cannot stand on its own, which overstates the case, though it is true that one is drawn into a world of ideas that invite and occasionally demand further exploration, whether that is to take place in studies of Auden's works, in the books that he read or in his own, usually excellent, prose writings.

Critics have also taken exception to the cosy, conversational style of many poems, which often, as François Duchene writes, "verges perilously on cultural chat."¹¹ Other common features of Auden's style that have been considered off-putting are the rank shifting (nouns are often used as verbs and verbs as nouns), the juxtaposition of words from a variety of usage levels, the breezy comic tone that is used even in reference to God, and the "lowness" of his subject matter, such as the rooms of a house (Thanksgiving for a Habitat, AH) or the micro-organisms of his skin ('A New Year Greeting,' EG) The later poetry is also often judged in the light of the poetry of the Thirties and Forties rather than according to the much different standards that Auden attempted to meet. This comparison gives rise to two kinds of complaint, one being that the later poetry is so much less aesthetically pleasing, representing a deterioration of his poetic gift, and the other one being that Auden has forsaken political awareness for the more comfortable confines of

home and church. Not the least irritating feature of Auden's later activity is that he struck a number of his most popular early poems from the canon, such as "Petition" and "September 1, 1939," and revised others to the extent of considerably lessening their impact.¹²

It is not surprising, given all the above, to read this comment from Clive James: "It is a common opinion among the English literati that Auden's later work is a collapse." James goes on to separate himself from this opinion and to provide the beginnings of a defence of Auden's status:

I am so far from taking this view that I think an appreciation of Auden's later work is the only sure test for an appreciation of Auden, just as an appreciation of Yeats's earlier work is the only sure test for an appreciation of Yeats. You must know and admire the austerity which Auden achieved before you can take the full force of his early longing for that austerity -- before you can measure the portent of his earlier brilliance. There is no question that the earlier work is more enjoyable. The question is whether you think enjoyability was the full extent of his aim.¹³

"Austerity" does not seem to be the right word as an all-inclusive term for the nature of the later poetry, as no single word could be. "Enjoyability" was also certainly a major portion of Auden's aim in writing poetry throughout his life, and a line that could be seen as a motto for his later work, given the number of times he quoted it, is the following from Samuel Johnson: "The only end of writing is to enable the readers better to enjoy life or better to endure it."¹⁴ James's attitude is a fair one, but he strikes an apologetic note that makes reading the later poetry seem more of a duty than a pleasure.

Other writers go to the opposite extreme with praise for the later

poetry, and perhaps there is some significance in the fact that most of them are American.¹⁵ Justin Replogle, for example, writes that About the House contains numerous examples of Auden's "greatest achievement, the late comic poetry."¹⁶ Replogle also considers Auden's use of diction to be one of the most exciting features of this poetry, saying that the mixture of words from different usage levels is one of the main sources of Auden's comic effects. Referring to a list of some of Auden's most esoteric words, he writes: "Set alongside their most used brethren these odd terms exhibit Auden's complete mastery of his comic medium. He has sailed to every corner of the usage world and brought back specimens from the antipodes."¹⁷ Replogle's enthusiasm may, possibly, be seen as the result of doing the required work on Auden's diction, the painstaking hunting around in the OED which is amply rewarded since Auden almost always has a variety of excellent reasons, all integral to the effects he wishes to achieve, for his odd use of words.

Edward Callan is another critic who praises Auden in the highest terms. He writes, for example, that the "poems in About the House show that Auden has lost none of his skill as a versifier. In general they reveal an almost faultless ear for rhythmic fluency combined with a mastery of syntax that has few equals since Milton."¹⁸ Towards the end of his article, which focuses primarily on the twelve poems in the first section, he writes:

Few poets would risk "the hallowing of the everyday" on so extensive a scale as Auden does in this cycle. Simply to carry such a scheme through without a pratfall would be some achievement. But Auden does not merely squeeze through. He invents a style that is formally appropriate and musically compelling and that can bear repeated reading.¹⁹

Callan goes so far as to rank this cycle on a level with Yeats's "The Tower": "It surpasses 'The Tower' at times; but it is more uneven, and its occasional lapses recommend caution in classifying it as the superior achievement." Callan describes his reservations in the same passage: "But those faulty aspects of his earlier work, repeatedly noted by critics, are there too -- the occasional slapdash; the sudden descents into colloquialisms and slangy phrases; the delight in such lesser forms as the limerick."²⁰ Even this mild criticism, however, is objectionable, for as Callan himself seems partially to recognize, it belongs to a standard litany of complaints against Auden which has, over the years, begun to ring hollow. Whatever "slapdash" Callan sees may be legitimately described as a fault, but the reservations concerning Auden's diction and his choice of forms are simply matters of taste. There is, in any case, only one limerick in the last four volumes (in the fifth section of "Marginalia," CWW), and only one reference to a limerick in About the House, though the fact remains that Auden did delight in light verse and verbal "play" of almost any description.

Auden reacted strongly, and with considerable justification, against anyone who would proscribe this delight. The reference to a limerick in About the House reads as follows:

Even a limerick
ought to be something a man of
honor, awaiting death from cancer or a firing squad,
could read without contempt
("The Cave of Making")

This echoes a passage from The Dyer's Hand which shows further how seriously, so to speak, he took frivolity: ". . . among the half dozen

or so things for which a man of honour should be prepared, if necessary, to die, the right to play, the right to frivolity, is not the least."²¹ This attitude, naturally, ties in with a defense of both light verse and the capacity of any verse with comic elements to deal seriously with the "larger" issues. At the same time Auden attempts to keep practitioners of the so-called "higher forms" of poetry and their more ostentatious seriousness from being regarded too reverently. A term such as "verbal contraption" (DH, p. 50) to describe a poem is a mild example of a comment intended to deflate sententious notions of what poetry is, but his harshest judgements are reserved for poets who either abrogate prophetic roles for themselves or who show any sign of subordinating truth to aesthetic principles. Shelley's "'unacknowledged legislators of the world' describes the secret police" to Auden (DH, p. 27), and he continually came out with passages such as, "We're not musicians: to stink of Poetry / is unbecoming, and never / to be dull shows a lack of taste . . ." ("The Cave of Making"); and

abhorred in the Heav'ns are all
self-proclaimed poets who, to wow an
audience, utter some resonant lie.
("Ode to Terminus," CWW)

The middle ground for Auden seems to be almost any style or form of poetry which attempts to speak truly in two different senses of that phrase -- to use words in their proper definitions and to speak the truth:

. . . in
Speech, if true, true deeds begin.

If not, there's International Babel,
In which murders
Are sanitary measures and stockbrokers
Integrity-ridden
("A Short Ode to a Philologist," AH)

Auden's concern with both language and its use and potential misuse as a medium of truth surfaces in his poetry in so many different ways that the reader is continually made conscious of his artifice. Part of Auden's reason for this is given in his contribution to a symposium on "A Change of Air" (AH), which is worth quoting at length because it is one of the few opportunities Auden took to answer his critics directly and contains a defense of many of the unique features of his latest poetry:

On various occasions I have expressed my dislike of persons who hold some Theory of Poetry to which they demand that all poems shall conform, and I will repeat it here. At the same time, every poet has to ask himself what kinds of poetry, given his temperament and talent, it is authentic for him to write, and what kinds are not, and, in reading other poets, he has to distinguish between their merits, which may be very great, and their influence upon himself, which may be pernicious. It was not the fault of Yeats or Rilke that I allowed myself to be seduced by them into writing poems which were false to my personal and poetic nature.

Well, then, my problem is this. In so much "serious" poetry, poetry, that is to say, which is neither pure playful song nor comic, I find an element of "theatre", of exaggerated gesture and fuss, of indifference to the naked truth, which, as I get older, increasingly revolts me. This element is mercifully absent from what is conventionally called good prose. In reading the latter, one is only conscious of the truth of what is being said, and it is this consciousness which I would like what I write to arouse in a reader first. Before he is aware of any other qualities it may have, I want his reaction to be: "That's true" or, better still, "That's true: now, why didn't I think of it for myself?" To secure this effect I am prepared to sacrifice a great many poetic pleasures and excitements. At the same time, I want what I write to be poetry as Robert Frost defines it, namely, untranslatable speech. Normally, when we read prose, we are not consciously aware of how it is saying what it says, of either the rhythmical value of the syllables or of each word as a unique entity with unique overtones: in poetry -- this is its greatest glory -- we are continually made aware of them. The ideal at which I aim is a style which shall combine the drab,

sober truthfulness of prose with a poetic uniqueness of expression so that, if a reader should try to translate a passage into French, say, or Italian or German, he will find that this cannot be done without loss of rhythmical values and precise shades of meaning

Whatever else it may or may not be, I want every poem I write to be a hymn in praise of the English language: hence my fascination with certain speech-rhythms which can only occur in an uninflected language rich in monosyllables, my fondness for peculiar words with no equivalents in other tongues, and my deliberate avoidance of that kind of visual imagery which has no basis in verbal experience and can therefore be translated without loss.

Every poet has his dream reader: mine keeps a lookout for curious prosodic fauna like bacchics and choriamb.²²

This is a prescription for a poetry that is unusually self-conscious about its content and form, especially the latter, since one is compelled to pay a great deal of attention to the poem's medium itself, or the English language. Replogle continually points to this aspect of the poetry, defining it at one point (after Ezra Pound) as "logopoeia." Pound defines logopoeia as "'the dance of the intellect among words,' that is to say, it employs words not only for their direct meaning, but it takes count in a special way of habits of usage, of the context we expect to find with the word, its usual concomitants, of its known acceptances, and its ironical play."²³

Replogle also writes: "Auden seems always to be standing back listening to his speakers talking. He watches their language, plays with it, makes rhetorical inventions of it, raises, lowers, mocks and revels in it."²⁴ Such poetry, with its strange mixture of austerity and ebullience, is consonant with Auden's concern with the truth in the

sense that it does not demand immediate consent. Rather, it engages the intellect in a consideration of its ideas and language. The reader's consent to the former and admiration of the latter are held in abeyance until the difficulties of the thought and the showcased diction and metrical variations have been well-considered.

2. Auden's Christianity

One moves into a large and often traversed territory in attempting to discuss specifically what Auden's vision of the truth is. I will *attempt only* to cover the essentials, showing as often as possible how Auden's world-view affected his ideas about writing.

The basis of much of Auden's thought is a particular and often repeated conception of man, which is, in its simplest form, that man is a dual creature, composed of body and soul. At the beginning of a short lecture entitled "Words and the Word" in Secondary Worlds, Auden bases the familiar conception on the two accounts of creation in Genesis:

In Chap. I, vv. 27 - 28, it is said: "Male and female He created them, and God said 'Be fruitful and multiply.'" In Chap. II, v. 7: God formed man of the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul, and the reason given in v. 18 for the creation of Eve is not biological, but personal: "It is not good that man should be alone." (p. 119)

Auden brings the first part of his definition of man's dual nature to this conclusion:

As individuals, then, we are created by sexual reproduction and social conditioning and are what we are, not by our free choice, but by the accident of birth and economic necessity. As individuals we do not act; we exhibit behaviour characteristic of the

biological species and social group or groups to which we belong. As individuals we are countable, comparable, replaceable.

As persons, who can, now and again, truthfully say I, we are called into being -- the myth of our common descent from a single ancestor, Adam, is a way of saying this -- not by any biological process but by other persons, our parents, our siblings, our friends. As persons we are not willy-nilly members of a society, but are free to form communities, groups of rational beings, united, as St. Augustine said, by a love of something other than themselves, God, music, stamp-collecting or what-have-you. As persons we are capable of deeds, of choosing to do this rather than that and accepting responsibility for the consequences whatever they may turn out to be. As persons we are uncountable, incomparable, irreplaceable. (p. 120)

Auden goes on to discuss the nature of language as it is used by these different sides of our being. "Individuals" need language as a code of communication in dealing with the necessities of life -- food, sex, shelter, and so on. In speech used by "persons,"

one unique person addresses another unique person and does so voluntarily: he could keep silent if he chose. We speak as persons because we desire to disclose ourselves to each other and to share our experiences, not because we need to share them, but because we enjoy sharing them. (SW, pp. 121-122)

This distinction also helps to account for the different angles from which life is viewed which are commonly classed under the terms "subjectivity" and "objectivity." The ultimate expression of objectivity is the language of science, which is algebra, and of subjectivity one of the highest expressions is poetry.²⁵

Auden's understanding of the problems that result from being "double men," and the way that this duality extends into every sphere of life, is discussed by Herbert Greenberg as follows:

. . . our anxiety arises from divided consciousness, a condition defined in . . . (Auden's) assertion that "Man's being is a copulative relation between a subject ego and a predicate self." As agent of mental awareness and volition, the "ego" is the unique consciousness seeming to each individual wholly free and coincident with his experience of personal being, while the "self" is that part of himself which seems separable from himself and, as object of the ego's attention, seems "given, already there in the world, finite, derived, along with, related and comparable to other beings." This basic distinction may be regarded from endless perspectives: the ego is the "I" part of ourselves, the self the "me"; as the beholder of possibility and relationship, the ego may be identified with "imagination," but it is equally the agent of "reason"; the self, on the other hand, is the source of instinct, the emotions, and of unconscious needs; crudely conceived, the ego is mind, the self body. Furthermore, project this subjective division into the frame of reference of the objective multitudinous world, and it appears as that between "history" and "nature," realms in which we confront, respectively, those factors weaving a complex thematic pattern in the texture of Auden's work -- freedom and necessity.²⁶

Our very experience of the world takes contradictory forms because of our dual natures, which may be considered a result of man's fall from "essential being" in Eden to "existential being" in this world.²⁷ The difficulties of solving the "dualism of experience" compound all the difficulties of attempting to recognize and define good and evil. Many have confounded evil, for example, with either the body or the mind, associations which have never had very beneficial effects because they prevent the reconciliation of the "subject ego" and the "predicate self." They also urge the renunciation of some vital part of our humanity, in one case denying man's finiteness as an "individual" and in the other man's freedom as a thinking, willing "person." If the body and the world of sensual experience are seen as evil, then man will search "for

salvation by finding release from nature," and his ideal form would be a "disembodied spirit."²⁸ If man's will and the world of the intellect are considered evil, he will seek "salvation by finding refuge in nature,"²⁹ and his ideal existence would be something akin to that imagined for a purely instinctive but noble savage. Both are also attempts at escape from the anxiety produced by our consciousness of death and by the subsequent desire to make our brief stays on earth meaningful, or to give our lives some lasting significance. In the one form of escape men seek consolation in identification with the everlasting, cyclical process of nature. In the other men seek an eternity outside nature, condemning time as well as the dross of all that exists in nature.

The problems of man's anxiety in time, his double nature, his uncertainties about even the simplest forms of knowledge, and his resultant difficulties in expressing himself truthfully, can, nevertheless, at least partially be overcome. The beginning of the solution is in many ways the very realization that man lives in the realm of the conditional:

. . . to take
 umbrage at death, to construct
 a second nature of tomb and temple, lives
 must know the meaning of If.
 ("Prologue: The Birth of Architecture," AH)

Knowledge of one's limitations, falseness, and mortality, and of existing in despair, may lead one to the belief in something that may variously be called Eternal Truth, Logos, the Unconditional or the "Wholly Other Life" that Caliban speaks of in "The Sea and the Mirror" (CP, p. 340), which are all names for God. Auden's recognition of God took the form of a renewed belief in Christianity, but one remarkable aspect of his conversion

is that it greatly heightened his sense of the distance between man and God. It also made him more aware than ever of man's inadequacies, especially the inadequacy of his language as a medium for expressing the truth: ". . . Speech can at best, a shadow echoing / the silent light, bear witness / to the Truth it is not . . ." ("The Cave of Making");

Another major result of Auden's conversion was that it gave him a new understanding of love, though the concept of love had had great importance in Auden's thought from the beginning, as Herbert Greenberg writes:

If Auden has consistently addressed himself to the question "How shall we live?" his conviction that love is the basic energy of life has provided that the question mean, essentially, "How shall we love?" and love has always implied for him what the title of a well-known poem, "Law Like Love," suggests: namely "law," in the sense of "natural law," but also in the broader sense of "that which is required of us." The conception derives from Dante, whose influence has been seminal and long-lasting, for Dante provides the organizing framework by means of which the problem of ego and self is construed as involving a quality of love. Auden has acknowledged his indebtedness by referring at least eight times to the following passage from the seventeenth canto of the Purgatory: "Nor Creator, nor creature, my son, was ever without love, either natural or rational; and this thou knowest. The natural is always without error; but the other may err through an evil object, or through too little or too much vigour
". . . Hence thou may'st understand that love must be the seed of every virtue in you, and of every deed that deserves punishment."³⁰

Auden had accepted a similar view before his conversion, but without any commitment to God as the source of love in the world, and without a belief in the fallen, sinful nature of man. Greenberg writes:

From the premise that the basic energy of the universe is love, certain propositions follow. They are expressed in the first two of the following statements of belief recorded in 1949:

- (a) All created existence is good.
- (b) Evil is a negative perversion of created good.
- (c) Man has free will to choose between good and evil.
- (d) But all men are sinners with a perverted will.

If statements (a) and (b) have always been for Auden absolute presuppositions, (c) and (d) represent critical developments in his thinking. The notion that all men are sinners with a perverted will reflects his acceptance of Christianity, and is, in fact, an observation of major relevance in causing this acceptance; while the doctrine of free will, though never denied by him, would have proven acceptable at some stages only with serious reservations which, when modified, make turning points in his career³¹

An even more important development in Auden's thinking, however, is a much more complex understanding of the love that is the universe's "basic energy." The greatest love, or the love that more than any other gives meaning to our lives, is Agape, which can be defined as the reciprocal love between God and man, as well as the love that man is commanded to give freely and unselfishly to his neighbour. A better term for Auden's earlier understanding of love is Eros, defined by Auden as having more to do with self-actualization than sex (cf. Spears, pp. 189-190), but which has little to do with the self-sacrifice and devotion called for in the Christian concept of Agape.

It should also be remembered that freedom of the will to choose between good and evil, one of the most obvious capacities separating man from the beasts, is subject, nevertheless, to two kinds of necessity. One is the necessity which he shares with the beasts in that there are certain functions which he must perform to survive physically, and the other is the necessity defined by what he understands to be commanded of

him regarding his relationship to God, which must be obeyed for what may be called spiritual survival. The latter comes to mind when Auden writes in "New Year Letter," "To sin is to act consciously / Against what seems necessity," or in a variation of these lines in "For the Time Being," "Adam, being free to choose, / Chose to imagine he was free / To choose his own necessity . . ." (CP, pp. 172, 279). But the first kind of necessity also becomes involved in sin when man attempts to deny his many limitations, or when he comes to think of them as evil, for these are limitations placed on him by God and constitute part of the definition of his place in creation.

Within Christian theology itself this is, surprisingly enough, a fairly revolutionary view. Christians have, throughout the history of the Church, flirted with a variety of dualistic heresies in their desire to reject "worldly things" or "passions of the flesh," believing in all piety that certain forms of such rejection accord with God's design for their lives. Choosing self-negation or any form of what may be called the Negative Way, some have felt it their duty to subject bodies to the point of self-hatred in what they perceive to be the operation of their souls. Others, often with an excessive interest in eschatology, have found the time in which they live to be an unspeakably heavy burden until that day when death will free them to join the community of saints in heaven.

Auden's rejection of these attitudes is based on his interpretation of the creation story in Genesis, as well as on his understanding of the incarnation of the Logos in the body of Christ. His thought in this

regard is heavily indebted to Charles Williams, who was an exponent of the Way of the Affirmation of Images, which has aims and principles similar to those of the Negative Way, but which goes about their realization in a different manner.³² The basis of the Affirmative Way is simply the belief that the Fall did not bring down all of creation with it. God's creation is still seen as good, and any doubts of this based on other interpretations of the Fall in Genesis are removed by the fact that, if the Word was made Flesh, the Son of God himself found it acceptable to live with the limitations that all humans must, and so it is wrong to think of "necessity" as intrinsically evil. One simple formulation of this idea is given in the haiku, "Our bodies cannot love: / But without one, / What works of Love could we do?" ("Postscript," "The Cave of Nakedness," AH). A more complex discussion is given in the following passage from Williams' The Image of the City, which begins with a quotation from Lady Julian of Norwich, the fourteenth-century mystic:

"For I saw full assuredly," wrote the Lady Julian, "that our Substance is in God, and also I saw that in our sensualite God is; for in the self point that our Soul is made sensual, in the self point is the City of God ordained to Him from without beginning; into which seat He cometh and never shall remove it . . . and as anent our substance and sensualite it may rightly be cleped our soul: and that is because of the oneing that they have in God. The worshipful City that our Lord Jesus sitteth in is our sensualite, in which He is enclosed; and our kindly Substance is enclosed in Jesus with the blessed Soul of Christ sitting in rest in the Godhead."

Whatever the Lady Julian meant by "sensualite", she certainly meant nothing less material or less vital than the whole physical nature; she was not weakening or refining it away. She followed the Church, which, ever since it had rejected the Nestorian idea of a merely moral union of the two natures in Christ, had

been committed to a realistic sense of the importance of matter: "our soul with our body, and our body with our soul, either of them taking help of other," which is not Browning but the Lady Julian again. The operations of matter are a means of the operation of Christ, and the body has not, in fact, as some pious people suggest, fallen a good deal farther than the soul.³³

The problem with the "Way of the Rejection of Images," as Williams sees it, is that it has also tended to reject the Way of Affirmation, even though "the two ways have the same maxim and the same aim -- 'to love everything because God loves it.'"³⁴ This principle has at times been replaced by an "unofficial Manicheism"³⁵ which has as its major tenet the belief that "things of the earth are corrupt," or, in a milder form, are at least vastly inferior to spiritual matters. It is commanded of every man, in this different view, to praise creation, because each man himself is a part of that creation, and to act or speak in any way that rejects his particular condition is to "act consciously / Against what seems necessity." Auden epigrammatizes the attitude that God seems to ask us to hold as "That singular command / I do not understand, / Bless what there is for being" ("Precious Five," CP, p. 447). This attitude is in many ways the culmination of those lines in the much-praised "In Memory of W.B. Yeats," "In the prison of his days / Teach the free man how to praise," and yet few would have expected Auden's poetry to take the almost inevitable turn that it did, and fewer, it seems, find it laudatory. The following quotation from Replogle is interesting in this regard:

. . . [Horae Canonicae] ends with a joyful hymn of celebration in Lauds": "God bless the Realm, God bless the People; / God bless the green world temporal" (CP, p. 486) Nothing in "Horae Canonicae," a remarkable performance, is more remarkable than this

final cry of joy. How surprised Auden's early audience would have been could they have foreseen their grave and disapproving social critic in his middle age, blessing the whole unregenerate secular world with such unabashed ardor.³⁶

This, then, explains the position from which Auden defends God's creation against Gnostics, Manichees and any other proponent of the idea that goodness cannot be associated with matter or bodily functions, or who rejects his present cultural and historical setting for some past Arcadia or future Utopia. The same position leads him to consider political tyranny in a new light, and he sees this tyranny to be closely associated with romanticism, with its "stress on the autonomy of the imagination," or with its "detached idealism" which can be seen as a form of Gnosticism.³⁷ To believe in any respect that individual genius is beyond morality, or that any individual has the right to treat nature and other people as mere materials in the imposition of his particular vision of an ideal world, was anathema to Auden. Callan describes Auden's attacks on such ideas as a long and "fervent crusade" which covered "every ground, whether artistic, political, or religious," and that this crusade has the added interest of showing the Auden has not only maintained his interest in politics but that his insights are "deeper and more philosophical" than they were in the past. Callan writes:

This amplitude of design distinguishes his criticism from that of his contemporaries, as does the note of urgency in his treatment of the subjective Romantic imagination and its attendant danger of carrying over into the real world of human conduct the untrammelled freedom of Ariel's world of possibilities. In About the House, he addresses these lines to the shade of Louis MacNiece:

More than ever
 life-out-there is goodly, miraculous, lovable,
 but we shan't, not since Stalin and Hitler,
 trust ourselves ever again: we know that, subjectively,
 all is possible.

He seems convinced that the modern tyrant who presumes that every imaginative possibility is permissible, is spawned, intellectually, by Romanticism's deification of original imaginative genius. Edens and Utopias are a proper concern of the artist, but outside the realm of art, a fascination with them may lead to the assumption that an ideal Utopian order may be imposed on society with the same freedom with which the artist gratuitously liquidates unsound rhythms or removes whole stanzas to some other place. As he puts it in The Dyer's Hand (p. 85): "A society that was really like a good poem, embodying the aesthetic virtues of order, beauty, economy, and subordination of detail to the whole, would be a nightmare of horror"

Auden's association of romantic idealism as well as political tyranny with dualistic theory is largely due to the influence of Denis de Rougemont's Love in the Western World, which was reviewed by Auden in 1941. The following is Spears' summary of that review:

. . . [Auden] states the book's thesis that, historically and metaphysically, the concept of romantic love is based upon Manicheism, holding matter and time to be evil, denying the flesh and the present, and seeking its perfection in death, when matter and time are transcended and the soul merges into the Logos. The great exemplar is Wagner's Tristan. This myth creates its negative mirror image; in Mozart's Don Giovanni, the flesh and the present are asserted, the spirit and the future denied; time is something to be aggressively destroyed. Opposed to both isotopes of Eros is the Christian concept of Agape; based on the Incarnation, it denies neither flesh nor spirit, and permits us to love human beings as individuals: to love God is to obey God, Who commanded us to love one another. De Rougemont is wrong, Auden says, in defining Eros as of sexual origin; Eros rather is the basic will to self-actualization without which no creature can exist (we have seen this concept in Auden's early poetry); Agape is Eros mutated by Grace, a conversion, not an addition; its symbol is not sex but eating, an act testifying to the dependence of all creatures on each other. The myth of

romantic love is a false solution to the problem of enabling Eros to choose truly, an attempt to eliminate the possibility of wrong decisions through making one myth discharge the functions of religious faith, tradition, and other beliefs that once governed the conduct of life.³⁸

De Rougemont does not link Eros with sexuality so closely, however, as to be unaware of the fact that passionate love can become a kind of hybris, or the wish to take what Auden calls the "will to self-actualization" to the extreme of a self-sufficiency equal to God's. The following passage from de Rougemont indicates this as well as showing how individual passion is analogous to a war-mongering nationalism:

Passion requires that the self shall become greater than all things, as solitary and powerful as God. Without knowing it, passion also requires that beyond its apotheosis death shall indeed be the end of all things.

And nationalistic ardour too is a self-elevation, a narcissistic love on the part of the collective Self. No doubt, its relation with others is seldom averred to be love; nearly always hate is what first appears, and what is proclaimed. But hate of the other is likewise always present in the transports of passionate love. There has thus occurred no more than a shift of emphasis. And what does national passion require? The elevation of collective might can only lead to the following dilemma: either the triumph of imperialism -- of the ambition to become the equal of the whole world -- or the people next door strongly object, and there ensues war.³⁹

Faith in God whose love for mankind went to the ultimate extreme of the sacrifice of "His only begotten Son" becomes a foundation for the practice of all the values of a humane civilization. Man is commanded to love God with all his body, mind and soul, to love Him who became flesh and the lowest of servants in order that man may be released from sin. Man is also commanded to love his neighbour as himself, or to follow the pattern set by Jesus in serving the material

and spiritual needs of others in recognition of the fact that they are all subjects in God's dominion. To believe these things is not, therefore, merely to establish grounds for personal salvation, but to accept a call to social action. This is the basis of Auden's use of the symbol of the City of God in his later poetry, a City to which all others are infinitely inferior. Auden was influenced in this regard by Charles N. Cochrane's Christianity and Classical Civilization, which he reviewed in 1944, and that review is again excellently summarized by Spears:

. . . Auden remarks upon the inability of classical thought to give positive value to freedom, to avoid the dualism of God and the world, mind and matter, time and eternity. Identifying the divine with the necessary or the legal, classical idealism cannot oppose tyranny on principle, cannot give meaning to individuality. As Augustine showed, only Christianity can make sense of both man's private and his social experience, the central doctrine being that of the Trinity, the formulation of the belief that God is love -- not Eros, the desire to possess something one lacks, but Agape, a reciprocal relation, dynamic free expression. If men love themselves, their society is an earthly city in which order is maintained by force; if they love God and their neighbors as themselves, a heavenly city in which order appears the natural consequence of freedom (i.e., through Agape, Eros and Logos are one).⁴⁰

One cannot be forced to belong to the "heavenly city." Citizenship is voluntary and dependent upon a personal, spiritual revolution which, however, cannot take place unless one recognizes that the source and ultimate goal of such a revolution is the grace of God.

One would think that Auden would write poetry redolent with praises of God and descriptions of his own spiritual progression. But orthodoxy, for Auden, "is a reticence": "To speak of God except in a context of prayer is to take His name in vain . . . "; and to pray in

public or to make any ostentatious display of piety is forbidden by the gospel.⁴¹ The poet must beware dragging what belongs to the religious sphere down to the aesthetic one:

A poet must intend his poem to be a good one, that is to say, an enduring object for other people to admire. Is there not something a little odd, to say the least, about making an admirable public object out of one's feelings of guilt and penitence before God? (DH, p. 458)

Auden almost goes so far as to say that Christians had better leave poetry alone:

A poet who calls himself a Christian cannot but feel uncomfortable when he realizes that the New Testament contains no verse (except in the apocryphal, and gnostic, Acts of John), only prose. As Rudolph Kassner has pointed out: "The difficulty about the God-man for the poet lies in the Word being made Flesh. This means that reason and imagination are one. But does not Poetry, as such, live from their being a gulf between them?"

"What gives us so clear a notion of this as metre, verse measures? In the magical-mythical world, meter was sacred, so was the strophe, the line, the words in the line, the letters. The poets were prophets.

"That the God-man did not write down words himself or show the slightest concern that they should be written down in letters, brings us back to the Word made Flesh.

"Over against the metrical structures of the poets stand the Gospel parables in prose, over against magic a freedom which finds its limits within itself, is itself a limit, over against poetic fiction (Dichtung), pointing to and interpreting fact (Deutung)."
(Die Geburt Christi.)
(DH, p. 459)

Auden claims not to know of an answer to Kassner's objection, but this is rather disingenuous in the context of all the solutions for relating art and Christianity suggested in both his poetry and theoretical writings. His preparedness "to sacrifice a great many poetic pleasures and excitements" for a style that has elements of "what is conventionally called good prose"⁴² is one example of this, and there

is consequently a fair amount of "pointing to and interpreting fact" in his poetry. His interest in the accuracy of his language and the truth of what he says is a corollary of this, for the inadvertent lying of imprecise speech and the outright lying that poets often indulge in for the sake of a good line are corrupting influences on both poet and reader. He also avoids any kind of writing that leans in any way towards religious or political propaganda, or what he terms "Black Magic,"

for politics and religion are spheres where personal choice is essential. "God", said St. Augustine, "who made us without our help will not save us without our consent." Propaganda, like the sword, attempts to eliminate consent or dissent and, in our age, magical language has to a great extent replaced the sword.⁴³

This attitude is reflected in Auden's poetry in the sense that it tends to go to the opposite extreme of propaganda. His poems often draw attention to their artifice, so that the reader is led continually into an objective consideration of the whole business of making and reading poetry, and the work demanded of the reader, in looking up words and working out difficulties in expression and thought, leads one to suspend assent until both the aptness of his language and the value of what he says have been well-considered.

Auden's fastidiousness, then, ensures that very little in his poetry actually contradicts anything in his Christian outlook. The greater difficulty for him was that of knowing how much, and what kind of, positive Christian content poetry could bear. Auden has many reservations, not just about poetry, but about the very adequacy of any kind of language in dealing with religion:

. . . the Christian theologian is placed in the difficult position of having to use words, which by their nature

are anthropomorphic, to refute anthropomorphic conceptions of God. Yet, when such anthropomorphic conceptions are verbally asserted, he must speak: he cannot refute them by silence. Dogmatic theological statements are to be comprehended, neither as logical propositions nor as poetic utterances: they are to be taken, rather, as shaggy-dog stories: they have a point, but he who tries too hard to get it will miss it.

The poet, who is concerned not with the Creator but with his creatures, is in a less awkward position, but for him, too, the relation between words and the truth is problematical. One might say that for Truth the word silence is the least inadequate metaphor, and that words can only bear witness to silence as shadows bear witness to light. Sooner or later, every poet discovers the truth of Max Picard's remark: "The language of the child is silence transformed into sound: The language of the adult is sound that seeks for silence."

The only witness to the living God, that is to say, which poetry can bear is indirect and negative. (SW, p. 136)

This kind of thinking seems much more restrictive than it actually is. Despite the limitations of the medium of poetry, and the fact that a poet must have no illusions about the efficacy of poetry in helping others find or better their faith, Auden is still very interested in attempting to make his words bear witness to his faith. This has taken the form of explicit and comprehensive treatments of Christian themes -- "For the Time Being: A Christmas Oratorio" and "Horae Canonicae" are two outstanding examples of this in his earlier work. It also takes the less obvious form in his treatment of "the phenomenal world as a realm of sacred analogies" (SW, p. 144). In the latter case, Auden makes a virtue of man's inability to attain "objective knowledge of things-in-themselves," an ideal which he says that even scientists no longer believe is attainable. Auden writes:

We seem to have reached a point where, if the word real can be used at all, then the only world which is real for us, as the world in which all of us, including scientists, are born, work, love, hate and die, is the primary phenomenal world as it is, and always has been, presented to us through our senses, a world in which the sun moves across the sky from east to west, the stars are hung like lamps in the vault of heaven, the measure of magnitude is the human body, and objects are either in motion or at rest.

If this be accepted, it is possible that artists may become both more modest and more self-assured, that they may develop both a sense of humour about their vocation and a respect for that most admirable of Roman deities, the god Terminus. (SW, pp. 143-144)

The way that a return to such a belief is possible, then, is through the subject's view of the world as something good, created by God. It can be used by man as a means of knowing himself, of recognizing his limitations and of defining his position in relation to the rest of creation and to God.

This helps explain both the comic tone and the celebratory spirit of most of Auden's later poetry. Auden defines "the comic" as follows: "A contradiction in the relation of the individual or the personal to the universal or the impersonal which does not involve the spectator or hearer in suffering or pity, which in practice means that it must not involve the actor in real suffering" (DH, p. 371). One of the greatest _____ of these contradictions is ^{that} between man and God, and there is always something essentially comic in man's attempts to define precisely his relationship with the divine, but at the same time the mere knowledge of the existence of such a relationship, which is the source of meaning and happiness in his life, is cause for celebration. Auden further develops his ideas about the comic in a review (1970) of Dr. Loren Eiseley's The Unexpected Universe:

. . . when we truly laugh, we laugh simultaneously with and at. True laughter (belly laughter) I would define as the spirit of Carnival.

Again a digression, on the meaning of Carnival as it was known in the Middle Ages and persisted in a few places, like Rome, where Goethe witnessed and described it in February of 1788. Carnival celebrates the unity of our human race as mortal creatures, who come into this world and depart from it without our consent, who must eat, drink, defecate, belch and break wind in order to live, and procreate if our species is to survive. Our feelings about this are ambiguous. To us as individuals, it is a cause for rejoicing to know that we are not alone, that all of us, irrespective of age or sex or rank or talent, are in the same boat. As unique persons, on the other hand, all of us are resentful that an exception cannot be made in our own case. We oscillate between wishing we were unreflective animals and wishing we were disembodied spirits, for in either case we should not be problematic to ourselves. The Carnival solution of this ambiguity is to laugh, for laughter is simultaneously a protest and an acceptance.⁴⁴

One kind of laughter of acceptance is that originating in the "escape from social personality . . . by the wearing of masks," and the laughter of protest can, for example, take "the form of mock aggression" (F+A, pp. 471, 472). Auden goes so far as to make "Carnival laughter" one part of a trinity of worlds, along with "Prayer and Work," which must be given "proper respect" if a "satisfactory human life, individually or collectively" (p. 472), is to be attained.

That the main locus of Auden's poetic expression of the "Christian spirit"⁴⁵ is the Carnival also represents a recognition of the fact that poetry by its nature transforms and levels its subject matter into aesthetically pleasing experiences. Auden does not ignore the reality of human suffering or the darker side of religious experience, but poetry is simply not seen to be capable of doing such matters justice. As he writes in "The Truest Poetry is the Most Feigning":

No metaphor, remember, can express
 A real historical unhappiness;
 Your tears have value if they make us gay;
O Happy Grief! is all sad verse can say.⁴⁶

As long as its limitations are understood, however, poetry's pleasures and its embodiments of ideal, harmonious worlds can still have a substantial, spiritually restorative effect. Poetry, along with all other activities and forms of play associated with "the spirit of Carnival," can be seen as ways of preparing for the worlds of Prayer and Work, just as "Carnival, the days of feasting and fun, immediately precedes Lent, the days of fasting and Prayer" (F & A, p. 472).

3. Christianity and Poetic Structures

Auden's concern with the dialectic between man's freedom and his subjection to necessity is also reflected in his love of writing within the restrictions of formal verse patterns. As we have seen, this in itself is considered a form of spiritual discipline ("Blessed be all metrical rules that forbid automatic responses," "Shorts II," EG), but it can also be associated with the festive Carnival spirit. Auden paraphrases Paul Valéry on this subject, and on the parts here quoted both men fully agreed:

For Valéry, a poem ought to be a festival of the intellect, that is, a game, but a solemn, ordered and significant game, and a poet is someone to whom arbitrary difficulties suggest ideas. It is the glory of poetry that the lack of a single word can ruin everything . . . (F & A, p. 363).

Auden's love of structure extends to his ordering of the poems in their respective volumes, and his overall patterns get quite complex in About the House, City Without Walls and Epistle to a Godson. This appears,

at first glance, to be a rather doubtful proposition, but it would be well to remember that precedents for this kind of patterning clearly exist in Auden's earlier work, and that his entire cast of mind was such that the consistent, complex and all-inclusive structure was his characteristic method of organization. Several small proofs of this are the charts that he was fond of drawing up and which explain and categorize some wide-ranging aspect of human experience. An early chart is found in an essay entitled "Psychology and Art Today" (1935),⁴⁷ where Auden divides the Christian era into three periods, comparing and contrasting each under thirteen sub-headings. Another is the aforementioned "Swarthmore Chart" of 1943, which outlines the dualism of experience in reference to a long series of categories. Auden, at times, was concerned enough about the reader's recognition of his plans that, in The Dyer's Hand (which cannot, unfortunately, be discussed at length here), he risked concluding his foreword with the note: "The order of the chapters . . . is deliberate, and I would like them to be read in sequence" (p. xii). In fact, all the volumes of poetry since Another Time (1940), with its division into three parts ("People and Places," "Lighter Poems" and "Occasional Poems"), are arranged or structured in varying degrees of complexity, two different kinds of which have earlier been shown for The Double Man and The Shield of Achilles.

The idea of symmetry, as found, for instance, in The Shield of Achilles (seven-poem cycles at the beginning and end with a fourteen-poem middle), is also quite prominent in Auden's last four volumes. Poems in different parts of a volume are specifically linked, as in Epistle to a

Godson with the sixteenth and eighteenth poems ("Shorts I" and Shorts II"), for example, or the fifteenth and nineteenth ("Doggerel by a Senior Citizen," "Old People's Home"). Here again one can be assured that Auden is following well-established patterns of thought.⁴⁸ He habitually thought in terms of polarities, and even in his reading and criticism he often concentrates on pairs of events and characters representing completely opposite sides of a particular theme. This is especially true of the third part of The Dyer's Hand ("The Well of Narcissus"). The mirror patterning and imagery redounding in Auden's writing seem meant to remind us continually of his image for art, the mirror (often the distorting mirror), and of art's manifold differences from nature and human society.

This is not merely a habit of Auden's thought, since all the antinomies he writes about are seen as projections of the fundamental dualism of experience for every individual. Auden's ultimate concern in everything he wrote was to attempt a reconciliation of this dualism, or a way of thinking that could hold all the oppositions of existence in one overall view and, at the same time, affirm their worth. Christianity, for Auden, made this possible, and the structures in his volumes reflect the desire to place everything within a Christian perspective, or to make his volumes as well as his individual poems point to the Word as the highest end of all human endeavour. Detailed descriptions of how this works will be reserved for the following chapters, but brief outlines will be given here. These outlines are also partly suggested by the three appendices at the end of this dissertation, which have the secondary value of showing readers presently using Collected Poems, in which

Professor Mendelson has done much rearranging,⁴⁹ what the original orders of the poems in each volume were.

The appendices should also give some indication of the length to which my chapters are committed. Every poem in each volume must be dealt with if it is to be shown as belonging to an overall pattern. My goal, however, is not simply to prove the existence of a series of patterns, but to show how those patterns are one manifestation of the pervasive and invigorating effect Christianity had on Auden's poetry. Full justice to the vitality and complexity of the majority of the later poems cannot be done in brief summaries of essential points, and there is no substantial fund of criticism on which one can rely.

In view of these considerations, it may seem amiss that City Without Walls is not accorded a chapter of its own in this dissertation. The length required to deal with each volume has simply made it imperative that at least one be withdrawn from intensive consideration. A brief summary of the volume's structure will be provided only to give some sense of the nature of Auden's work between About the House and Epistle to a Godson, but full justice to City Without Walls will have to be reserved for a later publication.

About the House is composed of two sections, a cycle of poems based on the rooms in his house in Kirchstetten entitled Thanksgiving for a Habitat, and a section of sixteen poems entitled "In and Out."⁵⁰ Two aspects of the cycle's arrangement are that the first six poems deal mainly with the themes of freedom and necessity, in alternating order, and the second six poems deal alternately with rooms that can be considered domestic versions of the private and public realms. The particular

functions of the house and rooms provide loci, as Callan puts it, "for expanding circles of analogy, reaching ultimately toward some spiritual horizon."⁵¹ Auden's vision of a feast that could take place in the dining room in "Tonight at Seven-Thirty," for example, is very much a vision of Agape, and in this respect it is the key poem and the climax of the cycle. "In and Out" is arranged in a mirror pattern in which each poem, with two exceptions, is linked or complemented in some way by a companion poem. The first, "A Change of Air," is linked with the fifteenth, "Ascension Day, 1964," the second is linked with the fourteenth, and so on until the two sections of poems entitled "Four Occasional Poems" and "Four Transliterations." The central poem on which this pattern turns is entitled, appropriately enough, "Symmetries and Asymmetries." The last poem, "Whitsunday in Kirchstetten," deals with the day on which the foundation of the Church is celebrated. The poem thus stands outside the symmetrical arrangement, just as the "House of God" stands over and above the civil orders of mankind, one of which is reflected in the house Auden puts in order in Thanksgiving for a Habitat.

City Without Walls is composed of twenty "titles" (though several times a number of poems are subsumed under one title,⁵² as in "Five Occasional Poems") and a concluding denouement of two titles. The title poem is composed of twenty five-line stanzas of epic metre and a denouement of five three-line stanzas, in which the problems of living in the "unpolicied spaces" of what seems to be a worthless, nightmarish city, are given a weak and temporary solution. "City Without Walls" is intended to be contrasted, first of all, with the twentieth title, "Ode

to Terminus," which calls in part for a new respect for rules and boundaries. The last two titles, "Four Commissioned Texts" and "Prologue at Sixty," deal more explicitly than anywhere else in the volume with Christian themes, and thus the conclusion of the volume as a whole may be said to offer a Christian resolution. "Prologue at Sixty" is also written in twenty five-line stanzas of epic metre and two stanzas that conclude the poem with a meditation and a prayer. Thus "City Without Walls" is contrasted even more specifically with the final poem. The point of the volume's structure, with its system of correspondences, numerical and otherwise, between the arrangements of the first and last poems and the volume as a whole, is, first of all, that the idea of the disorder of the secular city in "City Without Walls" is counteracted by the volume's order. Secondly, the "heavenly city," which depends for its establishment both on God's grace and on a different kind of "city without walls," an individual's inward and spiritual state, is seen to be the goal for which civilization must strive if it is to have any true and lasting value at all.

The thirty-three poems of Epistle to a Godson are arranged in a mirror pattern, so that the first poem is linked with the thirty-third, the second with the thirty-second, and so on until the last pair of poems, "Shorts I" and Shorts II." The poem that stands alone in the centre, or at the top, of this arrangement is "The Ballad of Barnaby." In the first poem, "Epistle to a Godson," Auden tries to decide what he should write by way of nourishment for a godson who is about to assume his share of responsibility as a citizen of the world. His solution forms an introduction to the rest of the volume:

. . . to give a stunning

display of concinnity and elegance
is the least we can do, and its dominant
mood should be that of a Carnival.
Let us hymn the small but journal wonders

of Nature and of households, and then finish
on a serio-comic note with legends
of ultimate eucatastrophe,
regeneration beyond the waters.

"The Ballad of Barnaby" is a key poem in this plan as it is the only full-fledged legend of eucatastrophe in Epistle to a Godson. Barnaby is a tumbler who suddenly decides to reform his life, enters a monastery, dies during a performance devoted to the Virgin Mary, and is then translated to heaven by a choir of angels. The system of correspondences in the background of the volume as a whole are between the turns of Barnaby's vaults (which he performs within a vault), the turns that poems in the second half of the volume usually give to poems in the first half, the turn of the volume as a whole around "The Ballad of Barnaby," and the "eucatastrophe," or the sudden turns for the good, of both religious conversion and the resurrection that succeeds death.

There are also indications that Auden intended to work the poems of Thank You, Fog into some overall structure, for there are a number of poems that can be linked in that they deal with variations on similar themes, and have almost exactly similar forms and metrical patterns. It is impossible to know what the structure would have been, however, especially since, as Professor Mendelson notes, Auden would probably have doubled the number of poems to be included ("Note," TYF, p. vii). All that seems clear is that Auden would have begun the volume with "Thank You, Fog" and concluded it with both "A Thanksgiving," which

takes stock of some of the writers he has been indebted to at various points in his career, and "Lullaby," in which Auden composes himself for a death that he knew to be imminent.

To the last Auden accepted his status as an entertainer whose particular business happened to be playing the game of poetry, though he realized that his was a very serious game, which accordingly led him to impose a number of severe restrictions on the form and nature of his utterances. His attempts to write poetry consonant both with what he felt he was "graced to behold" ("Shorts II," EG) and with his Christianity often resulted in the production of some very peculiar and difficult "contraptions." Auden persevered in an aesthetic he knew was going to win neither widespread popularity nor the adoration of critics, for the thrill in what is usually considered great poetry is rarely present in his last four volumes. This indicates neither a perversity in Auden's spirit nor a collapse of his poetic gift. The dazzling talk, the aptness and precision of what he says, his ease in handling a wide range of ideas, the comic flights of imagination through "a sacred realm of analogies" (as he perceived the world around him)', and his expressions of enchantment with the whole of creation, are all contained within a masterly handling of different verse forms and, in turn, within the technically brilliant overall structures of the volumes. Auden's rather unspectacular aims were to make his poetry as interesting and enjoyable as possible for anyone willing to spend some time with them: "to enable readers better to enjoy life or better to endure it." In these he succeeds admirably: one is afforded the considerable pleasure of reading a man

possessed of a good deal of wisdom, who manages to combine an excellent sense of humour with gravity of thought, and whose craftsmanship in the later poetry consistently meets the highest standards.

NOTES

¹My understanding of this Way and its complement, the Negative Way, is taken from Charles Williams, The Descent of the Dove (London, 1955), pp. 57-62 (first published in 1939). Henceforward this book will be cited as Descent.

²Descent, pp. 57-58. Williams' influence was both personal (he helped Auden in his decision to join the Church in the late Thirties) and intellectual. Quoting Auden's own introduction to Descent (New York, 1956), Monroe K. Spears writes: ". . . after reading and re-reading it for some sixteen years he finds it 'a source of intellectual delight and spiritual nourishment which remains inexhaustible' (p. xii)." The Poetry of W.H. Auden: The Disenchanted Island (New York, 1963), p. 243. Spears also shows exactly how strong Williams' influence was (cf. pp. 176-177; 242-243). Henceforward this book will be cited as Spears.

³"In Memory of W.B. Yeats," in W.H. Auden: Collected Poems, ed. Edward Mendelson (London, 1976), p. 198. Henceforward this book will be cited as CP.

⁴Forewords and Afterwords, selected by Edward Mendelson (New York, 1973), p. 126. Henceforward this book will be cited as F & A. The quotation is a prose translation of some "lines written in Goethe's middle-age," but Auden does not specify the poem.

⁵"Shorts II," Epistle to a Godson (New York, 1972). Henceforward this volume will be cited as EG.

⁶New York, 1955. Henceforward this volume will be cited as SA. The Double Man (New York, 1941), shortly to be referred to in this paragraph, will henceforward be cited as DM.

⁷Op.cit., p. 134. The ensuing quotations are from pp. 134, 135.

⁸The New York (Random House) edition of these volumes are used here. Henceforward About the House will be cited as AH, City Without Walls as CWW, and Thank you, Fog as TYF. Homage to Clio (New York, 1960) and Academic Graffiti (New York, 1971), both referred to later in this paragraph, will henceforward be cited as HC and AG.

⁹The edition used throughout this dissertation is The Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary, eds. Sir James Murray et al (New York, 1973). Henceforward this work (in two volumes) will be cited as OED.

¹⁰"Prefatory Note" to Herbert Greenberg's Quest for the Necessary: W.H. Auden and the Dilemma of Divided Consciousness (Cambridge, Mass., 1968). Henceforward this book will be cited as Greenberg.

¹¹The Case of the Helmeted Airman: A Study of W.H. Auden's Poetry (London, 1972), p. 178.

¹²All the poems that Auden revised or ceased to collect may be found in Edward Mendelson, ed., The English Auden: Poems, Essays and Dramatic Writings, 1927 - 1939 (New York, 1977). Henceforward this book will be cited as English Auden. All the reasons for Auden's revisions will not be dealt with here, though it can be said that his main goal was simply to eliminate "jarring sound or slovenly diction or what he came to think of as windy rhetoric . . ." (Edward Mendelson, "Editing Auden," New Statesman (17 September 1976), p. 376). In the same article Mendelson discusses Auden's revision of a line in "In Memory of W.B. Yeats": "Auden wrote in 1939, 'O all the instruments agree / The day of his death was a dark cold day.' He revised it in 1958 to, 'What instruments we have agree' The prose face is unchanged -- instruments are man-made, all we have is all there are -- but the poem now relies less on rhetorical heightening, more on the balance and plausibility of the statement." (p. 376)

¹³"Auden's Achievement," Commentary, 56, vi (December 1973), p. 58.

¹⁴A Certain World: A Commonplace Book (New York, 1970), p. 418. Secondary Worlds (London, 1968), p. 141. W.H. Auden and Louis Kronenberger, edd., The Faber Book of Aphorisms (London, 1964), p. 287. Henceforward these books will be cited as, respectively, Certain World, SW, and Aphorisms.

¹⁵This may be due, simply, to the fact that New York became Auden's main sphere of operations after 1939. His move to America just before the war did not, of course, aid his popularity in England, and there his sudden break from popular political movements and from the kind of poetry that had won him early fame would have been felt most deeply.

¹⁶Auden's Poetry (London, 1969), p. ix. Henceforward this book will be cited as Replogle.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 236.

¹⁸"Auden's Goodly Heritage," Shenandoah, 18, II (1967), p. 57. Henceforward this article will be cited as Callan.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 67.

²⁰Ibid., p. 57.

²¹New York, 1962, p. 89. Henceforward this book will be cited as DH.

²²Anthony Ostroff, ed., "A Symposium on W.H. Auden's 'A Change of Air,'" with essays by George P. Elliott, Karl Shapiro, Stephen Spender, and W.H. Auden," Kenyon Review, xxvi (Winter 1964), pp. 206-207. Henceforward this article will be cited as Ostroff.

²³Replogle, p. 224. Replogle (adding his own emphasis) quotes The Literary Essays of Ezra Pound, ed. T. S. Eliot (London, 1954), pp. 25, 33.

²⁴Replogle, p. 209.

²⁵One of Auden's poetic uses of this distinction is in "A Reminder," the fourth text of "Four Commissioned Texts" in CWW. He writes, "Truth is a single realm, but its governance is a Dual Monarchy . . .," the two monarchs being "DAME PHILOLOGY" and "DAME ALGEBRA."

²⁶p. 6. Greenberg's quotations are from The Enchafèd Flood: The Romantic Iconography of the Sea (London, 1951), p. 102.

²⁷These are terms from a chart Auden drew up and used while teaching at Swarthmore College in 1943. The chart was transcribed by Kenneth Lewars and printed in "Auden's Swarthmore Chart," Connecticut Review, 1, ii (1968), p. 48. Henceforward this article will be cited as Swarthmore Chart. Spears also summarizes this chart in a long footnote, pp. 248-249.

²⁸The first quotation in this sentence is from Swarthmore Chart, p. 48, and the second is from F & A, p. 471.

²⁹Swarthmore Chart, p. 48.

³⁰Pp. 7-8. The following list of references to the Purgatory is based on Greenberg's: "The Orators," in Poems (New York, 1934), p. 94 (cf. English Auden, pp. 62-63); "The Group Movement and the Middle Classes," in Oxford and the Groups, ed. R.H.S. Crossman (Oxford, 1934), p. 96; "The Good Life," in Christianity and the Social Revolution, ed. John Lewis (London, 1935), p. 36 (cf. English Auden, p. 345); "Psychology and Art Today," in The Arts Today, ed. Geoffrey Grigson (London, 1935), p. 13 (cf. English Auden, p. 339); "What is Culture?" Nation, CLII (June 1941), p. 757; "Notes," in "New Year Letter," DM, p. 143; DH, p. 130; Aphorisms, p. 83.

³¹Ibid., p. 9.

³²Descent, pp. 57-62.

³³Anne Ridler, ed. (London, 1958), p. 68. Henceforward this book will be cited as City. Williams also quotes the passage from Lady Julian in Descent, p. 224, and Auden uses it as the epigraph for "Memorial for the City," his elegy for Williams.

³⁴City, p. 69. A further definition of the two Ways is given in Descent, pp. 57-58:

. . . if the whole of Christendom had taken to the desert and lived among the lions, it remained true that the authority of the pillared pontiffs would have been compelled to assert that marriage and meat and wine were "valde bona." Rejection was to be rejection but not denial, as reception was to be reception but not subservience. Both methods, the Affirmative Way and the Negative Way, were to co-exist; one might almost say, to co-inhere, since each was to be the key of the other . . . The one Way was to affirm all things orderly until the universe throbbed with vitality; the other to reject all things until there was nothing anywhere but He. The Way of Affirmation was to develop great art and romantic love and marriage and philosophy and social justice; the Way of Rejection was to break out continually in the profound mystical documents of the soul, the records of the great psychological masters of Christendom.

³⁵Ibid., p. 68.

³⁶Replogle, p. 84.

³⁷Callan, pp. 59-60. While at Swarthmore College (1942-1945) Auden taught a course entitled "Romanticism from Rousseau to Hitler." Cf. Spears, p. 248. Further quotations in this paragraph are from Callan, pp. 59-60.

³⁸pp. 189-190. Auden's review is in The Nation (June 1941). Love in the Western World (New York, 1957) will hereafter be cited as De Rougemont.

³⁹De Rougemont, p. 271.

⁴⁰p. 190. Auden's review is in The New Republic (Sept. 1944). Christianity and Classical Civilization (New York, 1977) will hereafter be cited as Cochrane.

⁴¹The quotations are from "The Truest Poetry is the Most Feigning," CP, p. 470; and SW, p. 134 (Auden quotes Ferdinand Ebner). Cf. also DH, p. 457.

⁴²Ostroff, p. 207.

⁴³SW, pp. 128, 129. "Black Magic" is distinguished from "the White Magic of poetry" by the fact that "the Black Magician . . . has no enchantment to share with others but uses enchantment as a way of securing domination over others and compelling them to do his will" (pp 128-129).

⁴⁴F & A, p. 471. Auden's review, originally published in The New Yorker (21 February 1970), is called "Concerning the Unpredictable." For pointing out the importance of this review, and for showing how the comic spirit and the spirit of Carnival are related in Auden's poetry, I am heavily indebted to Timothy Green's excellent article, "The Spirit of Carnival in Auden's Later Poetry," Southern Humanities Review II (1977), pp. 372-382.

⁴⁵DH, p. 458. Auden writes "There can no more be a Christian art than there can be a Christian science or a Christian diet. There can only be a Christian spirit in which an artist, a scientist, works or does not work. A painting of the Crucifixion is not necessarily more Christian in spirit than a still life, and may very well be less." The example drawn from the visual arts, however, makes this point stronger than it would be with one drawn from the verbal arts, in which there can be little confusion, in the long run, concerning an artist's religious or intellectual orientation.

⁴⁶CP, p. 470. In a much earlier passage, which shows something of the strength and endurance of this idea for Auden, he writes:

Though language may be useless, for
 No words men write can stop the war
 Or measure up to the relief
 Of its immeasurable grief,
 Yet truth, like love and sleep, resents
 Approaches that are too intense . . .
 ("New Year Letter," 11. 293-298, CP, p. 166)

⁴⁷English Auden, p. 338

⁴⁸"Symmetries and Asymmetries" were frequently used themes, as in the poem of the same title in About the House, and Auden also used the mirror-image or symmetrical structure in individual poems, where the last stanza reflects the first in some way, the second-last the second stanza, and so on. Two examples are "Ascension Day, 1964" (AH) and "Epithalamium" (CWW). Auden's familiarity with "mirror-structures" is also indicated by an offhand comment made in the late Sixties, when he promised to write a "medieval anthem" for "Willie" Walton, which was to be "one of those the-latter-half-is-the-mirror-of-the-first-half things." In Robert Craft, Stravinsky (London, 1972), quoted by Charles Osborne, W.H. Auden: The Life of a Poet (New York, 1979), p. 282. Henceforward this biography will be cited as Osborne.

⁴⁹Cf. Professor Mendelson's discussion of his arrangement in CP, pp. 12-13.

⁵⁰The title of the cycle is underlined to help keep references to it distinct from the poem with the same title.

⁵¹Callan, p. 61.

⁵²Appendix C helps explain my use of the term "titles." There are actually thirty-seven "entries" in this volume -- poems, songs, sections of "marginalia" and other texts. Each of the "groups" of verse, however ("Five Occasional Poems," "Two Songs," "Marginalia" (in five sections), "Eight Songs from Mother Courage" and "Four Commissioned Texts") are united under single titles by common verse patterns, subject matter, and other qualities.

CHAPTER II

THANKSGIVING FOR A HABITAT -- A CYCLE

About the House begins, in the dedicatory address, with a pair of images suggesting an apocalyptic future:

A moon profaned by
Sectarian din, death by
Fervent implosion: --
Possibles. But here and now
Our oath to the living word.

These lines allude to Hannah Arendt's introduction to The Human Condition, in which she explains that part of her purpose is "to trace back modern world alienation, its twofold flight from the earth into the universe and from the world into the self. . . ." ¹ Examples of the former are the expressions of hope attendant on the advent of space flight, which was seen by some as a "step toward escape from men's imprisonment to the earth." ² One example of the latter is man's escape from boredom and the meaninglessness of labour into purely private realms devoted to a continual round of sensual pleasures.

This "twofold flight" can be seen as a variation on a theme Auden had long been familiar with. In 1943, for example, he outlined a twofold attempt at escape from the problems of the "dualism of experience" and from the responsibility implied in the "knowledge of good and evil." ³ One way is to seek "refuge in nature," or in a state of nature. This can be imagined as a form of implosion, a directing of all thoughts and feelings inward so that only one's personal needs, emotions and pleasures are

considered important. The other kind of escape is to seek "release from nature," the ideal form of which is pure, ethereal (or spiritual) being, freed from the limitations both of one's body and this world.

All such denials of our humanity or of the natural world lead ultimately to despair. Auden himself takes up the challenge of finding redemption for life as it is lived in one's actual circumstances and in the present time: "But here and now / our oath to the living word." The business at hand is the production of a volume of verse, and its keynote is to be praise of "the human condition," an idea that is immediately reinforced by the epigraph from Psalm 16 (in Latin) for Thanksgiving for a Habitat, which translates as, "The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage."⁴ In the rest of the Psalm God is praised as the guide to and source of all purity, truth and joy. Auden, quite possibly, quoted the verse in Latin to lead the curious to have a look at the entire Psalm in English. In any case, the epigraph helps link "the living word" of the dedicatory poem to the Word of God. This connection is initially established simply by the fact that one usually calls upon God to witness to the sincerity of one's promises in swearing an oath.

In Thanksgiving for a Habitat Auden takes the bold step of making an ordinary house and its rooms the basis for explorations of matters of the greatest significance. Edward Callan writes: "The house and rooms serve practical functions, but as the occasion for a poem in the cycle each room provides a locus for expanding circles of analogy reaching

ultimately toward some spiritual horizon."⁵ This horizon may be described as a faith in the God of Christianity as the means by which one's existence in the "here and now," however mundane or boring it seems to an outsider, can be seen as fraught with meaning and the potential for a profound happiness. This can be considered yet another form of escape only insofar as one is capable of seeing escapism in the attempt to redeem time and existence, in which one accepts, and attempts to find some good in, the limitations of necessity, the responsibility of freedom, and the problems and sufferings both entail. Man may share, along with all other living beings, in the restrictions of "nature-necessity,"⁶ but this is something that is decreed by God, was seen to be good, and therefore should be accepted with praise. There is also a part of man, as this idea implies, which can reflect upon his experience, which is free to act in ways not specifically determined by instinct, and which is free to choose for good or evil. But he is never so free as to make any move or decision which does not have consequences that have to be, as it were, paid for. To love God, His creation, and one's neighbour as oneself are, for Auden, commandments in a spiritual law of being which, if disobeyed, result in despair or the loss of the possibility of realizing the City of God in one's own being.

The first six poems of Thanksgiving for a Habitat fall into two even groups in which the house and the rooms are seen *either as helping Auden meet his needs or as being used as loci for his "free" activities.* "Prologue: The Birth of Architecture," for example, deals with an activity that goes beyond building and is involved in attempting "to

construct / a second nature of tomb and temple" The focus of "Thanksgiving for a Habitat," on the other hand, is adequately explained by its title, for Auden simply praises the fact that he has found a shelter which meets his basic needs. "The Cave of Making" deals with the free act of writing poetry. "Down There" is the cellar, where things necessary for sustenance are stored, and "Up There" is the attic, used primarily to store items for which few people have any use. "The Geography of the House" deals with the pleasurable necessity of leaving "the dead concerns of / Yesterday behind us"

The alternating focus on the ideas of freedom and necessity seems to continue into the second six poems. "Encomium Balnei" deals with the pleasure of taking a bath, which is not, strictly speaking, a necessity; "Grub First, Then Ethics" with the necessity of eating prior to any consideration of how a citizen should act; and "For Friends Only" with the free act of setting apart a guest-room as "a shrine to friendship." But "Tonight at Seven-Thirty" describes an activity in which the calls of both freedom and necessity are answered in doing "the honors of a feast," and "The Cave of Nakedness" also breaks the alternating thematic pattern by dealing with the necessity of sleep. The second six poems are more adequately described as organized into alternating considerations of the private and public realms.⁷ The poems about the bathroom ("Encomium Balnei"), guest-room ("For Friends Only") and bedroom ("The Cave of Nakedness"), all deal with the private realm as a place in which new hope and strength may be gathered for one's dealings with others in the public realm, which in turn has its microcosmic images in

the kitchen ("Grub First, Then Ethics"), dining-room ("Tonight at Seven-Thirty") and living room ("The Common Life"). All of the last six poems are focused on aspects of an ideal form of civilization, and the poem that may be thought of as the climax of the entire cycle is "Tonight at Seven-Thirty," which concludes with a light-hearted vision of Agape in which gratefulness for the feast (a creation of "Nature's bounty and grace of Spirit") is combined with mutual love between human beings and with reverence for God. The whole of About the House is, in fact, ultimately focused on the Grace of God, as it concludes with a poem set in His house, or Church, but further discussion of the poems in "In and Out" will be reserved for the third chapter.

1. Freedom and Necessity

The gnomic, riddling qualities of "Prologue: The Birth of Architecture" make it one of the strangest and most difficult poems in the entire book. Part of Auden's "test for critics," outlined in The Dyer's Hand, is a demand that they like "Riddles and other ways of not calling a spade a spade" (p. 47), but here he seems to take the practice to unreasonable lengths. The only two critics who have dealt with Thanksgiving for a Habitat at any length have avoided a number of this poem's difficulties: neither Callan nor Johnson comments, for example, on the lines in parentheses ending with the phrase "concrete and grapefruit."

The "Prologue" begins with a juxtaposition of two kinds of activity from the not-so-distant past with two from the present:

From gallery-grave and the hunt of a wren-king
to Low Mass and trailer camp
is hardly a tick by the carbon clock. . . .

The implications of the scientific means of measuring time are that past forms of worship and play should be comprehensible to the present age, but they are as strange to us as "Low Mass and trailer camp" would be to our forefathers. "[G]allery-grave" refers to earthen burial mounds divided into separate rooms, or galleries, in which individuals or members of a family in prehistoric Europe were buried in an elaborate ritual. Low Mass, on the other hand, is one of the least ceremonial of all the modern Catholic church services. The "hunt of a wren-king" refers to a form of recreation: in 1750, according to the OED, it is mentioned as an "antient Irish custom," and in this custom "a party of boys or young men ('wren-boys'), carrying a decorated holly-bush with a wren or wrenes hanging from it . . . go about on St. Stephen's Day singing verses" There is another reference in the OED to "the wren, the king of all birds," but it does not say whether this is associated with the wren-hunt on St. Stephen's Day, and Auden possibly made the connection himself. The point is that Auden has chosen kinds of worship and play from different ages that are as unique as he can find: they are the kinds of activities taken part in by "persons" (as opposed to "individuals") in "The Historical World of the Virgin, the world of faces, analogical relations and singular events, describable only in terms of speech" (DH, p. 61). The carbon 14 dating method belongs to "The Natural World of the Dynamo, the world of masses, identical relations and recurrent events, describable, not in words, but in terms of numbers, or rather, in algebraic terms" (DH, p. 61). Auden dismisses a scientific account of such a historical process with the heavily stressed summary, "but I / don't count that way nor do you"

The next lines announce that the past, apart from events remembered within the history of our own consciousness (from the time of "the Bicycle Age" on), is beyond our ken precisely because our interpretations are determined by our own unique historical perspective:

. . . already it is millions of heartbeats ago
 back to the Bicycle Age,
 before which is no After for me to measure,
 just a still prehistoric Once
 where anything could happen.

Auden then gives us five examples of architecture, "Stonehenge and Chartres Cathedral, / the Acropolis, Blenheim, the Albert Memorial," each of which represents a completely different style and period: prehistoric, High Gothic, Civic Greek, Baroque, and Victorian-Gothic. Architecture is properly defined as something distinct from building, according to Ruskin, and the word applies to any feature of a building that goes "above and beyond ^{its} common use" and to edifices that "are raised ^{to} the honour of God . . . or in memory of men."⁸

The fact that these five examples of architecture are seen as "works by the same Old Man / under different names" is reinforced by a small rearrangement of the historical order, with Chartres Cathedral and the Acropolis switching positions.⁹ The "Old Man" may be seen simply as a "prototypical architect,"¹⁰ or as something even vaguer. Spears writes: "In England country people often attribute an ancient artifact to The Old Man, meaning some prehistoric race about whom nothing is remembered."¹¹ Though much is remembered about the Old Man in Auden's terms, our comprehension of His way of thinking is still quite limited. A passage from "The Poet and the City" in The Dyer's Hand may be taken as a

commentary on this section of the poem:

. . . the fact that we now have at our disposal the arts of all ages and cultures, has completely changed the meaning of the word tradition. It no longer means a way of working handed down from one generation to the next: a sense of tradition now means a consciousness of the whole of the past as present, yet at the same time as a structured whole the parts of which are related in terms of before and after. Originality no longer means a slight modification in the style of one's immediate predecessors: it means a capacity to find in any work of any date or place a clue to finding one's authentic voice. (pp. 79-80; my emphasis)

The next few lines of the poem are original to the verge of incomprehensibility, "puzzling the born" as well as the unborn:

. . . we know what He did,
 what, even, He thought He thought,
 but we don't see why. (To get that, one would have
 to be selfish in His way,
 without concrete or grapefruit.)

A partial explanation of these lines may again be found in "The Poet and the City," and the following passage also recalls the opening lines of the poem:

. . . until recently, men knew and cared little about cultures far removed from their own in time and space: by human nature, they meant the kind of behaviour exhibited in their own culture. Anthropology and archeology have destroyed this provincial notion: we know that human nature is so plastic that it can exhibit varieties of behaviour which, in the animal kingdom, could only be exhibited by different species.

The artist, therefore, no longer has any assurance when he makes something, that even the next generation will find it enjoyable or comprehensible. (DH, p. 79)

Auden goes even further than this in the poem by suggesting that our own knowledge, or our understanding of our creations, is as unsure as it was for the "Old Man." His explanation of his work is not a matter

of what He thought, but "what He thought He thought," and it is to be assumed that the present age is subject to the same uncertainty. The parenthesized lines embody this idea in the sense that one's confidence in comprehending the poem is shaken by that stumbling block, as it were, compounded of "concrete and grapefruit."

To understand why the Old Man worked as he did, one would have had to live in his times, and to have been privy to his thoughts, or to have been sufficiently like him so that one could say that one was "selfish in His way" Since the unique quality of man's thought is so dependent on the conditions of his own culture, the introduction of a new condition makes the understanding of a previous culture increasingly difficult. The science and technology of this century, for example, seem almost every month to effect some transformation of our way of thinking and living (cf. DH, pp. 78-79). Perhaps the explanation of "concrete and grapefruit," then, is that they were not introduced to the Western world until the nineteenth century. Concrete, in the modern sense of the word, was not in use during the building of the five given examples of architecture, with the exception of the Albert Memorial. This monument was built from 1863-1871, and concrete had only begun to be used about forty years earlier (OED), though it was hardly the dominant element in construction as it is today. The word "grapefruit" was not introduced to England until the late nineteenth century, and it was not until this century that the fruit itself became a common feature on our tables. The invention of concrete has had a fairly substantial effect on our environment, and therefore on our perception of things;

but grapefruit? Perhaps Auden had Ruskin in mind: "There is no law, no principle, based on past practice, which may not be overthrown in a moment, by the arising of a new condition, or the invention of a new material" All the principles governing our actions, all those things that appear to be "The necessities of the day . . . rise, strange and impatient, out of every modern shadow of change."¹²

Knowing that he has just caused a considerable bewilderment in his readers, Auden takes the poem in a new direction with the words, "It's our turn now / to puzzle the unborn." "Puzzle" can mean two things -- that it is our turn to perplex succeeding generations, as we have been ^{perplexed} by preceding ones, and that it is our turn to "put together" a world of our own. It is now clear that Auden has not merely been talking of architecture, the "primal art,"¹³ as such, but that his concern is with the worlds that are built in all their aspects as expressions of men's unique outlooks on life. The inability of previous ages to construct societies with laws that can survive the passage of time does not prevent man from attempting to create worlds that will last:

. . . mortal or not,
a world has still to be built
because of what we can see from our windows,
that Immortal Commonwealth
which is there regardless: It's in perfect taste
and it's never boring but
it won't quite do.

This Commonwealth is the world of nature to which both animals and the physiological part of man belong. The word "regardless" can be taken in two senses: the Commonwealth "is there on a non-contingent basis, and it is incapable of 'regarding' either itself or anything else."¹⁴

It is referred to in the third person (note the repetition of "it" in these lines), and it is immortal in the sense that nature is an endless cyclical process. These definitions, however, only apply to the world that is seen from behind windows -- the way a scientist, for example, objectively regards man and nature. This view is of all living creatures in the realm of necessity, in which "the most exquisite shelters and safes" may be built, but which does not account for the qualities that also include a man in the realm of freedom, or that define him as a "person" in the "Historical World of the Virgin." Some of the activities that express this part of man are art, play, worship, irresponsible behaviour and, of course, architecture:

Among its populations
 are masons and carpenters
 who build the most exquisite shelters and safes
 but no architects, any more
 than there are heretics or bounders: to take
 umbrage at death, to construct
 a second nature of tomb and temple, lives
 must know the meaning of If.

When a man reflects on the limitations implied by his association with the realm of nature, and when he realizes further that there are questions concerning life for which there are no easy explanations, it is then that he begins to "learn the meaning of If." To be conscious of the fact that he will die, and to think that there is no recourse in an after-life, or that, if there is, it may be an unhappy one, may lead man to be a good deal more offended than a phrase such as "taking umbrage" implies. But death can also be seen as a transitional stage, and as leading to the good if one has been successful in the construction of "a second nature of tomb and temple." Tomb and temple refer to man's being

as well as to his buildings.¹⁵ In specifically Christian terms, a man may take on a second nature twice -- in his conversion, and in his resurrection and translation to heaven after death. But before he can cast off the "old man," as it were, and become a new man, or reborn, he must understand that he lives in the realm of "the conditional." This presupposes the existence of the Unconditional, a sense of which man cannot do without,¹⁶ since it provides the foundation for real control of anxiety. The birth of architecture, the building of a world distinct from that of the Immortal Commonwealth, the construction of a second nature of tomb and temple, all are thus very closely related to the Biblical image of rebirth.

This has many implications on both a personal and a political level. In an analysis of Auden's Christianity, Spears writes as follows:

From the standpoint of the conditional, every sacrifice is in vain, "for, to it, 'a live dog is always better than a dead lion'"; we must become conscious of true necessity, which is internal and absolute -- so absolute that we obey it without worrying about the future. The Christian knows no distinction between the personal and the political; all his relationships are both. Neither an anarchist nor a nonpolitical idiot, he acts in the present, regarding neither past nor future; in theological language, he redeems the time. Man cannot live without a sense of the Unconditional; if he does not fear God, his unconscious sees to it that he has something else, airplanes or secret police, to fear. When anxiety is not kept in its proper theological place, it returns in realms -- moral and aesthetic -- where it should not be.¹⁷

One of the problems in this view is that man can never fully comprehend God, since he cannot help but think in anthropomorphic terms. R.G. Collingwood comments on this dilemma in a passage that helps to explain the odd "Postscript" that jars with the high, oracular tone of the poem:

We cannot help thinking anthropomorphically, but we are provided with a remedy: our own laughter at the ridiculous figure we cut, incorrigibly anthropomorphic thinkers inhabiting a world where anthropomorphic thinking is a misfit.¹⁸

Perhaps Auden wished to have some fun at his own expense, contrasting the circumlocutions, knotty abstractions and certainties of the poem with the comical posturings and direct threats of one who feels threatened:

Some thirty inches from my nose
The frontier of my person goes,
And all the untilled air between
Is private pagus or demesne.
Stranger, unless with bedroom eyes
I beckon you to fraternize,
Beware of rudely crossing it:
I have no gun, but I can spit.

At the same time, the "Postscript" helps Auden fit into his own definition of the characteristic hero of modern poetry, and it illustrates something of the idea that "every artist feels himself at odds with modern civilization":

The characteristic style of "modern" poetry is an intimate tone of voice, the speech of one person addressing one person, not a large audience: whenever a modern poet raises his voice he sounds phony. And its characteristic hero is neither the "Great Man" nor the romantic rebel, both doers of extraordinary deeds, but the man or woman in any walk of life who, despite all the impersonal pressures of modern society, manages to acquire and preserve a face of his own.¹⁹

In "Thanksgiving for a Habitat" Auden makes clear that the importance of one's architectural impulses do not diminish the importance of those aspects of our dwellings which meet the needs of the natural man, and his praise is now directed to what may be considered mere "shelters

and safes." The poem is written in syllabic quatrains (ten syllables in the first and third lines, and eight in the second and fourth), though this construction gives little more than a semblance of order. The lines continually spill over into following lines, and no line or stanza comes to a complete stop until the last line of the last stanza, suggesting that Auden meant this poem to have an aura of chaos. The poem may be described as a jumble of ideas and images, all of them connected in some way with a definition of man, and all juxtaposed in such a way that the poem proceeds "by a series of awkward jerks," or by "comic stops and starts."²⁰

"Thanksgiving for a Habitat," like the "Prologue," begins with a reference to a tomb. The way Egyptian Pharaohs were buried again points up the vastness of the gulf between past and present:

Nobody I know would like to be buried
with a silver cocktail shaker,
a transistor radio and a strangled
daily help, or keep his word because

of a great-great-grandmother who got laid
by a sacred beast.

The absurdity of putting past practices in a modern context shows the impossibility of knowing exactly why cultures in the past thought and acted as they did. It is also impossible to restore to the present a way of living in the past, even if one has a vast "unearned income." Auden refers, in the second and third stanzas, to both that kind of inherited wealth necessary for the construction and maintenance of baroque mansions in the past, and perhaps to the undeserved wealth of

"press lords" in general,²¹ not just to the famous collector and builder of San Simeon, William Randolph Hearst.

Auden then jumps to a consideration of the habitations of motorcycle-gang "lords," who ignore the law in building their "adulterine castles." Coming right after a comment on Hearst, one suspects Auden meant to get another "dig" in at press lords, bringing to mind the disgusting liberties they take with the English language, or with "Dame Philology," a phrase Auden was wont to use (as in "A Short Ode to a Philologist"). The phrase "adulterine castles" was used originally four to five centuries ago to describe the fortresses built by guilds without licenses from the crown (OED). Auden's description of motorcycle gangs as "our half-strong" is clearly a term of contempt for those who make virtues of lawlessness and brute strength, but it is still an odd phrase. Perhaps it is meant as a translingual pun deriving from the French method of labelling cheese -- demi-forte, for example, (which may also be punned on as "half a fort," or "half castle"). Auden makes another jarring leap by suddenly referring to "Hetty Pegler's Tump," a burial mound in Gloucestershire, and he incongruously associates this "tump" with Schönbrunn, the sumptuous rococo-style summer palace of the Habsburgs near Vienna, built in 1711. The basis of the connection is that they are examples of "the shell man constructs for himself as an expression of what he imagines his ideal self to be," as Callan points out,²² or of "someone's idea of the body / that should have been his, as the flesh / Mum formulated shouldn't" Though Auden seems to admire these two places, as opposed to his dislike for San Simeon and "adulterine castles,"

he concludes his discussion of them by commenting on the vast difference between every man's real and ideal self:

. . . that whatever
 he does or feels in the mood for,
 stocktaking, horseplay, worship, making love,
 he stays the same shape, disgraces
 a Royal I.

This last phrase recalls Pascal's definition of man as a limited, miserable creature who is at the same time the most excellent being in all God's creation: "All these same miseries prove man's greatness. They are the miseries of a great lord, miseries of a deposed king."²³ Pascal also refers continually to the fact that only by the grace of God can man overcome his "disgraceful" condition, and in this respect it is interesting that Auden next describes several faulty methods of attempting to overcome our disgrace -- neither overadmiration nor enormous rooms make us more than what we are, and "Darwin and graphs" have shown us how closely we are actually related to the animal kingdom.

Auden shifts ground again by saying that, though it is impossible not to disgrace "a Royal I," it is not right to make living conditions fit only for the "natural" half of man, or for his biological needs:

. . . but earnest
 city planners are mistaken: a pen
 for a rational animal
 is no fitting habitat for Adam's
 sovereign clone.

"Adam's sovereign clone" is a phrase that defines man in all his qualities. He is of nature, an "individual," an animal, no matter how rational, yet he is also a sovereign "person" responsible for how he thinks and acts.

He is created in God's own image, but he is also fallen, and in this sense he is similar to Adam. The typological assertion, that this similarity can become identity → to the point of justifying the use of the word "clone," is possibly related to Charles Williams's concept of "co-inherence," which is in turn, in the following passage, based on St. Augustine's explanation of the Fall:

. . . the Augustinian view . . . asserted (i) that man was created in a state of supernatural good, of specific awareness of God, (ii) that Adam had got himself out of that state by sin, and his sin was "pride" -- that is, "the act of deserting the soul's true 'principle' and constituting oneself one's own principle." He had, as it were, claimed to have, and behaved as if he had, a necessity of being in himself. He had, somehow and somewhere, behaved as if he were God. (iii) His descendants therefore were not at all in a mere social habit of sinning; they did not merely sometimes sin; they were sinners, which was not at all the same thing. Nay, more, they had, all of them, been involved in that first original iniquity, and its guilt. "Omnes enim fuimus in illo uno quando omnes fuimus ille unus" -- we were all in that one man when we all were that one man.²⁴

Auden then turns his attention to his own habitat, and his definition of man now proceeds by distinguishing him from the world of nature:

I, a transplant

from overseas, at last am dominant
 over three acres and a blooming
 conurbation of country lives, few of whom
 I shall ever meet, and with fewer

converse.

Auden progresses from plant to animal imagery in the following stanza, and his unsociability threatens to turn to active dislike as far as certain species are concerned, such as Amphibia and Arachnids. The word "Arachnids" immediately leads Auden to think of the Olympian gods' dislike

for Arachne, the weaver. Athena in particular took umbrage at a tapestry woven by Arachne depicting the gods' amours, and for this transgression Arachne was made a spider. Man's emblem of guilt is his clothing, and, by extension, his dwelling place: the "birth of architecture," in this respect, can be said to have taken place in the Garden of Eden.

Those who deface this emblem of guilt are, like the cruel Olympian gods, "germane to Hitler." Just as we are the "children" of Adam and share in his sin, we may as well also declare ourselves to share a particular "germanity" with Hitler should we "deface" our habitations in a manner similar to making "pens" for "rational animals." Auden immediately disavows such a connection for himself:

. . . the race of spiders
shall be allowed their webs. I should like
to be to my water-brethren as a spell
of fine weather. Many are stupid,

and some, maybe, are heartless, but who is not
vulnerable, easy to scare,
and jealous of his privacy?

Auden also dissociates himself from Linnaeus by not recoiling from his "water-brethren" which, presumably, include Amphibia. The term also alludes to baptized Christians, not extremely attractive in their propensity for stupidity and heartlessness.

Like most animals, however, man is generally "vulnerable, easy to scare, / and jealous of his privacy." This recalls the question in the seventh and eighth stanzas:

One may
be a Proustian snob or a sound Jacksonian
democrat, but which of us wants

to be touched inadvertently, even
by his beloved?

No matter how one defines oneself, whether in terms of political systems, cultural groups, or as distinct from the world of nature, Auden tells us that all men have a need for privacy that must be respected, and that every man should at least be allowed his habitat. A model on a very low scale of this primal aspect of civilization is the relationship between Auden and the blackbird. They cannot understand each other, but neither endangers the other nor infringes on the other's privacy, though only the human is capable of enjoying the other's "alien rigamarole."

Auden then shifts his attention to the future, beginning with the words, "I ought / to outlast the limber dragonflies," and returns to the theme of death which, at the beginning of the poem, had been discussed in relation to the past. The imagery to this point has proceeded from vegetation, to insects and amphibians, and up to a singing blackbird, but now Auden reverses direction, proceeding from "limber dragonflies" (which will outlast him), to a "filter-passing predator" (a "kenning for virus"²⁵, but which also brings cigarette smoke to mind), and then at last to the "smidge of nitrogen" which, at death, he will return "to the World Fund." The strange terminology and the play on sizes in all these lines dealing with Auden's speculations on death are comprehensively dealt with by Johnson:

There is continual interaction among the various contextual luggage of each word, especially between the informal and scientific vocabularies. The parenthetical clause continues this, throwing "nod" and "jittery" against "nano-second," "c.c.," and "giga-death"; part of the point is the comic if unfunny handling of sophisticated weaponry by characters from opera buffa. A nano-second is a billionth of a second, a cubic centimeter of "poisonous nothing" is redundantly

small (though that "poisonous nothing" is, presumably, radioactive debris, very potent "nothing"); a giga-death is what happens in a nuclear explosion -- one death times a billion, occurring in one second divided into a billion. The play on sizes is becoming very large in its scale, oddly small in its terminology. Etymologically, as Auden would know, the words giga and nano are related to giant and nanny, and suggest the nursery and fairy tale as well as the laboratory and the battlefield, a set of correspondences that makes its own ironic point. The euphemism for death in this instance is "translated," and translated is exactly what is happening verbally: giga-death and nano-second are translations of "ordinary" words for death into terminology at once mathematically precise, fanciful, and pertinent to probable causes of death today. Within the whole series, there are progressive shrinkage and enlargement, along with a progressive abstraction of vocabulary. Nevertheless, the series of euphemisms for death reminds us that, in the end, dead is dead.²⁶

Several further inversions of expectation come in the ensuing

lines:

Should conventional
blunderbuss war and its routiers²⁷

invest my bailiwick, I shall of course
assume the submissive posture:
but men are not wolves and it probably
won't help.

By comparison with a nuclear holocaust the methods of war considered "conventional" are laughably ancient, and Auden goes further by actually using the terms describing the conventions of war centuries earlier. One would expect to hear only the phrase, "conventional war," but Auden throws a "blunderbuss" in between to emphasize the absurdity of man as the only species "for whom war is conventional."²⁸ The comparison with wolves has the further effect of shaming humans for their tendency to deprive others of even their small portions of "Territory, status, and love."

Even the birds, however, would fight for these things, and the major source for Auden's "Thanksgiving" in this poem is that suddenly, as if he had not even asked for it, he has been granted his habitat:²⁹

what I dared not hope or fight for
is, in my fifties, mine, a toft-and-croft
where I needn't, ever, be at home to

those I am not at home with, not a cradle,
a magic Eden without clocks,
and not a windowless grave, but a place
I may go both in and out of.³⁰

The main influence on this last line is a passage from the beginning of George Macdonald's novel, Lilith, in which a raven gives advice to Mr. Vane:

"The only way to come to know where you are is to begin to make yourself at home."
"How am I to begin that when everything is so strange?"
"By doing something."
"What?"
"Anything; and the sooner you begin the better! For until you are at home, you will find it as difficult to get out as it is to get in. . . . Home, as you may or may not know, is the only place where you can go out and in. There are places you can go into, and places you can go out of; but the one place, if you do but find it, where you may go out and in both, is home."³¹

The simplicity of Auden's last line represents another complete reversal of expectations, for the poem may be described as a web of involutions that Johnson at one point relates to the changing sizes and shapes in Through the Looking Glass, and at another point to Brobdingnag.³² The analogies are excellent, since Swift was interested in definitions of humanity throughout Gulliver's Travels, and since Alice also continually wonders who she is. At times Auden shows us the smallness of man in his

cruelty and ignorance, and to other times the greatness of man as "a Royal I," even if he disgraces that sovereignty. Man cuts a ridiculous figure with an "incorrigibly anthropomorphic" thinking, and yet, ironically, his abilities to define and reflect can still lead him to a point where a simple respect for the life, privacy and freedom of movement of others can be seen as the beginning of his happiness.

Auden's method in this poem seems aptly described by one of Pascal's Pensées:

If he exalt himself, I humble him,
If he humble himself, I exalt him;
And I contradict him always,
Until he understands
That he is an incomprehensible monster.³³

Man in "Thanksgiving for a Habitat" is seen, to give a brief list, burying himself with worldly goods, mending lethal bicycle chains, trying to buy back the distant past, as germane to Hitler, defacing his "emblem of guilt," yearning for a second Edenic childhood or death (the "windowless grave"), faring poorly in comparison with animal life, and conducting nuclear and "conventional blunderbuss war." A place that one "may go both in and out of" is not the humblest of desires, given man's unpredictability and his tendency to violence. As Auden writes in "The Cave of Making": "we shan't, not since Stalin and Hitler, / trust ourselves ever again: we know that, subjectively, / all is possible." Given this inability to get a human guarantee of safety, a man may well wish to join the Psalmist in hoping that the Lord Himself will "guard his going in and his coming out, now and for evermore" (Psalms 21:8).

"The Cave of Making" is the third poem to open with reference to

death, since it is an elegy written in memory of Louis MacNeice, and since "Weland's Stithy" in the second line alludes to "Weland's Smithy" in Wiltshire, a famous prehistoric gallery-grave. This accentuates the idea that "caves of making" are cut off from the rest of life very much as graves are, but the analogy cannot be taken too far simply because a good deal of lively making goes on in the caves.

Auden's description of the poem as an "egocentric monologue" is apt. Through alternating five and three-stressed lines, through five verse paragraphs marked by line breaks, the poem moves from a description of the room in the first paragraph, to a brief history of the beginning of his friendship with MacNeice in the second, a few comments on MacNeice's death in the third, a general discussion of poetry in the fourth (with a full complement of Auden's controversial opinions on the subject), and on to a final affectionate address to MacNeice in the fifth. As Richard Johnson points out, however, the poem still has many of the conventional elegiac properties:

Like most elegies, it raises questions about death, and like most elegies for poets, it raises questions about the nature of poetry. The connection between awareness of mortality and poetic making helps to indicate why Auden so emphasizes poetry as an act of making (as opposed, in particular, to expressing or convincing), why he so lauds such makers as Weland and Hephaistos, both of them smiths, artisan artists, workers in permanent metals. If poetic making is a kind of architecture, then the reverse is true, and the poem underscores the notion that any and all acts of making a world are tinged with awareness of mortality. The experience of reading the poem, stately if neither funereal nor solemn in its movement, is one of seeing details -- the trivia which are its raw materials -- achieve the status of well-made art: "silence / is turned into objects." We have a sense of sharp contrast both between the objects and the world from which they are made.³⁴

Johnson may have added that the appropriateness of the word "stithy" for rooms where poetry is made is that in the past its spelling was often fairly close to study, and occasionally the sense of the two words were closely associated, as in this quotation from 1661: "James Yorke, a Blacksmith of Lincolne . . . is a servant as well of Apollo as Vulcan, turning his Stiddy into a Study" (OED). "Stithy" is also well-chosen in that it eases the difficulties in welding the sounds and the ideas of "smithy" and "study" together. Auden's "cave of making" is completely silent, and is separated from the rest of the house as well as being shut off from "the vast background of natural life." Stithies were the opposite of silent, and were often situated at the centre of town life. Weland and his predecessor Hephaestus were not ordinary smiths, however, and their forges are usually described as being inaccessible to the public. Their craft was magical, as Auden's is in the simple sense that "silence is turned into objects," as well as in the sense that these objects belong to "the White Magic of poetry," with which the poet hopes to share the enchantment he felt in writing with his readers.³⁵

The most striking feature of the poem's first verse paragraph is the association of poetry with a kind of mechanical craft. The word "cave," first of all, suggests that the room has little to do with art or architecture since a cave is something found in nature, and since the possessor of the cave is a craftsman who makes or builds "verbal contraptions" (DH, p. 50), an activity quite distinct from the kind of art considered to be "inspired" or an embodiment of the highest truths.

The "tools" of Auden's craft in his artistic stithy are the Olivetti portable, the "very best [dictionaries] money can buy," and "heaps of paper." All associations with natural and social life are kept out of the room, since "all is subordinate / here to a function," and the image for the quality of light in the cave is that it is good enough to "mend a watch by." The last phrase of the verse paragraph is about the farthest thing from the romantic exaltation of poetic imagination as one could imagine: "here silence / is turned into objects" (my emphasis).

Auden begins the second verse paragraph by addressing MacNeice, and he then outlines the similarity of their background, which still has a few exceptions: "lover of women and Donegal, / from your perspective you'd notice / sights I overlook . . ." Both of their "dads" were "middle-class," and their "ancestors probably / were among those plentiful subjects / it cost less money to murder." These lines, suggesting that human history is full of treachery and tyranny, immediately give way to a lighter description of their childhood:

. . . both of us
 became self-conscious at a moment
 when locomotives were named after knights in Malory,
 Science to schoolboys was known as
 Stinks, and the Manor still was politically numinous

Auden suddenly shifts tone again in a passage describing their reactions to events beginning with the First World War and ending with the Second. The "sack of Silence" reminds us of the sack of Rome, and we know that before the "cosmic Model" became German it was Roman, which itself led to a good deal of oppression: "the Roman gravity, that nonsense / which stood none." Even though life at present seems as good as it was during

their childhood, it is small wonder that MacNeice and Auden could not sustain a faith in the Pelagian doctrine of "immanent virtue":

More than ever
 life-out-there is goodly, miraculous, lovable,
 but we shan't, not since Stalin and Hitler,
 trust ourselves ever again: we know that, subjectively,
 all is possible.

In 1956 Auden had written that

. . . it was impossible any longer to believe that the values of liberal humanism were self-evident. Unless one was prepared to take a relativist view that all values are a matter of personal taste, one could hardly avoid asking the question: "If, as I am convinced, the Nazis are wrong and we are right, what is it that validates our values and invalidates theirs?"³⁶

The heavy stress in the poem on the word "subjectively" implies, as it did at the end of the "Prologue" with "the meaning of If," that there is an unconditional truth beyond human subjectivity which validates the opposition to tyranny. Auden also knows that there is a close correlation between tyranny and the artistic imagination, and he "seems convinced that the modern tyrant who presumes that every imaginative possibility is permissible, is spawned, intellectually, by Romanticism's deification of original imaginative genius."³⁷ "Subjectively," even Auden and MacNeice are capable of doing the worst things, and perhaps this is a reason Auden takes such pains to reduce his poetry to the status of a craft with an element of the harmless kind of "magical enchantment." He avoids specification of alternative views and the articulation of new political solutions. Here, as in "Prologue: The Birth of Architecture," he brings us to the verge of explaining the Being in Whom we can trust, or Who makes it possible for us "to construct / a second nature of tomb

and temple," but he leaves all further definitions and decisions to the reader. His desire is to clarify problems and instill a desire to search further: "A poem -- a tall story: / But any good one / Makes us want to know" ("Postscript").

All these problems no longer matter to MacNeice, who is in the "country of Unconcern," removed from the realm of the conditional and its possibilities. The image used to describe MacNeice's death is that he has "quietly slipped out of Granusion, / our moist garden" Granusion was the garden which Uranus and Gaea (or Natura) entered on their descent to earth, and in which Gaea gave birth to the Titans. The garden was moist because it was in the "lower air" of the earth's atmosphere, which grew drier the more it approached the "condition of fire" in the higher spheres of the heavens.³⁸ Auden associates himself and MacNeice with these Ur-Parents -- the two poets had once collaborated, after all, in the production of the book, Letters from Iceland.³⁹ The humour in the analogy is tempered by the knowledge that even the Titans, the gods, and the best of men must eventually die, but the very association is also a form of praise for MacNeice.

The traditional element in elegies for poets, that a dead poet continues to live in some way for the writer, is maintained by Auden in his description of MacNeice as a "voice of conscience" whose "influence is welcome at any hour in my ubity." "Ubity," according to the OED, was last in common use in the seventeenth century, and it simply means "place, locality." Perhaps Auden's choice of this word is related to the examples given in the OED: "1624 . . . An Angel being a finite

creature, is at one instant difinituely in one vbitie onely . . . That which mooueth and passeth from one vbitie to another, is not in both the places at once." Having depicted himself and MacNeice as Titans, he now suggests an ironic comparison with angels, the influence of one guiding angel being welcomed by another. Maintaining the same balance of buoyant spirits and gravity, Auden then goes to a much lower end of the usage scale to describe MacNeice's poetry as "proof positive / of the maker you were." "Proof positive" was the "slogan of a well-known television tooth past^e commercial, repeated in the 1960's until it became a national household joke,"⁴⁰ and its effect is again a playful deflation of poetry.

Auden leaves MacNeice, in the fourth verse paragraph, to return to a general discussion of poetry and, rather surprisingly, he now suggests that poets have never had it so good. Their audience is no longer composed of "Beefy illiterate burner[s]" demanding improvised eulogies, or of "Baroque Prince[s]" expecting only a low form of amusement. Modern poetry is also free from the corruptions of consumerism, and its unpopularity is due to the fact that it

cannot be "done" like Venice
or abridged like Tolstoy, but stubbornly still insists upon
being read or ignored: our handful
of clients at least can rune.

"Runing" has associations with the deciphering of magical signs as well as the mere ability to interpret poetry, and Auden may also have intended a pun on "ruining," an idea which is strengthened by the later reference to "lip-smacking / imps of mawk and hooey [who] write with us what they will" As a corrective to possible excesses in the

process of translating the symbols of words, and the runes of a poem, one would have to share the understanding that Goethe had:

while knowing Speech can at best, a shadow echoing
the silent light, bear witness
to the Truth it is not, he wished it were

There is another strange play on words in the first of three parentheses in this fourth verse paragraph, all of which deal in some way with life's problems and the difficulty of addressing them:

(It's heartless to forget about
the underdeveloped countries,
but a starving ear is as deaf as a suburban optimist's:
to stomachs only the Hindu
integers truthfully speak.)

This is at least partly a reaction against critics demanding engagé poetry, and "heartless" may be read sarcastically just as the obscurity of "Hindu integers" may be seen as the deliberate flaunting of the kind of phrase that requires some special skill in "runing." Auden justifies the withdrawal with one's "handful of clients" into one's "own little "Anglo-American / musico-literary set" ("Whitsunday in Kirchstetten") by saying that poetry is simply not worth much to the starving. Even as propaganda, with all its attendant dangers, poetry would not have much effect in changing "a suburban optimist's" or anyone else's way of thinking, and it is hardly an appropriate medium for defining specific solutions for the world's problems. It is difficult enough for our statesmen to solve them, a point carried by the second parenthesis: "(Today, even Talleyrand might seem a naif: he had so / little to cope with.)"

For the starving in underdeveloped countries one can only give food or not give food. This is one meaning suggested by "integers,"

which are whole numbers on the plus or minus side of a given referent, as distinct from mixed numbers or fractions. This has the further connotation of distinguishing the "language" of integers from the subtleties and shades of meaning in mere words. One reason the integers are called "Hindu" is that the concept of negative numbers was a creation of Hindu mathematicians. They found that integers "could be useful as positive numbers by employing them to represent debts. In fact, they formulated the arithmetic operations on negative numbers with this application in mind."⁴¹ The phrase "Hindu integers" can also be taken as an evocation of our debt to the world's "starving stomachs," and also to the size of this debt, since it is easily associated with the starving millions in, for example, India. A further, admittedly tenuous connection can be made here with the Untouchable caste, since the Latin origin of "integer" means "untouched." One point that remains perfectly clear is that many kinds of problems, although our duty is to do our best to overcome them, are "untouchables" to poetry in the sense that poetry can do nothing directly about them.

Certain kinds of speech, for Auden personally, would be ineffectual and improper if he were to be faced with yet another problem, that of his own imminent death, and the third parenthesis thus contains the last iteration of a motif within the fourth verse paragraph:

. . . (at
that frontier I wouldn't dare speak to anyone
 in either a prophet's bellow
 or a diplomat's whisper).

Why he "wouldn't dare speak" in these ways and yet considers reading a limerick to be acceptable is perhaps due to the fact that there is nothing

pretentious about most limericks. A "man of honor" also would not have much to do with "the Francophile / gaggle of pure songsters" nor with anyone "stink[ing] of Poetry," whether he was at the frontier of death or not. He would not fear being occasionally dull, nor avoid light verse as he would a disease. Auden's horror at the thought of speaking "in either a prophet's bellow / or a diplomat's whisper" is likely due to an association of pride with the former and deception with the latter. The whispering implies an attempt to cheat death, and prophetic bellowing a succumbing to the belief that imminent death gives one special access to the truth and a right to force it on others.

In all of his later writings, however, Auden can hardly be said to be apolitical or "heartless." Perhaps he is right in saying that "poetry makes nothing happen" (my emphasis), but by trying to point to the existence of God (the Truth, the Unconditional, the "silent light"), by attacking the ideas that lead to tyranny, by setting up defences for preserving a responsible use of the English language, by attempting to encourage the impulses to a simple tolerance and to other attitudes that are necessary for civilization, and even by drawing attention to problems such as starvation, it is clear that Auden would like to help make some things "happen" and to prevent others from happening. Nevertheless he realizes his limitations as both a poet, cut off in his cave of making from "the vast background of natural / life," and as an individual human being, and he focuses his attempts at betterment in these private spheres of action. He would like to become "a minor Goethe, / with his passion for weather and stones but without his

silliness / re the Cross" His aspirations are not entirely humble since, after all, he would like to become a Goethe no matter how minor, and he takes the opportunity to chide the great man for his beliefs. He does attempt, however, to undercut the self-important attitude to which poets are prone and his own "self-enchantment when lip-smacking / imps of mawk and hoey / write with us what they will" A matter of greater importance than his poetic reputation is the comfort of a friend, even if that is nothing more, for the time being, than the imagined companionship of the "dear Shade" of Louis MacNeice.

The "Postscript" seems intended to preserve various ideas and bits of poetry not used in the poem. These "scraps" may also be after-thoughts, or they may be short spinoffs from the writing of other poems in About the House. Whether he intended it or not, Auden also overcomes the image of the poet as a ruthless dictator of his communities of words, unceremoniously destroying or suppressing a vast number of enjoyable or attractive thoughts that simply cannot be fitted into a particular poetic structure.

Since "The Cave of Making" is about poetry, the short poems in the "Postscript," not surprisingly, all reflect a concern with language, just as one would expect to find pieces of silver or gold beneath an object that Weland had just fashioned. The first pair of haiku recall the ending of "Prologue: The Birth of Architecture," and Auden here clarifies the analogy between architecture and poetic fabrication. The world that "has to be built" to distinguish man from mere existence in nature's never-ending cycle ("that Immortal Commonwealth"), is now compared with poetry, those "Timeless fictional worlds / of self-evident meaning"

Poetry represents an escape from the "conditional," since the world in which we actually live is a "temporal one where nothing / Is what it seems." Poetic fabrication may be analogous to the construction of "a second nature of tomb and temple," but it must be seen in its proper sphere: "Every poem . . . is an attempt to present an analogy to that paradisaal state in which Freedom and Law, System and Order are united in harmony. Every good poem is very nearly a Utopia. Again, an analogy, not an imitation; the harmony is possible and verbal only" (DH, p. 71).

The limitations of speech in expressing truth, and the difficulty in understanding the past as described in "Prologue: The Birth of Architecture," where Auden writes that we know what the Old Man "did, / what, even, He thought He thought, / but we don't see why," are now echoed by these lines:

At lucky moments we seem on the brink
Of really saying what we think we think:
But, even then, an honest eye should wink.

There is another throwback to the "Prologue" in the second last piece of the "Postscript":

Nature, consistent and august,
Can't teach us what to write or do:
With Her the real is always true,
And what is true is also just.

The "real" in this sense is everything that exists and does what nature compels it to, but Dame Kind does not recognize architects, nor heretics and bounders, since natural law does not govern in the areas of art, morality or any activity in which man's freedom and his continual responsibility for choosing between good and evil are involved.

It is interesting in this context that the "Postscript" should

that Goethe was speaking for all artists when he wrote:

Poetic fire sank low in me,
But up it flamed, up to the sky,
When it was evil I sought to fly.

(pp. 134-135)

Auden's current answer to this problem is both to attempt an ordering of his life and to tame his "poetic fire" for better ends. Even a poem such as "Time has taught you . . ." *could*, ironically, have its ultimate sources in Auden's vices, but Auden successfully subjects them to his calm, *contrite* consideration. The most surprising aspect of the poem is that Auden, despite his objections to confessional poetry, makes "an admirable object out of . . . [his] feelings of guilt and penitence before God . . ." (DH, p. 458). Perhaps this is why it has been tucked away at the end of the "Postscript."

In the first three poems of Thanksgiving for a Habitat Auden has taken us "around" the house, moving from the generalities of architecture to the general praise of a specific habitat, and then to a room that is attached to the house, but separated, reachable only by an outside staircase. The next two poems in Thanksgiving for a Habitat take the reader inside the house for the first time, even though that entry is into its lower and upper extremities.

"Down There" and "Up There" are complementary in many ways. They are both composed of six-line stanzas, and their titles both point vaguely in the direction of the basement and attic, suggesting that not much time is spent in either. The poems, in turn, are dedicated to Irving and Anne Weiss, an initial indication of the association of the cellar with a male principle (it is "not for girls") and the attic with

a feminine one ("Men would never have come to need an attic"). Both rooms are primarily used for storage, though the cellar stores necessities, and the attic trivial, nearly useless items. "Up There" has three stanzas of five-foot lines -- a trochee, a dactyl and three concluding trochees. "Down There" has four stanzas of lines composed of five iambs and a concluding trochee, one variation being that each stanza has one line that ends with a spondee. These lines, therefore, end with three strong stresses ("Great Cold came," "key-cold-cloak," "flagstoned vault" and "switch lights on"), which could each be seen as a foot which the Latins called a "molossus." It would not be too farfetched to say that Auden intended a pun on "molasses" (once a variant spelling of molossus" OED)) in the sense that he stores a molossus in each stanza as he does "wine, beer, conserves and pickles" in his cellar. There are, after all, several other rather brazen puns in the poem: "we . . . at safe anchor, / Ride there on caves," and when lights are switched on, rooms "seem put out." Johnson comments on the differences between the two rooms as follows:

. . . "Down There" and "Up There" . . . establish a new architectural co-ordinate for the realms of, roughly, nature and history. "Down There" is the past viewed in biological-evolutionary terms, the cares of primal man, his refuge from glaciation; it is the "safe anchor" of all civil life. "Up There" is the storehouse of useless oddments of the historical past. We are reminded of Auden's favourite quotation from Whitehead: civilization is a precarious balance of trivial order and barbaric vagueness. The house is the image of civilization, and here, as elsewhere in the series, Auden carefully defines the triviality and the vagueness as a way of approaching that which exists, precariously, at their intersection.⁴²

"Necessity" and "freedom" are two other terms that could be included in Johnson's antinomies. The cellar is too closely associated with

nature-necessity, like the "windowless grave" mentioned in "Thanksgiving for a Habitat," and the attic with freedom, like "a magic Eden without clocks," to be places comfortable enough for adults to spend much time in.

It is a different case for children, however, whose distance from adulthood is roughly similar to the respective distances of barbaric vagueness and trivial order from civilization. For a boy, a journey to the cellar can be a dangerous quest, leading through the "route of the instinctive and the natural to the core of the unconscious -- a route which, if braved, can be realistically fruitful"43 Auden draws special attention to the third line in the following passage by prolonging the fearful descent with an extra pair of syllables:

. . . sometimes, to test their male courage,
A father sends the younger boys to fetch something
For Mother from down there; ashamed to whimper, hearts
 pounding,
They dare the dank steps, re-emerge with proud faces.

Children daydream in the attic, and "conjure in its plenum," but for them this is as healthy an activity as confronting "the realities of flesh and instinct":44

Now an eyrie for two excited sisters,
Where, when Mother is bad, her rage can't reach them,
Now a schooner on which a lonely only
Boy sails north or approaches coral islands.

The boy begins to imagine a better life in this room, even if his imagination seems overly wistful and romantic, whereas his parents only use it as storage for items with a shallow, sentimental value. The children should eventually gain a clearer vision of the good to which they should be directing their thought and energy, just as they should have a clearer

notion of their past accomplishments in the construction of a human world distinct from the nature symbolized by the cellar. Children, however, are at a stage where a fuller life can only be guessed at, and where the realm of nature and its limitations must still be understood and passed through.

Auden concludes the first half of the cycle with a poem that may be said to put toilets on the map of serious poetry, if "serious" may be associated with lines that treat one of the most important and pleasureable necessities with a series of jokes. In "The Geography of the House," the first poem to be set on the ground floor, Auden begins a new day in high spirits:

Seated after breakfast
 In this white-tiled cabin
 Arabs call the House where
Everybody goes,
 Even melancholics
 Raise a cheer to Mrs.
 Nature for the primal
 Pleasures She bestows.

The stanzaic structure itself embodies the content and the humour of the poem. Each stanza is written in trochaic trimeter, with the exception of the catalectic fourth and eighth lines, which are also the key points in the punch lines. These two rhymed lines drop a syllable, which not only gives the jokes more "punch" because they end on a stress, but also suggest that both poet and the poem, as it were, are "at stool."

The need to spend some time daily in "the House where / Everybody goes" is as much a leveller of social distinctions as death. Excretion is one of the primal pleasures and it is guaranteed to all ages and all social classes. It is intimately connected with every aspect of our

lives from childhood to old age -- religion, thought, commerce, art, and so on -- and Auden delights in deflating the "higher" or "purer" conceptions that we may have regarding these matters:

All the Arts derive from
 This ur-act of making,
 Private to the artist:
 Makers' lives are spent
 Striving in their chosen
 Medium to produce a
 De-narcissus-ized en-
 -during excrement.

After this declaration one is forced to view this poem as the end-product of a similar striving. We can also see what kind of ideas dominated in Auden's intellectual diet. One of the most dominant is that all created things and all natural processes are worthy of celebration, which is true of the digestive tract no less than other parts of the body. This, in turn, is part of the Christian way of affirmation, and Auden may well have had a passage such as the following from Charles Williams in mind when he wrote "The Geography of the House":

Eyes then are compacted power; they are an index of vision; they see and refer us to greater seeing. Nor has the stomach a less noble office. It digests food; that is, in its own particular method, it deals with the nourishment offered by the universe. It is a physical formula of that health which destroys certain elements -- the bacteria which harmfully approach us. By it we learn to consume; by it therefore to be, in turn, consumed. So even with those poor despised things, the buttocks. There is no seated figure, no image of any seated figure, which does not rely on them for its strength and balance. They are at the bottom of the sober dignity of judges; the grace of a throned woman; the hierarchical session of the Pope himself reposes on them; into even greater images and phrases we need not now go.⁴⁵

The "unofficial Manicheanism"⁴⁶ of much of modern Christianity, with its

denial of all things "fleshly," is one example of thought that runs counter to an affirmation of the interdependence of body, mind and soul. To say that the enemy in the poem is Gnosticism (or Manicheanism) and all its various sub-species, such as "Higher Thought" or the literary doctrine that only the sublime is fit subject matter for poetry, is to risk ridicule, but one has the satisfaction of knowing that Auden himself gives this name to the "foe" in the second last stanza:

(Orthodoxy ought to
 Bless our modern plumbing:
 Swift and St. Augustine
 Lived in centuries,
 When a stench of sewage
 Ever in the nostrils
 Made a strong debating
 Point for Manichees.)

The levelling action of the poem does not result in a blurring of distinctions. The connection between certain aspects of our being does not prevent the understanding, for example, that "Mind and Body run on / Different timetables," just as freedom is kept distinct from necessity. Their interdependence, however, is partly defined by the fact that a visit to the "geography" is a necessary preliminary for action in the coming day:

Not until our morning
 Visit here can we
 Leave the dead concerns of
 Yesterday behind us,
 Face with all our courage
 What is now to be.

"The Geography of the House" completes the first half of the cycle, then, with a stanza that could be summarized as "excretion first, then action," to paraphrase the title of a later poem. The poem also forms an effective

bridge to the social orientation of the following poems by, firstly, placing us on the ground floor or the "living area" of the house and, secondly, to strain a metaphor, by leaving the first six poems behind and looking forward to the next six.

2. The Private and the Public Realm

All six poems in the second half of the cycle are ultimately focused on Auden's relationships with other people, even though their subjects alternate primarily between "the private realm and the public realm." What distinguishes the privacy of a bath, a guest room and a "cave of nakedness" from the private realms in the first half of the cycle is that each is now seen as a preparation for, or a not entirely happy leave-taking from, human company. The social focus of the second half of the cycle may be briefly sketched as follows.

In "Encomium Balnei" Auden mentions a coming dinner and concludes with an image of life in "the Holy City" in which all animosities and wrongs have been negated. "Grub First, then Ethics" ends with a vision of the "City" as a supreme form of civilization, and Auden hopes that he will have tucked away "a good dinner" should the time come "to hold her Thermopylae." He welcomes friends "within the circle of . . . [his] affection" in "For Friends Only," and "Tonight at Seven-Thirty" deals throughout with the ideal dinner party. Auden is thankful to be "reneighborhooded in the Country of Consideration" in "The Cave of Nakedness," and "The Common Life" deals with daily life with others in a part of this "Country," or the living room.

It is also interesting to note that the poems dealing with private

rooms (bath, visitors' room, bedroom) are far less structurally complex than the three dealing with the more public rooms (the kitchen and one room that, in fact, doubled as both dining room and living room). It is as if Auden implies that the quality of life in public depends more upon its formal arrangements than it does in private, where a greater relaxation is allowable, and both attitudes are reflected in the forms given the poems. The "syllabic fog" of "Encomium Balnei" leads into the highly complex structure of "Grub First, Then Ethics." Briefly, the latter follows a rhyme scheme of aabcdefcgehijklk, even though many of the rhymes are far from pure. The line lengths are determined by syllable count, following this pattern: 6,7,9,9,11,7,11,7,11,7,11,7,11,7,9,6. "For Friends Only" has eight stanzas of six lines each that follow a simple pattern determined solely by word count, the lines alternating between seven and five words. This leads into the second rather baroque poetic structure in the cycle, though "Tonight at Seven-Thirty" is even more intricate than "Grub First, Then Ethics." Here the rhyme scheme is abacbddeecfgfg, and the line length, once again determined by syllable count, follows this pattern: 4,10,4,12,4,12,12,12,7,12,10,7,9,6. It is followed by "The Cave of Nakedness" which is simply written in alternating twelve and thirteen syllable lines, and "The Common Life" concludes with the more formal quatrains following an 11-7-11-7 syllable-count pattern, which may be said to echo the five pairs of eleven and seven syllable lines at the heart of "Grub First, Then Ethics."

The shift into the second half of the cycle takes place in a room that is a mere two steps away from Auden's extremely small, "white-tiled

says, "still John Bull's / hip-bath it was / that made one carnal pleasure lawful / for the first time since we quarrelled / over Faith and Works." This recalls "The Geography of the House" (fourth stanza) and the fact that Luther's revelation came while sitting on "the Scala Sancta at Rome,"⁴⁸ and Auden has found another reason to level qualitative distinctions between the things of this world and the so-called otherworldly understanding. Shortly after this glance at Church history he lowers, as it were, two of the highest representatives of culture and state in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, saying that Shakespeare and Louis XIV "probably stank."

After this comes an attempt to see modern bathing habits through the eyes of a Roman "bath addict" and "amphitheatre fan." This commentary rests largely on Auden's conception of the classical understanding of public and private realms:

To the Greeks the Private Realm was the sphere of life ruled by the necessity of sustaining life, and the Public Realm the sphere of freedom where a man could disclose himself to others. Today, the significance of the terms private and public has been reversed; public life is the necessary impersonal life, the place where a man fulfills his social function, and it is in his private life that he is free to be his personal self.⁴⁹

This reversal has also led to the compression of the once public bathing areas or tepidariums "into such a few square feet" that a Roman would mistake them for "warrens of some outlawed sect / who mortify their flesh with strange / implements." He would not be that wrong because, as Hannah Arendt points out, Christianity was largely responsible for the re-evaluation of the private life and of toiling for the necessities of that life, which the Greeks and later the Romans associated with the

conditions of slavery.⁵⁰ The irony is that, from the point of view of that strict form of Christianity represented here by people like the desert hermits, even the most private coddling of the flesh in a bath was "tabu." Auden makes a remarkable connection between behavioural psychologists and "St. Anthony and his wild brethren" by having the latter think of ablutions as "a habit of that doomed / behavioral sink this world." The connection may be that behaviourists also treat the body and behaviour as something to be carefully controlled and modified. The joke on St. Anthony's group is that, for all their self-control, they are a "wild brethren," but even so Auden certainly has far more respect for those who went to the extremes of the Negative Way than those who think of humans as stimulus-response mechanisms.

St. Anthony and his kind, including modern versions of the private, hermetic individual, have many other qualities to recommend them. They may have, in effect, accepted the monk's vows of chastity, obedience and poverty, a discipline quite different from that of the Affirmative Way, and in many ways completely antagonistic to Auden's spirit. Nevertheless, he now embraces their outlook, chiefly for the reason that it has taught us "the unclassical wonder of being / all by oneself." Everyone is a master of this room when he or she is taking a bath, and "to withdraw from the tribe at will," and to shed like clothes all our social roles, "is a sacrosanct / political right." In this momentary retreat from rhyme and reason into the closest equivalent to an "Eden . . . for the lapsed," one is capable of rejuvenating both body and soul, literally and figuratively shedding "the old man" in preparation for the

new. The effect is, whether sitting down to breakfast or standing up "to welcome / folk for dinner" (which will shortly be the case), that one has left all aggressive feelings and conflicts behind, whether they are directed against others or against oneself as in the case of someone like St. Anthony.

In this state one may "feel as if" -- and the emphasis on "as if," spoken twice, shows that Auden is intent on avoiding a blurring of imagination with reality -- "the Pilgrim's Way / or as some choose to call it / the War Path / were now a square in the Holy City / that what was wrong has been put right." Callan writes that the "poet at the center is homo viator, preferring the Pilgrim's Way to the War Path,"⁵¹ but Auden does not make a clear-cut opposition between the two. The fact that some choose to call "the Pilgrim's Way . . . the War Path" may be partly understood in terms of the aforementioned body, body-politic analogy, in which the mortification of one's own flesh is related to the oppression of others. A better reading of these lines is simply that the progress of Christians to their resting place in the "Holy City" has often been marred by the intolerance that leads to armed aggression against even those whose beliefs are not substantially different from their own. They change the name and the substance of their own calling through their actions, becoming, in effect, "heathen on the War Path."

The last five lines of the poem re-echo the sentiments of the previous six, though in a slightly larger context. Callan writes that the "reference to Baron Von Hügel whom Yeats in 'Vacillation' dismissed

with 'So get you gone Von Hügel, / Though with blessings on your head', is a reminder that Auden shares the antipathy for over-fine refinement that Von Hügel defined as modern gnosticism."⁵² One may also be reminded of Yeats's desire to reach the "holy city" in "Sailing to Byzantium" in which, "sick with desire / And fastened to a dying animal," he vows:

Once out of nature I shall never take
My bodily form from any natural thing,
But such a form as Grecian goldsmiths make
Of hammered gold and gold enamelling
To keep a drowsy Emperor awake⁵³

Auden is clearly not in sympathy with the ideas in this poem: he wanted his "thinking" to be "the same as thanking," and he makes good on this wish insofar as his own attitude to the body and its desires was one of praise. Auden must have had some difficulty in thinking thankfully of either "Sailing to Byzantium" or "Vacillation," however, though he clearly must have had Yeats in mind in writing of both the "Holy City" and Von Hügel. Whereas Auden completely accepts the consolation and the challenge of Christianity, Yeats, addressing Von Hügel in the last section of his poem, rejects the "relief" of Christianity by saying that he plays "a predestined part," and that his example is "Homer . . . and his unchristened heart." Yeats tries, however, to resolve the antagonism of the differences between his view and that of Christianity by having, for example, "The Heart" close out the seventh section of "Vacillation" with the line, "What theme had Homer but original sin?" The last section, immediately following this line, begins as follows: "Must we part, Von Hügel, though much alike, for we / Accept the miracles of the saints

and honour sanctity?" Though the beliefs of both poets form something of an antinomy, both "Encomium Balnei" and "Vacillation" are dominated by a mood of reconciliation, and metaphorically speaking, "all military hardware" is at least momentarily "slighted and submerged" as far as Auden's attitude to Yeats and to the rest of the world in this particular poem is concerned.

The original title of "Grub First, then Ethics" was "On Installing an American Kitchen in Lower Austria" (HC). The new title brings immediately to mind one of the main thematic concerns of the cycle, the differences and connections between necessity and freedom. Auden had also used this phrase before in a discussion calling for political tolerance, and thus another recurring theme in the cycle is emphasized. The following excerpt from The Dyer's Hand contains the heart of that discussion:

Today there is only one genuine world-wide revolutionary issue, racial equality. The debate between capitalism, socialism, and communism is really a party issue, because the goal which all seek is really the same, a goal which is summed up in Brecht's well-known line:

Erst kommt das Fressen, dann kommt die Moral.

i.e., Grub first, then Ethics. In all the technologically advanced countries today, whatever political label they give themselves, their policies have, essentially, the same goal: to guarantee to every member of society, as a psychological organism, the right to physical and mental health. The positive symbolic figure of this goal is a naked anonymous baby, the negative symbol, a mass of anonymous concentration camp corpses. (DH, pp. 86-87)

One of the best examples of the fact that the attempt to guarantee the right to physical and mental health cuts across "party politics" is that

Auden can freely and loudly proclaim one of the better known slogans of a communist playwright.

This discussion comes from the same essay in which Auden discusses the modern inversion of the significance of the Greek conception of public and private realms. Politics today is chiefly concerned with human necessities, which the Greeks used to consider a purely private matter. Auden also writes that today

public life is the necessary impersonal life, the place where a man fulfills his social function, and it is in his private life that he is free to be his personal self.

In consequence, the arts, literature in particular, have lost their traditional principal human subject, the man of action, the doer of public deeds. (DH, p. 80)

All of Thanksgiving for a Habitat is based primarily on what used to be considered the private realm, or in simple terms, "life at home." It is clear, however, that the last six poems shift their focus to a social life in which many activities take place that were once considered appropriate only for expression in public forums, such as the agora. Much of the public realm has "come home," in other words, and a new set of distinctions between what is public and private can be made there. Just as the formerly public bathing has become a purely private activity, discussions and arguments concerning religion, philosophy, politics and art have their new main forums in the private dwelling and specifically in dining and living rooms. Several results, then, of the inversion of the functions of public and private realms, are that dinner has become the main occasion for such discussions, and that cooking, once associated with the barbarism of necessity and slavery, can become the medium of "a pure artist."

These are several aspects of the human condition that Auden shows to "the shade of Plato" in "Grub First, then Ethics":

Should the shade of Plato
 visit us, anxious to know
 how anthropos is, we could say to him: "Well,
 we can read to ourselves, our use
 of holy numbers would shock you, and a poet
 may lament -- where is Telford
 whose bridged canals are still a Shropshire glory,
 where Muir who on a Douglas spruce
 rode out a storm and called an earthquake noble,
 where Mr. Vynyian Board,
 thanks to whose lifelong fuss the hunted whale now suffers
 a quicker death? -- without being
 called an idiot, though none of them bore arms or
 made a public splash," then "Look!"
 we would point, for a dig at Athens, "Here
 is the place where we cook."

Replogle writes of the importance of "the pronunciation of 'Well'" in this stanza:

. . . a key word that sets off the right voice for the rest of the poem. Note too the melody and tone color demanded by the clause "we can read to ourselves." The sound of the voice alone means mock matter-of-fact innocence. The mock portentous pause after "may lament" announces the forthcoming absurd examples, their trivial irrelevance to be pointedly missed by the sounding voice, delivering them in the earnest tones of a native respondent eager to inform and celebrate.⁵⁴

This is true with regard to the tone of voice, but the examples given are not trivial or irrelevant regardless of how absurd they seem. Auden's irony is based on his understanding of Plato and Plato's society, and his matter-of-fact tone is calculated to upset. Reading, as the modern age knows it, is a silent, private act. In Plato's time it was highly unusual to read without speaking out loud or to someone else.⁵⁵ Numbers were holy to Plato because they were Ideas, which were necessary for the understanding of the phenomenal world. Plato, not unlike the Gnostics and

Manichees after him (systems of thought closely related, in fact, to Neo-Platonism), believed in the separation of the higher "world of timeless Ideas" which "could produce true knowledge," and "the world of appearances" which "could produce only opinion." This can be demonstrated by the fact "that the Idea Two, for example, has a timeless quality, whereas two apples disappear."⁵⁶

Plato had a low opinion of poets to begin with, but Auden now treats him to a lengthy ironic lament. This goes on for seven lines, and then Auden calmly informs him that a poet may write this way "without being / called an idiot" This may shock the modern reader as well, and it must be kept in mind that laments concerning such subject matter must be laced with a healthy dose of irony if the poet is to escape with his reputation intact. A second irony, however, is that people like Telford, Muir and Vynyian Board, however unlikely they may be as candidates for public adulation, really are our important public figures:

The true men of action in our time, those who transform the world, are not the politicians and statesmen, but the scientists. Unfortunately poetry cannot celebrate them because their deeds are concerned with things, not persons, and are, therefore, speechless.
(DH, p. 81)

Ironic portrayal is one method of hurdling the obstacle of this speechlessness, and it has the secondary advantage of pointing out the value of our new men of action. They belong to the world of appearances, however, and have little to do with "Higher Thought," so Plato would be scandalized by this as well as by the radical inversion of public and private realms. Auden's final, sly, mock-innocent "dig at Athens" is the excited pointing

to the kitchen, which was for the Greeks the locus of women and slaves, and for Plato the heart of the world of transitory appearances.

Auden returns to his political theme when he begins describing his kitchen in the second stanza, and immediately juxtaposed to this is a discussion of courtesy, a process that indicates the discursive, associational logic of the rest of the poem as it does most of the poetry in the cycle. Analogies in this stanza are set up between "democratic and egalitarian" America, modern Austria, ancient democratic Greece (Cnossos), and the European "Age of Poise" of several centuries ago:

"Do-it-yourself America" planned the kitchen, but did not build; its blueprint, the emblem of mechanical efficiency, is prophetic, in the literal sense that the plan is a prophecy of the completed kitchen and in the metaphorical sense that the kitchen is a miracle; this is a "palace kitchen for kingdoms" in its elaborateness and in the sense, explained in the sixth stanza, that a home today is a kind of kingdom, the modern substitute for "the public space."⁵⁷

Courtesy's thought is not that clear, though Johnson attempts this answer: "Since we make fewer distinctions between classes in terms of accent or dirty necks, since modern machines make all hands equally uncalloused, 'the right note is harder / to hear'."⁵⁸ Courtesy's problem, however, is first that of determining "who is to give the orders." According to folklore it is the longer thumb, traditionally the male's, that determines a person's dominance, but today there are many homes either where there are no females, or where they have escaped subordination. In any case, the association of the levelling of traditional hierarchies with

difficulties in hearing "the right note" brings to mind the impoliteness and discourtesy which are well-known features of the democratic age.

The "right note" may have been easier to hear in an age when everyone knew their place in the social order, "when [Courtesy] . . . talked shamelessly to her maid and sang / noble lies with Him," but this hardly makes "the Age of Poise more praiseworthy. That it can be struck "in New Cnossos" is also hardly reinforced by the supporting statement:

. . . where if I am
banned by a shrug it is my fault,
not Father's, as it is my taste whom
I put below the salt.

The "right note" can only be seen as a sarcastic description of forms of social snobbery in different ages. The Age of Poise had generally accepted standards of discrimination, whereas each individual in the New Cnossos, regardless of occupation or parentage, determines his own standards by which others are snubbed.

The third stanza describes the re-ascendance of the importance of kitchens. The simile for the hearthstone -- "round as a birthday-button" -- begins an encapsulated history of man's evaluation of the places where food is made. The hearth, "sacred to Granny" as well as to the earliest men, fell into disfavour for a time when it was considered "an abhorrent dungeon," and then, literally reborn in its modern kitchen form, became "numinous and again the center of a dwelling" (analogous to the navel as the center of the body). Those with more refined religious or social ideals brought such low and earthly places into disfavour, in which the "warm unlaundered meiny / belched their comic prose and from a dream of which / chaste Milady awoke blushing."

↓
 Cooks and their machines are now seen as the heroes of this
 religio-comic poem:

House-proud, deploring labor, extolling work,
 these engines politely insist
 that banausics can be liberals,
 a cook a pure artist

 who moves everyman
 at a deeper level than
 Mozart

Johnson provides a good analysis of these lines:

The first line quoted, taken alone, suggests the kitchen as the solution to the modern confusion between work and labor; that the adjectives modify "engines" (a curious term for kitchen appliances) is a way of surprising the reader, with his view of the machine as the enemy of freedom. To have these engines "politely insist" continues the paradox: courtesy does indeed seem to reign in the kitchen, carried out not by men but machines. "Banausics" are artisans, generally in a pejorative sense; the term has reference to the forge, and ties this cave of making to "such antres as Weland's Stithy." Banausic refers to both the servile class and a pragmatic approach to things, and meshes with the original sense of "liberal": "Original epithet of those 'arts' . . . that were 'worthy of free men': opposite to servile or mechanical" (OED). The dialectic of the poem is latent in the diction: for a banausic to become a liberal by working in a pragmatic cave like a kitchen is for labor to become work, feeding an art, and grub to lead to ethics. ⁶⁰

Johnson goes on to say that the "comic word play telescopes a tricky, sophisticated, and serious philosophical argument into a phrase," and that "the point is worth arguing in some detail, because it is just this kind of superficially whimsical verbal rococo that is at once a red flag to critical bulls and the serious basis of Auden's craft."⁶¹

Men are moved "at a deeper level than Mozart" not just because stomachs are physically lower than the mind, but because "the subject of the verb / to-hunger is never a name" "Subject" can be read two ways: the subject of the verb is always an "individual," a biological organism, and he is subject to the necessity of eating. This is of course common to all men: little in the act of eating because of hunger distinguishes one as a unique person, although, conversely, the act of making food can, especially with the advent of the engines that free "artful cooks" ("Tonight at Seven-Thirty") from the grind of labour.

Hunger was not the issue in the Garden of Eden, and it is on the basis of this idea that Auden takes the strange leap of logic into the lines beginning with "dear Adam and Eve" Proper names define that part of man which is free to act and is responsible for his actions, which is contrasted to that part of him subject to necessity. Partaking of the forbidden fruit was a free act, but nothing in the actual need to eat distinguishes one living creature from another, whether man or serpent. Even in sex there is the distinction of

different bottoms,
 but the neotene who marches
 upright and can subtract reveals a belly
 like the serpent's with the same
 vulnerable look.

Other creatures referred to in the context of hunger are defined by their race or physical categories, "Jew, Gentile or pigmy," and Auden begins a shift of focus from the individual's need for "grub" to the person's ethics through his very sympathy for their hunger. All creatures must be granted their calories, "from dear Adam and Eve" to all neotenes and even the usually reviled serpent. Auden's sympathies here are similar to those

extended to the "race of spiders" in "Thanksgiving for a Habitat," which "shall be allowed their webs." Another comparison with that poem is suggested by the word "neotene," which is quite similar in its context to the phrase "Adam's / sovereign clone." The word is derived by Auden from "neoteny," which is defined in the OED as "the abnormal time-extension of youthful characters." In amphibia and reptiles this term may be used to describe the "complete retardation, or . . . the retention of partially larval conditions," and in higher species it is also associated in some way with the "neopallium, the cortical area of the brain which is the organ of associative memory in mammals" (OED). Auden's use of the word is intended to describe man in terms of his biological-instinctual inheritance -- he is a rational animal subject to hunger -- and of his spiritual inheritance, for he is an inheritor of the inescapable original sin, holding within him an extension of the fallen nature of the first humans.

Man as both rational animal and sinner can take a step closer to the Holy City, however, by insuring that the hungry "get their calories." This is a key point at which freedom and necessity intersect, and one of the reasons why cooking can be considered more important than the music of Mozart, for example, or the poetry of Auden. All "fine arts" and free actions such as playing games or making love or war are predicated on full bellies, though at the same time certain acts of eating not determined by physical necessity, as well as the act of feeding another, are two of the most significant elements in Christianity. One need but think of the forbidden fruit, the Last Supper, and the parable in which men who feed the hungry (among other acts of charity) are granted the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 25:31-46). Auden has the audacity to conclude this line of

thought with a joke:

then surely those in whose creed
God is edible may call a fine
omelette a Christian deed.

Auden pokes fun at the doctrine of transubstantiation in the celebration of the Eucharist, but the idea remains that satisfying another's hunger and making the meal aesthetically pleasing, even in the most insignificant of meals, may still possibly be considered deeds performed in a Christian spirit.

Auden continues in the same humorous vein into the fifth stanza, which begins with a minimal defense of gluttony, descends into descriptions of people Auden is not terribly fond of, and ends with a comic look at the first bite. The evidence of murder mysteries is not worth a great deal, but in them "one can be sure the gourmet / didn't do it" The gourmet's distant kinship with the glutton is one indication that Gluttony is a little less dangerous than the other deadly sins. The odd juxtaposition of this idea with the lines beginning, "children, brave warriors out of a job," may be intended to show that children would perhaps like to kill, if only imaginatively, but cannot. Auden speaks disdainfully of children -- they "can weigh pounds more than they should / and one can dislike having to kiss them" -- and then displays another personal prejudice: "yet compared with the thin-lipped, they / are seldom detestable." One can only hope that he is thinking along metaphorical lines, using the time-honoured convention in literature that the thin-lipped are often villainous or petty. He continues along these censorious lines with descriptions of the "worst dead bore" as a good trencherman,

grieving some waiter, and of Beauty pecking "at a master-dish," the kind of thing that makes chefs choleric.

Up to this point the stanza may be seen as a mass of disharmonious elements -- fat, gluttonous, thin-lipped, boring, choleric and fussy people. Auden quite consciously includes himself in this list with his own prejudiced remarks reminiscent of the chef's cholera. The chef's one reward is (perhaps not unlike the poet's observance of someone taking delight in his poem),

to behold the mutually hostile
mouth and eyes of a sinner married
at the first bite by a smile.

It is interesting that Auden should resolve the contentions of the stanza with the image of the sacrament of marriage, and it foreshadows the ending of "Tonight at Seven-Thirty" where swallowing is seen as "a sign act of reverence." More will be said about this later, but for now it is significant to note that for the first time in the poem something is actually eaten. All the conflicts and antagonisms between people and their ideas described in the opening five stanzas seem, for a moment, to be resolved in this smile, as if the "grub first" portion of the poem has been completed and can now make way for a consideration of ethics and civilization.

At least such description partially explains the logic of the jump into the subject matter of the concluding stanza:

The houses of our City
are real enough but they lie
haphazardly scattered over the earth,
and her vagabond forum
is any space where two of us happen to meet

who can spot a citizen
 without papers. So, too, can her foes. Where the
 power lies remains to be seen,
 the force, though, is clearly with them: perhaps only
 by falling can She become
 Her own vision, but we have sworn under four eyes
 to keep Her up -- all we ask for,
 should the night come when comets blaze and meres break,
 is a good dinner, that we
 may march in high fettle, left foot first,
 to hold her Thermopylae.

Auden not only had "City" in mind as a metonym for Civilization, modern and ancient (as in the allusions to the cities of Greece), but also the "Holy City" ("Encomium Balnei") that Christians are meant to defend.⁶² The "vagabond forum" that is created "where two of us happen to meet / who can spot a citizen / without papers" is not just meant to invoke an image of citizenship proved by pedigree or of bureaucracy as a threat to spontaneity. It also brings to mind several passages from the Bible, one of which is Christ's saying, "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there I am in the midst of them" (Matthew 18:20). Another concerns Paul's attempts to distinguish between the value of the rules and regulations of the Old Testament and the life of the Spirit in the New: ". . . we should serve in the newness of the spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter" (Romans 7:6).⁶³ It is especially difficult to explain the imagery of the last half of the stanza unless the foes of the City and civilization are also seen as foes of Christianity, who today clearly have the force of numbers. The "falling" or the collapse of civilization can be seen as becoming "Her own vision" if the ultimate end of civilization is seen as a "dying and resurrection" comparable to

Christ's.⁶⁴ Swearing "under four eyes / to keep Her up" (my emphasis) refers primarily to the eyes of the two meeting citizens, but Auden also seems to refer to something separate from and above them. Since he has just mentioned the City's "own vision," the eyes may be seen as an allusion to the four gospels, the "living word" to which Auden gives his oath in the epigraph to the whole cycle.

The allusion to the Apocalypse ("when comets blaze and meres break") precedes a return to the main theme of the poem, eating, and to a classical image of the successful defense of civilization, suggesting that Auden is fairly certain after all of "where the power lies." The warriors have a good chance of successfully defending the City and Her ethics as they march (or dance, which is one implication of "left foot first") to Thermopylae, as long as they have been granted "a good dinner."

A dinner is literally moments away in "Tonight at Seven-Thirty," but friends have to be invited first and perhaps given a place to stay, and the visitor's room is thus the subject of "For Friends Only." It is a room in which every need of a friend's, including privacy, is provided with a respect bordering on reverence: "Ours yet not ours, being set apart / As a shrine to friendship" After describing in fastidious detail most of the attentions that will be paid to visitors, as well as reminding them that they must meet certain conditions (they should not expect romance, nor to see drama, and they had better not attempt "to 'borrow' stamps"), Auden begins to write in a slightly more relaxed fashion:

But absence will not seem an evil
 If it make our re-meeting
 A real occasion. Come when you can:
 Your room will be ready.

The stanzas that follow these lines show an increasing warmth, which is partly manifested in the change from an austere and simple diction to something more in line with "the language of friendship," as in words like "Tum-Tum" and "munching." One critic complains about it -- "How many will know that Tum-Tum . . . is Edward VIII . . . ?"⁶⁵ -- but this knowledge does not seem to be essential. "Tum-Tum's reign" can refer just as easily to a time before recent dieting fads, when the stomach's demands held sway over considerations of bodily contours, as to the habit of having "a tin of biscuits / On the bedside table" during Auden's youth.

The right note is struck after all the careful preparations have been made for the visitor, and the true courtesy represented in this poem may be compared with the attitudes masquerading as courtesy in the second stanza of "Grub First, then Ethics." The last stanza breaks through all the earlier reserve by beginning with a hearty benediction followed by lines letting his visitor know he is unique, well-beloved, and worthy of an honoured place in Auden's home and heart:

Felicissima notte! May you fall at once
 Into a cordial dream, assured
 That whoever slept in this bed before
 Was also someone we like,
 That within the circle of our affection
 Also you have no double.

In Italian Journey Goethe comments on the Italian phrase:

Good Night! We northerners say this at any time after
 sundown when we take leave of each other; the Italian

says Felicissima notte! only once, to wit, when the lamp is brought into the room at the moment that separates day from night, so that the phrase has quite a different meaning. The idioms of every language are untranslatable, for any word, from the noblest to the coarsest, is related to the unique character, beliefs and way of life of the people who speak it.⁶⁶

Auden's use of the phrase may be thought of as one small, further nod to the uniqueness of a friend who deserves something more than a bland "good night."

The dinner in "Tonight at Seven-Thirty" is in many ways similar to a "love-feast," or "agape-feast," the meal which often accompanies the Church's celebration of the Last Supper. Thus a celebration of brotherly love follows the celebration of the sacrament, just as, in the Christian view, respect and love for others flows from the interchange between God's love for his creatures and man's love and reverence for God. The specifically Christian dimension of the love-feast, however, is carefully subdued here, though without losing its importance. The most specific references are to "God's board" in the second stanza, "Christ's ceneclè" in the third, and "grace of Spirit" and "true olamic silence" in the last. Auden's reticence in this regard may be taken, in turn, as a "sign . . . of reverence," but at the same time it is quite evident, as Callan says, that "it is impossible to read this poem on . . . [a] literal level. From the first mention of 'God's board' the spiritual analogy to a mystic meal is simultaneously present."⁶⁷

Eating as necessity, art, and "sacral" rite are, then, three levels of meaning linked analogously throughout the poem, and it is interesting in this regard that the poem is dedicated to a gourmet whose

book, The Art of Eating, had been reviewed by Auden in 1958.⁶⁸ The poem begins with a short review of the biological hierarchy, which progresses from plants, to ruminants, predators, and finally to man. Eating for all species lower than man is a business, a necessity that completely dominates their existence, and the only possible exceptions mentioned are pack-hunters, which

dine en famille, it is true,
with protocol and placement, but none of them play host
to a stranger whom they help first.

Here Auden restores man to his ascendancy in comparison with the wolves which, in "Thanksgiving for a Habitat," were less violent than man, if only in the sense that they would respect one who had assumed "the submissive posture." Auden uses two phrases that define man in his dual nature. He is a "supererogatory beast" who is both an animal needing to eat and yet capable of doing more than what is necessary: "supererogation" is also a word commonly used in Roman Catholic theology to describe "The performance of works beyond what God commands or requires" (OED). Man is also "Dame Kind's thoroughbred lunatic," the finest of her creatures and yet prone to evil and insanity. Even so, only he "can / do the honors of a feast"

This is something man has done and will do throughout history, and the review of nature in the first stanza gives way to a historical review in the second. Man was doing the honours of a feast

before the last Glaciation when he offered
mammoth-marrow
and, perhaps, Long Pig, will continue till Doomsday
when at God's board
the saints chew pickled Leviathan.

Callan writes that these lines are "a humorous reference to God's taking of the symbol of evil, the great Leviathan, and dividing its flesh among the elect (an image that invites the additional humorous possibility of Hobbes's bureaucratic state, pickled)."⁶⁹ Leviathan, however, is not so much a symbol of evil as he is a natural force associated with stories of man's weakness. Leviathan took an unwilling Jonah to Nineveh, and he is one of the major images in the book of Job ("Canst thou draw out Leviathan with a hook?"). Leviathan in this stanza is better understood as an indication of God's bounty in the tremendous amount of food that will be served at His board, as well as of man's new strength in the final overcoming of sin.

The second stanza, having taken a glance at past and future, now focuses on present history in which, specifically, the longstanding, unchanged "Law of the Hearth" is described:

. . . a brawler may not
 be put to death on the spot,
 but he is asked to quit the sacral dining area
instanter, and a foul-mouth gets the cold
 shoulder. The right of a guest
 to standing and foster is as old
 as the ban on incest.

The most prominent feature of the whole stanza is that certain people are rejected and others accepted: saints are opposed to sinners, brawlers and foul-mouths to "good" guests, and along the same lines the right "to standing and foster" contrasts with "the ban on incest." Another interesting aspect of the stanza is the use of the word "sacral," which shows again that Auden's idea of a feast is something more than a good meal.

In the third stanza Auden begins to specify conditions for the ideal dinner party, a process that is continued through stanzas four and five:

For authentic
comity the gathering should be small
and unpublic:
at mass banquets where flosculent speeches are made
in some hired hall
we think of ourselves or nothing.

Auden has in mind the isolation one often feels in the midst of crowds (cf. DH, pp. 81-83), though it is brazen to assert that this is always the case. Authentic "courtesy, civility and urbanity" (three concepts united by "comity" OED)), necessitate as much care - the choosing of guests as in the setting of the table. Auden goes to the extreme of attempting to find the "Perfect / Social Number":

Christ's cenacle
seated a baker's dozen, King Arthur's rundle
the same, but today, when one's host may well be his own
chef, servitor and scullion,
when the cost of space can double in a decade,
even that holy Zodiac number is
too large a frequency for us

The image of "a baker's dozen" for Christ and the twelve disciples borders on the profane, but outrageous as it is at first glance, none of its connotations contain anything that can be called disrespect. It brings to mind the words, "the bread of life" (John 6:35), or Christ, at the Last Supper: "Take, eat, this is my body . . ." (Matthew 26:26), and is another expression of supererogation, or giving more than what can be expected. Allusions are made both to one of the lowest and to the highest examples of this, the baker's extra loaf and Christ's sacrifice: the violence done to the reader's sensibility is mostly due to the

magnitude of the differences between (not the heterogeneity of) elements yoked together.

There is no inappropriateness in linking the cenacle with "King Arthur's rundle" since the second was actually patterned after the first. A frequent form of organization in the "age of chivalry," therefore, involved a king or lord with a company of twelve knights. The grail for which the knights searched was also said to be the chalice "From which Our Saviour drank at the Last Supper."⁷⁰ Just as the dinner party will be far less illustrious than the two examples just given (though Christ, too, was in some respects "his own /chef, servitor and scullion"), and since modern conditions make large gatherings difficult, Auden sets out a mere "six lenient semble sieges, / none of them perilous". The terms used to describe six soft and similar chairs, none of them dangerous to sit in, also identify the six diners as sinners. The "siege perilous" was reserved for one without sin, and one destined to find the Holy Grail. An interesting aside concerning this image is that Galahad, who took up the empty chair, may be likened to Matthias, the disciple chosen to fill the place left by Judas. All this serves to remind us that Auden is dealing with a "rite," however "worldly." It is "sacral" but not "sacramental," and may be seen as nothing higher than a symbol or a minor "re-presentation" of something like the Last Supper.

As in any rite all profanation must be kept out. This "worldly rite" would be profaned by "nicknames or endearments / or family / diminutives" ⁷¹ This is not to say that lovers, friends and family are to be kept away, but that the language they tend to use

belonging to private lives would separate them from the group and prevent "authentic comity." The third stanza gives a number of examples of loves that are inappropriate for this setting, because private or excessive, and of loves that have in some fashion become perverted. In a distinct, middle position between the extremes of the "married malcontents" (ill-willed, malevolent⁷²) and the doters who "tiddle" (fondle, indulge themselves to excess) and "curmurr" (murmur and purr like contented cats); and of demanding children and the silent "failure in the toil / of his bosom grievance"; there exists, simply, "Well-liking," which is nevertheless "a must." "Well-liking" is something that is directed to all the members of the group, and is not confined to one person or to self. This helps to explain the seemingly harsh treatment given the "failure," who is apparently not rejected because of his failing but because of his overweening self-pity.

After rejecting a number of prospects because of their faults, Auden considers a faultless being, "a god," and rejects him also:

he would be too odd
to talk to and, despite his imposing presence, a bore,
for the funniest
mortals and the kindest are those who are most aware
of the baffle of being, don't kid themselves our care
is consolable, but believe a laugh is less
heartless than tears, that a hostess
prefers it.

Those capable of knowing grief (unlike gods), and those who make it part of their care to understand another's grief (as opposed to those who focus on their own), are figures of admiration in Auden's comic vision. Replegle comments on the just-quoted lines as follows:

Since human folly and imperfection are inevitable and inescapably absurd, life is both tragic (inconsolable)

and comic ("a laugh"). But if neither can be denied by the man of integrity and perception, the wise laugh at man's uncertainty ("the baffle of being") and the good (the least heartless) love him for his absurdity.

Auden's best comedy, like that of Chekhov and Kafka, contains the tragic within it. But there is far less emphasis on suffering in his than in theirs. He never writes black comedy, the self-tormenting laughter of a suffering writer shocked or tortured by human folly.⁷³

Auden suddenly jumps to other considerations, as if the consideration of grief and confusion are best not dwelt on. The fifth stanza ends, then, with the completion of his list of pre-arrangements for ensuring the festivity of this occasion. The argument here recalls "Grub First, Then Ethics." "Fine raiment and good looks" may please that part of the brain which is receptive to visual, aesthetic details, but obviously the stomach and the food are the more important considerations here. "Artful cooks / and stalwart digestions," then, join with the number six, well-liking, a sense of humour, and kindness, to make six conditions essential to the occasion's success.

Auden puts on the visionary's robes in the last stanza, and perhaps the most surprising thing is that at no point does he cast them off, as it were, with some self-deprecating joke or other undercutting device. That is not to say that the stanza is void of humour, but in this instance it is subsumed in the attempt to harmonize a large number of potentially discordant elements into an object of which the ultimate goal is to bear witness to the truth:

I see a table
at which the youngest and oldest present
keep the eye grateful
for what Nature's bounty and grace of Spirit can create:
for the ear's content

one raconteur, one gnostic with amazing shop,
 both in a talkative mood but knowing when to stop,
 and one wide-travelled worldling to interject now and then
 a sardonic comment, men
 and women who enjoy the cloop of corks, appreciate
 depatical [sic] fare, yet can see in swallowing
 a sign act of reverence,
 in speech a work of re-presenting
 the true olamic silence.

The pairing of different or opposite things begun in the opening four lines -- young and old, Nature and Spirit -- is continued throughout. Callan writes: ". . . the guests are chosen, essentially on the gifts they can bring to the feast -- each according to his kind."⁷⁵ There is a faint, and very apt, allusion to Noah's ark in this comment, but it must be remembered that only six people are present, and only three are defined in any specific detail. The raconteur, gnostic, and wide-travelled worldling form an interesting trio, since the basis for disagreement is provided, though not taken advantage of. The worldling's "sardonic comment[s]" could upset the talkative raconteur and the gnostic; the latter two could find themselves in competition for speaking time; and the gnostic may find the others' attachment to the things of this world distasteful. The presence of the gnostic, in fact, is the most interesting, given Auden's antipathy to gnosticism and other dualistic philosophies. Perhaps Auden intended a joke in this, suggesting that a dinner such as this one would be enough to convince a gnostic that the physical world is not inherently evil, or that there is some co-inherence of God and His creation. It is rather difficult to see the gnostic in good conscience wholeheartedly enjoying "the cloop of corks" or appreciating "dapatical fare." "Dapatical" means "sumptuous, costly,

magnificent" and, though this is an admittedly fanciful argument, it may also be associated with the archaic word "dap," which means "to fish by dipping and bobbing the bait on the surface." Whether Auden intended this or not, "dapatical fare" is certainly bait for a gnostic, making Auden, perhaps, a "fisher of men."

The main intention of the description of this group of people then, is to show that there is "well-liking" enough to lead each present to curb his tendencies to upsetting the comity. The raconteur and gnostic both know when to stop talking, the worldling interjects his sardonic comments in moderation ("now and then"), and presumably Auden and the gnostic attempt to convince each other peaceably of the errors of their ways. All present accept limits; all enjoy, appreciate, and are grateful for both the food and conversation. The harmony is wrought among young and old, men and women, the five senses, gnostic and Christian, raconteur and sardonic worldling, and Nature and Spirit; and all this leads into a conclusion that attempts a definition of the relations between symbol and truth, physical and spiritual sustenance, time and eternity, and between words and the Word. All present give due appreciation to the food and drink,

yet can see in swallowing
a sign act of reverence,
in speech a work of re-presenting
the true olamic silence.

Swallowing is "a sign act of reverence" in the sense that it is silent, and would be more of such an act if it involved in any way whatsoever a thankfulness for God's Providence. The last pair of lines re-iterates an idea that increasingly dominated Auden's thought from the time of his

conversion on, which is that "for Truth the word silence is the least inadequate metaphor" (SW, p. 136), and, elaborated a little further, "Speech can at best, a shadow echoing / the silent light, bear witness / to the Truth it is not" ("The Cave of Making").⁷⁶ The "olamic silence," or the "olamic Sabbath" as it is called several times in the OED, is literally that which exists outside of time -- God's "order as it existed before the Fall and as it continues after the Judgment" Speech is "a work" of bearing witness to, or of preparing the way for, or of "re-presenting," what it is not: "the true olamic silence."

The form of "Tonight at Seven-Thirty" harmonizes with its content in even the most minor details. The interplay between the significance of the numbers twelve and six, for example, is reflected in the length of lines, which follow this pattern: 4,10,3,12,4,12,12,12,7,12,10,7,9,6. Auden may not be able to serve twelve, but he manages to preserve the number in five twelve-syllable lines. The last line in each stanza is the only one with six syllables, and so each of the six stanzas ends appropriately with "the Perfect Social Number." There are five other line lengths, so that the last line is also the sixth different length used. "Tonight at Seven-Thirty" is one of the *few* poems in the volume that leaves no line unrhymed, although many of the rhymes are imperfect, and the interlocking of the rhyme scheme (abacbddeecfgfg) and the balance of line lengths embody the harmonizing intent of the theme. Much of the energy of the poem derives from Auden's conquering of the difficulties involved in meeting the same, complex stanzaic requirements exactly six times, and the apparent ease with which he relates form and content is also an indication of the energy generated by his vision. Callan writes:

The poem itself becomes a work of re-presenting this vision of order. As an object it represents a playful order composed by homo ludens, related by analogy to the social harmony of the dinner-party which is a microcosm of the ideal society, and related allegorically to the harmony of the olamic sabbith [sic] "when at God's Board the saints chew pickled Leviathan."⁷⁸

"Tonight at Seven-Thirty" is one of the best examples of Auden's view that a poem can "present an analogy to that paradisaal state in which Freedom and Law, System and Order are united in harmony" (DH, p. 71). He has few illusions, however, about the nature and the value of the analogy, saying that such "harmony is possible and verbal only," that its value in witnessing for the good is very tenuous, and that it must be seen distinctly in its relationship to the world:

The effect of beauty, therefore, is good to the degree that, through its analogies, the goodness of created existence, the historical fall into unfreedom and disorder, and the possibility of regaining Paradise through repentance and forgiveness are recognized. Its effect is evil to the degree that beauty is taken, not as analogous to, but identical with goodness, so that the artist regards himself or is regarded by others as God, the pleasure of beauty taken for the joy of Paradise, and the conclusion drawn that, since all is well in the work of art, all is well in history. But all is not well there. (DH, P. 71)

We are thus made aware again "of the baffle of being," in which only certain signs, events, and analogies occasionally present themselves in our attempt to see a little more clearly "through the clouded glass." In these terms "Tonight at Seven-Thirty" may represent small consolation, but it is nevertheless a triumph in every other respect, as is fitting for a poem which attempts to embody the spirit of Agape, and which represents the climax of the entire movement of the cycle.

"The Cave of Nakedness" plunges the reader back into the private

realm, and its contrast to the stately progression of "Tonight at Seven-Thirty" is upsetting. The poem reads like a long, elaborate conversation coming from someone who does not particularly like the ritual of going to bed, and the alternating twelve and thirteen syllable lines seem to be minimal governance for the tumultuous rush of ideas, though these are further organized into four verse paragraphs. The first introduces the bedroom and Auden's progress to it, and Auden comments on the meaning of "bedrooms" for the ordinary "unmythical mortal." Auden seems to get into bed in the second verse paragraph, and much of the conversation here is taken up with a comparison between age and youth. The third discusses the time usually spent in actually sleeping -- Auden picks up on the analogy to dying here, and goes on to describe a "Vision of Hell" and his overcoming it in the early morning. The last paragraph describes his waking, a type of rebirth as he is "reneighbored in the Country of Consideration."

Auden begins the poem with references to several renowned, mythical lovers: "Tristan and Isolde" are "the great exemplars" of romantic love, which "is based upon Manicheism, holding matter and time to be evil, denying the flesh and the present, and seeking its perfection in death, when matter and time are transcended and the soul merges into the Logos."⁷⁹ The two lovers are, therefore, "much too in love to care / for so mundane a matter" as a bed. This myth of romantic love "creates its negative mirror image: in Mozart's Don Giovanni, the flesh and the present are asserted, the spirit and the future denied."⁸⁰ "Don Juan," therefore, "needs no bed, being far too impatient to undress" Bedrooms are the private and necessary refuges of everyman, however:

"unmythical / mortals require one, and prefer to take their clothes off, / if only to sleep."

The rest of this verse paragraph is primarily concerned with the idea that the bedroom is a place where each person confronts himself in his nakedness, both physical and spiritual. The "essential being," as it were, is something that only he and God can know anything about. It is impossible to reveal oneself to another in any completely satisfactory way, or even to reveal to another the nature of sexual relationships (the romance dies in the telling) or of religious meditations:

. . . where there's a bed,
be it a nun's restricted cot or an Emperor's
baldachined and nightly-redamselled couch, there are no
effable data.

This is the first of several pairings of religious and sexual passion (that of "lovers" and "monks" is another), and one is tempted to think that the comparison does not work in sexuality's favour. The Emperor, for example, is clearly the monarch of Scheherezade fame. The word "baldachined," suggesting rich Eastern silks with gold embroidery, strengthens this association, in which case the "nightly-redamselling" could be described as rather brutal "deeds of errantry." The point made by the association of sexuality and faith is that the individual's "O's of passion" and the person's "interior acts of attention" are like stories "in which the names do matter and the style of telling is of much less significance." The bedroom is a sanctuary for the most personal expressions of one's being, whether impassioned prayers to God or declarations of passion to the beloved, and therefore they need a room which corresponds to the private nature of such activity:

conscious and deliberate attempts to control those tendencies which would magnify "Ordinary human unhappiness" to something worse than it is. He immediately adds:

. . . to cavil
[is] putting on airs: at day-wester to think of nothing
benign to memorize is as rare as feeling
no personal blemish, and Age, despite its damage,
is well-off.

It is also surprising to discover that Auden's age is the least cause of anxiety or unhappiness. Despite the common yearning of "Fifty-plus" for youth, Auden finds a comparison with "Seventeen" and all the problems and uncertainties of that age to be a chief source of his contentment.

The third verse paragraph begins with the association of an image for sleep, "disband[ing] from the world," with the possibility of dying, in which case his future would certainly be in the hands of "the Gospel Makers." Auden makes a mock-innocent comment on the fact that he need not fear a horrible midnight death "(not in neutral Austria)", and also lists the assaults that he "would be spared":

. . . fire, nightmare, insomnia's
Vision of Hell, when Nature's wholesome genial fabric
lies utterly discussed and from a sullen vague
wafts a contagious stench, her adamant minerals
all corrupt, each life a worthless iteration
of the general loathing (to know that, probably,
its cause is chemical can degrade the panic,
not stint it).

This is perhaps the bleakest passage in the entire volume, and stands in complete opposition to the vision in "Tonight at Seven-Thirty." There "the true olamic silence" is re-presented by speech; here, "Nature's wholesome genial fabric lies utterly discussed", and this last word again

brings to mind the bond between the Word and Creation. The language of this passage is carefully chosen to evoke a sense of complete worthlessness. "Discussed" is linked with "disgust"; the French word for "wave" is used, linking it with vagueness; the differentiation of lives that was so astutely maintained and harmonized through "well-liking" in "Tonight at Seven-Thirty" here becomes the reiteration of a single note, which is "the general loathing"; and one supposedly calming explanation, that thought and emotion have purely chemical origins, takes the whole process one step further, since the "Vision of Hell" is itself degraded.

Auden then begins the restoration of his focus on praising his and the world's existence. He bows to the theory of chemical causes by taking pills, but these are secondary to the help given by "the Gospel Makers," to whom he now gives the even more cavalier appellation of "the Holy Four." He seems to have had the habit of reading them before sleeping, and they, perhaps, helped provide him nightly with something "benign to memorize." The approach of dawn and new hope is signalled by birds:

. . . members of an avian orchestra
are already softly noodling, limbering up for
an overture at sunrise, their effort to express
in the old convention they inherit that joy in beginning
for which our species was created, and declare it
good.

The birds reiterate, then, God's declaration at the time of creation, and contradict entirely the vision of hell. Joining the conventional "avian orchestra" in praise, Auden follows a convention himself in associating sunrise with a new beginning in life and the Christian re-birth, though this is done in his unique style and is heart-felt:

We may not be obliged -- though it is mannerly -- to bless
 the Trinity that we are corporal contraptions,
 but only a villain will omit to thank Our Lady or
 her henwife, Dame Kind, as he, she, or both ensemble,
 emerge from a private cavity to be reborn,
 reneighbored in the Country of Consideration.

The phrase "corporal contraptions" reminds us of Auden's definition of poems as "verbal contraptions," and this is one more item, along with the titles and similar kinds of "Postscripts," suggesting a comparison of this poem with "The Cave of Making." Commenting on the opening lines in the second verse paragraph, Johnson writes:

The poem develops this cave as an image of both
 remembered womb --

Since my infantile entrance
 at my mother's bidding into Edwardian England --

and anticipated tomb -- "When I disband from the world"
 -- that again reminds us of the carefully developed
 connections between making and mortality in "The Cave of
 Making"; this, in effect, is the mirror image of that
 poem.⁸¹

There are many differences as well as similarities, however, and it should be remembered that, as in the case of Don Juan and Tristan, a mirror image contains a "mutual reversal of value".⁸² The distinctions between sinful man and the aesthetic value of poetry maintained in the earlier "Postscript," for example, are echoed in this one:

Only look in the glass to detect a removable blemish:
 As for the permanent ones, already you know quite enough.

The verbal contraption may be judged negatively for its removable blemishes or aesthetic lapses, but the corporal contraption is "lapsed," one of its permanent blemishes being original sin. In the haiku following this couplet Auden is quick to show that the "flesh" is not responsible for

this blemish: "Our bodies cannot love: / But, without one, / What works of love could we do?" Man is seen, then, as a being in which body and spirit are united, subject to both freedom and necessity. Poetry has very little to do with necessity; it is a free act. Auden's "Cave of Making" is, like the "Cave of Nakedness," a private room, cut off from the rest of the house and daily life, but the poetry made there is intended for the public view. Sleep is a necessity, however, and though there are other "free" actions that may take place in the bedroom, most cannot, in Auden's view, be adequately recounted in the public realm.

"The Common Life" deals with a living room, which can be thought of as part of "the Country of Consideration," and which, as mentioned earlier, actually doubled as the dining room. This poem is the denouement of Thanksgiving for a Habitat: Auden here gets on with the "daily business of living," and perhaps it is this fact (knowing that life does not stop here), that gives the cycle a sense of not having come to a conclusion. The cycle has come full circle, but it is clear that many more rounds through the various rooms have to be completed before a final conclusion. This is one sense in which the phrase, "the common life," may be understood, but the title also evokes an image of the earliest Church, whose members had "all things common" (Acts 4:32). This idea is reinforced by the fact that the second section of About the House culminates in two poems on Ascension Day and Whitsunday (the Day of Pentecost), two key dates in the founding of the Church.

Throughout "The Common Life" Auden forges a series of analogies

between the "secular faith" manifested by his living room and the creed of the Church:

A living room, the catholic area you
 (Thou, rather) and I may enter
 without knocking, leave without a bow, confronts
 each visitor with a style,

a secular faith: he compares its dogmas
 with his, and decides whether
 he would like to see more of us.

The first articles of Auden's own dogma concerning living rooms (he is chilled by "cups used for ashtrays," for example) suggest that the analogies with the Church are only to be taken in the most lighthearted fashion, but the lines following the second parenthesis show that his reflections have a weightier side as well:

There's no We at an instant,
 only Thou and I, two regions
 of protestant being which nowhere overlap

This alternation of light and serious is to continue to the last stanza which shows, again, that the ultimate focus of the poem and the cycle is religious in nature.

An area can be catholic in the sense that it encompasses all within it (or at least those who have been allowed to enter), and itself makes no distinctions between persons: to space there can be a "We at an instant." People, however, cannot help making distinctions: in the opening lines Auden corrects his address of Chester Kallman as "you" to a more respectful "Thou," and shortly after he shows that the essential beings of "Thou and I" are by definition "protestant." The isolation of each person in his uniqueness is a theme echoed by the lines based on

what Sherlock Holmes would infer by looking at the room. He can get so close to the inner life as to know that Auden and Kallman "belong to the clerisy" (a term "introduced by Coleridge to express a notion no longer associated with Clergy" (OED); that is, learned men as a body of scholars, philosophers and poets), but the master of inductive reasoning can go little further:

. . . could he read
what our prayers and jokes are about, what creatures
frighten us most, or what names

head our roll call of persons we would least like
to go to bed with?

Auden goes on to consider the inexplicable marvel of people sharing their lives for reasons going beyond necessity and usefulness:

What draws
singular lives together in the first place,
loneliness, lust, ambition,

or mere convenience, is obvious, why they drop
or murder one another
clear enough: how they create, though, a common world
between them, like Bombelli's

impossible yet useful numbers,⁸³ no one
has yet explained. Still, they do
manage to forgive impossible behaviour,
to endure by some miracle

conversational tics and larval habits
without wincing (were you to die,
I should miss yours).

That Auden would miss these habits after having to endure them is another instance of the strange nature of friendship. "It's a wonder" to Auden even that he and Kallman are still alive, and still "cater-cousins" after twenty-four years, a number further suggesting that they had had "a full day" together with all the pleasant, figurative associations of the phrase.

It is appropriate that Auden should resurrect an archaic term to describe his long-lasting friendship with Kallman. A "cater-cousin" is an intimate friend, providing for one's needs and desires, and the modern association with catering survives in the sense that "artful cooking" is of no small importance to these two, who "spend much / on . . . [their] food."

The last five stanzas constitute a concluding movement that begins with a literal description of the room and moves through several levels of analogy until the two last stanzas, which are based on several passages from Paul's letter to the Corinthians. This ending also, fittingly, recalls several key passages from "Prologue: The Birth of Architecture,"⁸⁴ the first of which is a distinction between building and architecture. The "builder" has given this common room small windows, and Auden immediately makes allegorical use of this. The privacy of this "public realm" within the house will be protected, and leads him to write:

every home should be a fortress,
 equipped with all the very latest engines
 for keeping Nature at bay,
 versed in all ancient magic, the arts of quelling
 the Dark Lord and his hungry
 animivorous chimeras.

Humans must "construct a second nature of tomb and temple" to be worthy of the term architect, and here Auden does something similar with his "habitat." Civilization is a human artifice that keeps "Nature at bay," and Christian civilization goes one step further in the attempt to quell "the Dark Lord and his hungry / animivorous chimeras" which bring to mind the demonic, shade-devouring chimeras in several circles of Dante's Hell. Auden's soul-consuming creatures are more to be thought of as false ideas

or feelings that, if allowed to establish themselves under the auspices of one's own free will, subvert one's devotion to truth and love, or to God.

It is strange that Auden should use the language of magic to describe methods of quelling the chimeras, especially since it associates, at the highest analogical level, religion with superstition. Auden, however, thought of certain kinds of magic in more flattering terms. He thinks of poetry as a kind of "White Magic," for example, which the poet uses "to share his enchantment" with a given subject with others (SW, p. 128). If an analogy between poetic fabrication and the art of homemaking is acceptable, then the "ancient magic" of the latter may be used in a number of ways to quell the thought and spirit running contrary to faith. Through the creation of "a common world" between people, and using all the available "engines" at hand, one can share with others one's enchantment with the civil life, prevent the complete encroachment of Nature, and deprive any form of evil from gaining a hold within.

The "Black Magician," on the other hand, is a sort of power-hungry utilitarian who "has no enchantment to share with others but uses enchantment to secure domination over others and compelling them to do his will" (SW, pp. 128-129). He is excluded from the inexplicable wonder of the common world created freely by those partaking in it and in which consideration is continually given to each other's needs and desires. These ideas appear to be in the background of the following lines:

(Any brute
can buy a machine in a shop,
but the sacred spells are secret to the kind,
and if power is what we wish

they won't work.)

One must recognize the potential civilizing effects of the "machines" at one's disposal before they can be used in the approbative sense of "engines." This may be thought of as one part of the knowledge that is "secret to the kind," the word "kind" signifying both compassion and the class of people who would be part of a liberal civilization.

The apocalyptic image in the second last stanza, "The ogre will come in any case: / so Joyce has warned us," implies that, regardless of human endeavour, there will come a day when "the Dark Lord" will hold dominion over the world. It seems strange that Auden should choose Joyce out of all the eschatological writings at his disposal, Biblical and otherwise, to speak of a future catastrophe. Perhaps he wished to show that the idea is not exclusive to Christianity, or perhaps to dissociate himself from futile speculations concerning the latter days by giving them to another, and non-Christian, writer. He has done something similar twice before, in the dedicatory address and in the final stanza of "Grub First, Then Ethics":

A moon profaned by
Sectarian din, death by
Fervent implosion:--
Possibles. But here and now
Our oath to the living word.

.

. . . all we ask for,
should the night come when comets blaze and meres break,
is a good dinner, that we
may march in high fettle, left foot first,
to hold her Thermopylae.

Auden also leaves the comment on the "ogre" to the realm of

possibility and turns his attention to the present, making what amounts to another "oath to the living word":

Howbeit,
fasting or feasting, we both know this: without
the Spirit we die, but life

without the Letter is in the worst of taste

The Biblical passage these lines are based on is II Corinthians 3:4-6:

And such trust have we through Christ to God-ward:
Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any
thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God:
Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testa-
ment; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the
letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.

The "letter," by which Paul means primarily the Old Testament Judaic Law, condemns man because he cannot help but continually disobey it, making salvation through Grace necessary for everlasting life. Auden softens the harshness of Paul's formulation by slightly changing the focus: not "the Letter kills," but "without the Spirit we die". It is also odd, to say the least, that Auden should say "life / without the Letter is in the worst of taste" Perhaps this term carries a stronger sense of condemnation for Auden than it does for most, his focus being, perhaps, less on aesthetics than on propriety of behaviour. It is a recurring problem for all whose Christianity tends to concentrate attention on the Spiritual aspect of the Word, that not enough attention is paid to sin and to following the letter of the Law. St. Paul was well aware of this, as was Auden, who once quoted Paul's exclamation in Romans 6:1: "What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that Grace may abound? God forbid."⁸⁵

The final lines of the poem seem to echo the ascendancy of the Spirit over the Letter:

. . . and always, though truth and love
can never really differ, when they seem to,
the subaltern should be truth.

The relationship between truth and love, however, is seen to be a lot more complex, and we are reminded that "we see through a glass darkly" (I Corinthians 13:12). This ending also brings I Corinthians 13:13 to mind: "And now abideth faith, hope, and charity, but the greatest of these is charity." Auden again deliberately makes his language a little less assertive ("the subaltern should be truth"), as if he realizes that he is, at best, Paul's less confident subaltern as a "minister of the new testament."

This conclusion has nevertheless come a long way from the beginning of Auden's epic and comic journey through nine rooms of the house. The "Prologue" declared man's need to build a world distinct from Nature, "that Immortal Commonwealth / . . . in perfect taste," which suggests another reason why "life / without the Letter" is described as being "in the worst of taste." Life in its natural, amoral state, which the advent of the Letter of Mosaic Law denied to man because it made him conscious of sin, can be disgusting for man, though in "perfect taste" from the standpoint of the rest of creation. The possibility of the highest form of human life, the religious, was described in these cryptic lines:

. . . to take
umbrage at death, to construct
a second nature of tomb and temple, lives
must know the meaning of If.

Throughout the twelve poems in the cycle Auden develops a view of man as a conditional being; a strange conjunction of a body subject to necessity and a free will; a being who is driven to disclose himself to others in

the public realm and to contribute his share to civilization, and yet is dependent on lengthy intervals of privacy for sanity and personal re-creation; and a being whose relationship with God, the Unconditional, is of utmost importance, but who is faced with the difficulty of recognizing the commands of One who is everything that man is not.

The matrix out of which the cycle proceeds is the same command to construct a second nature of both the man (the body is, in the Bible, often likened to tomb and temple) and his dwelling, which can ideally become one of "The houses of our City" ("Grub First, Then Ethics") and ultimately of the City of God. "Tonight at Seven-Thirty" is the poem in which the house comes closest to resembling a temple, for the dinner party is made explicitly analogous to the feast of Agape which, along with the Eucharist, commemorates the Last Supper. It is also true of "The Common Life," however, where the last paragraph of the Apostle's Creed seems to hover about the four walls of the living room. That paragraph reads: "I believe in the Holy Ghost; the Holy Catholic Church; the Communion of Saints; the Forgiveness of sins; the Resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting." Auden's belief in the Holy Ghost is, in the poem, a concomitant of his expression of dependence on "the Spirit"; the room is "A catholic area" in which "two regions / of protestant being" move; Auden and Kallman create "a common world / between them," and they belong, though it is a weak echo of "the Communion of Saints," to the "clerisy"; they "manage to forgive impossible behaviour"; and the phrase, "the life everlasting," is clearly enough associated with the words, "without / the Spirit we die"

It is a recurring temptation to ignore Auden's comic style, and

to forget that, even though his writing continually darts back and forth between different levels of analogy, the basis of all the poetry in this cycle is still that very modest thing, a fairly ordinary house in Kirchstetten, Austria. It can never be forgotten, however, that the particular quality of Auden's later comic style springs from his Christian vision, and particularly from his sense of the great disparity between man and God, which here carries over into considerations of the differences between a house and the House of God, and between a man's words (as well as his poetic "verbal contraptions") and the Word of God. That relationships between them are at all possible, and that they have been made possible by God's love and Christ's sacrifice on the cross, leads Auden to a gratitude for all that he has been given and to the attempt to govern every aspect of his life according to his faith. The following psalm of praise from Charles Williams indicates the kind of focus Auden has in this volume (particularly in "The Common Life"), and how Auden could come to think of his house as one of the facts "in God's glory":

In the last paragraph of the Apostle's Creed the City is defined. "I believe in the Holy Ghost" is its first clause and primal condition. If it is living, it lives so, and only so, towards Christ; in whom it already lives complete, having (by virtue of His substitution) "the perfect and simultaneous possession of everlasting life." Simultaneously all its citizens derive from all. "The Holy Catholic Church" is its name here, allowing for all proper implications of whatever kind: "visible -- invisible," "invincible ignorance," and so on. But the other four clauses are, as it were, the four walls of the description in the Apocalypse; or, if the metaphor divides them too much, say they are the four qualities of that life: "the Communion of Saints, the Forgiveness of Sins, the Resurrection of the Body, and the Life everlasting." They are the qualities of the renewed perfection

of union -- interchange, interchange redeeming even the denial of itself, the glory of the holy flesh by which so much was known, the infinite power in all the glory. The glory is the thing happening; it is not, though in our talk we seem to make it so and can only believe in it so, an accident of the thing happening. The glory of God is in facts. The almost incredible nature of things is that there is no fact which is not in His glory. This is the great inclusion which makes the City. If, to use terms of space, we ascend towards it, it is still that which descends out of heaven, and is the cause and course of our ascent. The language of it is in the great interchange of fiery tongues by which the Spirit manifested at the beginning.⁸⁶

Williams' essay is entitled "The Redeemed City," and one is tempted to go so far as to subtitle Thanksgiving for a Habitat "the redeemed house." Just as the passage from Williams closes with an image of the day of Pentecost, however, the theme of possible redemption in About the House will not be complete until the last line of "Whitsunday in Kirchstetten."

NOTES

¹Chicago, 1969, p. 6 (first published in 1958). Henceforward this book will be cited as Arendt.

²Ibid., p. 1. Arendt quotes "some American reporter"

³Swarthmore Chart, p. 48. The ensuing phrases, "refuge from nature" and "release from nature" are also taken from this chart. Cf. footnote 27 in my Introduction.

⁴Unless otherwise specified, all reference to the Bible will be taken from the Holy Bible: Authorized King James Version (Grand Rapids, 1977).

⁵Callan, p. 61.

⁶This is a phrase used by Reinhold Niebuhr in The Nature and Destiny of Man: A Christian Interpretation, Vol. II; Human Destiny (New York, 1964), p. 5 (first published in 1943. For a discussion of Niebuhr's influence on Auden, see Spears, pp. 179, 183, 184.

⁷Arendt, whose second chapter is entitled "The Public and the Private Realm" (pp. 22-78), influenced Auden's understanding of this distinction. Richard Johnson also points out Arendt's influence in "Auden's Architecture of Humanism," Virginia Quarterly Review, 48 (1972), pp. 98, 109. Henceforward this article will be cited as Johnson.

⁸John Ruskin, The Seven Lamps of Architecture, in The Works of John Ruskin, Vol. 8. E.T. Cook & A. Wedderburn, edd. (London, 1903), p. 29. Henceforward this book will be cited as Ruskin. Whether Auden had Ruskin in mind or not, there are enough similarities in their ideas concerning architecture and building to warrant quotation.

⁹Auden may have switched these while revising the final draft, realizing that "the Acropolis" and "Chartres Cathedral" are also, syllabically speaking, interchangeable.

¹⁰Johnson, p. 97.

¹¹Spears, p. 345.

¹²Ruskin, p. 21.

¹³Ibid., p. 71.

¹⁴Johnson, p. 98.

¹⁵John Fuller writes, in reference to the "Postscript": ". . . Auden implies, though comically, that the 'second nature of tomb and temple' is in fact man's religious sense, his awareness of identity and morality, and that what we build is our own soul which doesn't take easily to fraternization." A Reader's Guide to W.H. Auden (London, 1970), p. 242. Henceforward this book will be cited as Fuller.

¹⁶This idea, and the terms "conditional" and "Unconditional," recur throughout Kierkegaard's writings. See, also, Spears, p. 184, and Descent, pp. 217-218.

¹⁷Spears, p. 184.

¹⁸R.G. Collingwood, The New Leviathan (Oxford, 1942), p. 103. Henceforward this book will be cited as New Leviathan. According to Spears, Collingwood, "the Oxford philosopher and historian . . . profoundly influenced Auden" (p. 242), especially with The Principles of Art (Oxford, 1938).

¹⁹DH, p. 84. Callan observes that the "'Postscript' . . . deflates the contemplative mood of the poem through an unpleasant contrast in both style and attitude. This 'Postscript' obtrudes like Caliban in Ariel's domain to warn against a romantic tendency to regard the poet as the sole possessor of a creative imagination" (p. 63).

²⁰Replogle, p. 227.

²¹Auden's dislike of newspapers extended, for example, to excluding them altogether from his "dream Eden" (DH, pp. 6-7).

²²Callan, p. 62.

²³Blaise Pascal, Pensées, ed. Louis Lafuma, John Warrington, trans. (London, 1973), p. 59. Henceforward this book will be cited as Pensées. Auden was quite familiar with Pascal's works, writing a poem about him in 1939 ("Pascal," English Auden, p. 451) and quoting him throughout his career (cf. the numerous entries in Aphorisms, for example). In an untitled essay in Modern Canterbury Pilgrims, Auden writes that, during the early Thirties, "The only theological writer I knew of . . . whom I found readable and disturbing to my complacency was Pascal." James A. Pike, ed. (New York, 1956), p. 36. Henceforward this essay will be cited as Pike.

²⁴Descent, pp. 67-68.

²⁵Johnson, p. 101.

²⁶Johnson, pp. 101-102. "Nano" is similar but not etymologically related to "nanny."

²⁷The OED cites "routier" twice. It is, in one case, the French word from which the archaic, English "ruttier" is adapted, which means "A set of instructions for finding one's course at sea", clearly not Auden's intended meaning. In the second case, "routier" is an Old French word which entered English (through a Middle Dutch adaptation) as "rutter," a term (now archaic) for a German cavalry soldier of the 16th and 17th centuries, or a term (now obsolete) for either a "gay cavalier" or one of "a party of swindlers." The OED suggests a comparison with the obsolete "router," one meaning of which is "swaggering soldier or bully."

²⁸Op. cit., p. 102.

²⁹Auden had been thinking about changing his summer residence from Ischia, Italy, when it was unexpectedly announced, in 1957, that he "had won the Feltrinelli prize, which carried with it a cash award of approximately £1,200 . . . which helped to enable him, the following year, to buy a small farmhouse in Lower Austria." Osborne, p. 246.

³⁰Arendt may have been an influence in these lines: "The earth is the very quintessence of the human condition, and earthly nature, for all we know, may be unique in the universe in providing human beings with a habitat in which they can move and breathe without effort and without artifice." (p. 2).

³¹Quoted from "George Macdonald," F & A, p. 273. Auden combines two passages separated by a couple of pages. In the Ballantine Books edition (New York, 1973), though this is not the one reviewed in F & A, these passages are on pp. 10 and 12.

³²Johnson, pp. 100, 101.

³³Pensées, p. 63.

³⁴Op. cit., pp. 103-104.

³⁵SW, p. 128. Auden changed his mind several times on this subject. In The Dyer's Hand he writes: "Poetry is not magic. In so far as poetry, or any other of the arts, can be said to have an ulterior purpose, it is,

by telling the truth, to disenchant and disintoxicate" (p. 27). This statement seems to derive, however, from his writings in the Forties, and particularly from a review of Eliot's A Choice of Kipling's Verse: "Poet of the Encirclement," The New Republic (October 25, 1943). Here Auden also mentions that Art's "proper effect . . . is disenchanting . . ." (cf. Spears, p. 188). In 1960 Auden wrote the following as the epigraph to Part II of Homage to Clio (used again as the dedicatory poem in Collected Poems):

Although you be, as I am, one of those
 Who feel a Christian ought to write in prose,
 For poetry is magic: born in sin, you
 May read it to exorcise the Gentile in you.

The new assertion that "poetry is magic" is based on the idea that, in "White Magic," a poet's "ulterior purpose" may be to arouse enchantment with the truth, but that this enchantment is not forced on readers against their will, and may freely be joined in.

³⁶Pike, p. 40. Also quoted by Spears, p. 173.

³⁷Callan, p. 60.

³⁸C.S. Lewis, The Discarded Image (Cambridge, 1967), pp. 59-60.

³⁹London, 1967. First published in 1937. Henceforward this book will be cited as Letters from Iceland.

⁴⁰Replogle, p. 232.

⁴¹Morris Kline, Mathematics in Western Culture (London, 1954), p. 93. I found this book in Auden's Kirchstetten "cave of making" while visiting in July, 1982. Any further comments on the structure and contents of Auden's house are based on this visit, and on conversations with Frau Strobl, Auden's former housekeeper and present owner of the house.

⁴²Johnson, pp. 104-105.

⁴³Callan, p. 64.

⁴⁴Callan, p. 65.

⁴⁵City, p. 85.

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 69.

⁴⁷Callan, p. 63.

⁴⁸Descent, p. 16.

⁴⁹DH, p. 80. The relevance of this passage, which is in turn based on Arendt's The Human Condition, was suggested to me by Johnson (p. 106).

⁵⁰Cf. pp. 14-16, 313-320, the latter pages comprising a section entitled "Life as the Highest Good."

⁵¹Op. cit., p. 62.

⁵²Ibid., p. 64.

⁵³W.B. Yeats, The Collected Poems of W.B. Yeats (London, 1973), p. 218. Henceforward this book will be cited as Yeats. The ensuing quotations from "Vacillation" are from pp. 285, 286.

⁵⁴Replogle, p. 244.

⁵⁵Williams writes (quoting C.S. Lewis' The Allegory of Love): "Augustine 'comments on the fact -- to him, apparently, remarkable -- that Ambrose, when he read, read silently. You could see his eyes moving, but you could hear nothing'" (Descent, p. 77).

⁵⁶Samuel E. Stumpf, ed., Socrates to Sartre: A History of Philosophy (New York, 1966), p. 49.

⁵⁷Johnson, pp. 107-108.

⁵⁸Ibid., p. 108.

⁶⁰Ibid., p. 109.

⁶¹Ibid., p. 109.

⁶²The following discussion of the City symbol in Nones (1951), showing partially what the various meanings of "the City" were for Auden, is taken from Spears, p. 194: "The dominant symbol in the volume is the City. Signifying civilization, man's social achievement, the City has always been a feature of Auden's moralized landscape, but it is given now a special connotation closely related to the symbols just discussed. The contrast of Eros and Agape and the meditations on the Logos lead naturally to a contrast of the earthly and heavenly cities (civitas terrena and civitas Dei), secular and Christian societies. Though the city symbol is universalized, the central image is usually that of ancient Rome fused with the present, for the state of our own civilization constitutes an inevitable parallel with that of collapsing Rome: both are naturalistic cultures rejecting, in the name of reason, the Absurd of Christianity, which alone can give meaning to history as well as to individual life."

⁶³This passage is again referred to, though much more directly, in the last stanza of "The Common Life."

⁶⁴A somewhat similar point is made in "Vespers," the fifth poem of "Horae Canonicae," in which Auden contrasts his Arcadianism with another's Utopianism and relates both to the crucifixion:

[we are both forced], for a fraction of a second, to remember our victim (but for him I could forget the blood, but for me he could forget the innocence),

on whose immolation (call him Abel, Remus, whom you will, it is one Sin Offering) arcadias, utopias, our dear old bag of a democracy are alike founded:

For without a cement of blood (it must be human, it must be innocent) no secular wall will safely stand. (CP, p. 484).

⁶⁵Irvin Ehrenpreis, "Poetry Without Despair," Virginia Quarterly Review, 42 (Winter 1966), p. 164. Henceforward this review will be cited as Ehrenpreis.

⁶⁶Johann Wolfgang Goethe, Italian Journey, trans. W.H. Auden and Elizabeth Mayer (New York, 1968), p. 73. Henceforward this book will be cited as Italian Journey.

⁶⁷Callan, p. 66.

⁶⁸The Griffin, 7:6 (June 1958). The dedication to M.F.K. Fisher is more than a gesture, for Auden owes a fair number of his ideas concerning an ideal dinner party to the following passage: ". . . gastronomical perfection can be reached in these combinations: one person dining alone,

usually upon a couch or a hillside; two people, of no matter what sex or age, dining in a good restaurant; six people, of no matter what sex or age, dining in a good home

"The six should be capable of decent social behaviour: that is, no two of them should be so much in love as to bore the others, nor at the opposite extreme should they be carrying on any sexual or professional feud which could put poison on the plates all must eat from. A good combination would be one married couple, for warm composure; one less firmly established, to add a note of investigation to the talk; and two strangers of either sex, upon whom the better-acquainted could sharpen their questioning wits

"Hunger and fair-to-good health are basic requirements, for no man stayed by a heavy midafternoon snack or gnawed by a gastric ulcer can add much to the general well-being." Quoted in Certain World, p. 135.

⁶⁹Callan, p. 66.

⁷⁰Thomas Bulfinch, The Age of Chivalry and Legends of Charlemagne (New York, 1962), p. 157. Henceforward this book will be cited as Bulfinch.

⁷¹Part of Auden's attitude to nicknames is indicated in the "Postscript" to "The Cave of Making": "In a brothel, both / The ladies and gentlemen / Have nicknames only."

⁷²All definitions in this paragraph are from the OED.

⁷³Replogle, p. 220.

⁷⁴"Depatical" means nothing, though it has been faithfully transcribed by many who have quoted and commented on this passage prior to its correction in CP to "dapatical."

⁷⁵Callan, p. 66.

⁷⁶One of the first expressions of this idea comes at the end of the Stage Manager's "Preface" to The Sea and the Mirror (1942-1944):

. . . this world of fact we love
Is unsubstantial stuff:
All the rest is silence
On the other side of the wall;
And the silence ripeness,
And the ripeness all.

(CP, p. 311)

Commenting (in the last words of The Dyer's Hand) on one of Prospero's last speeches in Shakespeare's The Tempest, Auden writes: "The tone is not that of a man who, putting behind him the vanities of mundane music, would meditate like Queen Katharine 'upon that celestial harmony I go to,' but rather of one who longs for a place where silence shall be all" (p. 527).

⁷⁷Callan, p. 66.

⁷⁸Ibid., pp. 66-67.

⁷⁹Spears, p. 189.

⁸⁰Ibid., p. 189.

⁸¹Johnson, p. 114.

⁸²Caliban's speech, The Sea and the Mirror (CP, p. 330).

⁸³Bombelli's numbers are examples of the algebraic language in which imaginary, codified numbers are commonly accepted by scientists or mathematicians in the attempt to explain certain phenomena. Mathematicians before Bombelli had attempted to understand the square root of negative numbers, the "fictitious" or imaginary negative roots of an equation, and "the irreducible case in the cubics":

It remained for Raphael Bombelli of Bologna, who published in 1572 an algebra of great merit, to point out the reality of the apparently imaginary expression which a root assumes, also to assign its value, when rational, and thus to lay the foundation of a more intimate knowledge of imaginary 'qualities.'

Florian Cajori, A History of Mathematics, 2nd Edition (New York, 1931), p. 135.

⁸⁴Both poems are also structured on alternating line lengths of eleven and seven syllables. That the cycle has come full circle is thus suggested by a metrical similarity as well as by the approximation to a "second nature" in the construction of their "common life."

⁸⁵Epigraph, "For the Time Being," CP, p. 269.

⁸⁶City, p. 110.

CHAPTER III

SYMMETRIES AND ASYMMETRIES IN "IN AND OUT"

Three themes are dominant in "In and Out," the second section of About the House. The first theme is that man suffers from a congenital spiritual defect which hinders him from fully discovering the meaning in his life, and compels him to demean what has been revealed to him. The second theme is that drastically different experiences -- those moments when man feels either estranged from or in harmony with himself, the world, or God -- can both be considered as good fortune, each in a different way helping strengthen one's resolve to know the good more fully. The third theme is that man is dependent upon God for the meaning of his existence and for everything of value in it.

The ordering of the poems in "In and Out" helps emphasize these themes in several ways. The most obvious is that the two poems which deal most directly with the contrasting themes, man's separation from God ("Ascension Day, 1964") and reconciliation with Him ("Whitsunday in Kirchstetten"), conclude the volume. Auden, however, has done much more with the overall structure of "In and Out" than simply give positions of prominence to certain poems, although a major purpose of this structure is to make these poems even more prominent. The first twenty-one poems, to begin with, are grouped by theme, subject matter and tone into subsections of six poems, nine poems (or three "titles")¹ and six poems each, with "Whitsunday in Kirchstetten" remaining outside this arrangement.

This is made even more complex by Auden's establishment of specific points of comparison and contrast between poems in the first half of "In and Out" and poems in the second half. A symmetrical pattern is created which links the first and twenty-first poems ("A Change of Air" and "Ascension Day, 1964"), the second and twentieth poems ("You" and "After Reading a Child's Guide to Physics"), and so on until the "Four Occasional Poems" are linked with the "Four Transliterations." "Whitsunday in Kirchstetten," again, remains outside of this "mirror pattern," but further discussion of this and other matters must wait until the elements of the overall structure have been reviewed.

The first six poems all deal in different ways with the theme of man's attempts at reconciliation with himself and with the world, and all have an ideal setting as a key point of reference. "A Change of Air" deals with the estrangement of the persona ("you") from the ego ("your name") and their reintegration through a "sojourn Elsewhere." "You" treats of the relationship between body and ego, and alludes to Eden in the second last stanza beginning with the lines, "Oh, I know how you came by / A sinner's cranium" "Et in Arcadia Ego," its connection with Eden obvious from the title, deals with themes similar to those of "You" but on the larger scale of Nature ("Mother Earth") and Man. Much of the focus of "Hammerfest" is on a part of Norway seen as possessing a prelapsarian innocence. Though most of the haiku in "Iceland Revisited" are concerned with variously comic and not-so-comic images of isolation and discomfort, the poem ends with two positive, "Hyperborean" images: "The magical light beyond Hekla" and "Fortunate island, / Where all men are equal / But not vulgar -- not yet." "On the Circuit" is the comic

high point of "In and Out," just as the sixth poem ("The Geography of the House") is in Thanksgiving for a Habitat, and the comedy here is based on the inconvenience, discomfort and isolation experienced on a promotional tour. Nevertheless, the poem ends with another description of an "ideal society": "God bless the U.S.A., so large, / So friendly, and so rich."

The second subsection, composed of "Four Occasional Poems," "Symmetries and Asymmetries," and "Four Transliterations," is a "swing section," mediating a shift from the harmonies of the first subsection to the estrangements of the third. This middle section begins in very high spirits with "A Toast," of "Four Occasional Poems," and the spirit of praise and thanksgiving dominates the next three, "A Short Ode to a Philologist," "Elegy for J.F.K.," and "Lines for Elizabeth Mayer." "Symmetries and Asymmetries" stands at the halfway point of "In and Out" and its title, as will shortly be seen in greater detail, actually describes the section's overall organization. The poem is composed of two couplets, a quatrain and forty haiku poems, which are, despite first impressions, carefully ordered under the guiding idea of a quest for understanding. "Four Transliterations" are dramatically different in subject and mood from the "Four Occasional Poems," although the theme of love is dominant in both. The occasional poems deal with love of friends, of learning and of justice, whereas the much bleaker transliterations deal with romantic love, love of fame and sexual love. The last haiku of "Symmetries and Asymmetries" helps explain why the two sets of four poems are deliberately set up for comparison and contrast: "The God of Love / Will never withdraw our right / To grief and infamy." Apparently

irreconcilable opposites such as joy and grief, and honour and infamy, can actually be complementary in one harmonious creation designed to encourage movement toward a loving God. Part of Auden's point is that images of despair and judgement help man to envisage Mercy as much as ideal places and uplifting experiences do.

These ideas also form the basis of the comparisons and contrasts between the third subsection of poems and the first. The poems paired by the mirror construction are as follows: "A Change of Air" and "Ascension Day, 1964"; "You" and "After Reading . . ."; "Et in Arcadia Ego" and "Bestiaries are Out"; "Hammerfest" and "Lost"; "Iceland Revisited" and "At the Party"; and "On the Circuit" and "The Maker." The settings in the third subsection are as important as they were in the first, but this time they contain little or nothing that can be considered analogous to or symbolic of goodness. The "Maker's cave," the jam-packed party room, Hades, a bee colony, "an ever-expanding universe," and Kundry's enchanted garden² are all negative inversions of the good places dealt with in the first six poems. The difference is partially described by the last lines of "Thanksgiving for a Habitat":

. . . not a cradle,
a magic Eden without clocks,
and not a windowless grave, but a place
I may go both in and out of.

Auden is far too wary to make "magic Edens" or "windowless graves" of any of his settings: that wariness makes movement, makes growth possible.

The differences between the two subsections finds another appropriate image in the first haiku in "Symmetries and Asymmetries": "Deep in

earth's opaque mirror, / The old oak's roots / Reflected its branches" Life's darker experiences, so to speak, may be as valuable as its happier ones, just as, on a higher plane, the Negative and Affirmative Ways in Christianity are equally valuable and complementary. "A Negative Way," in fact, will be used as a catchphrase for the third subsection of poems, because, in each poem, Auden either rejects certain attitudes and ideas or recognizes his own distance from the good. In the first six poems Auden is much more concerned, however guardedly, with the acceptance of certain images and ideas as representative of the good, so that subsection may justifiably be subtitled "An Affirmation of Images."

The differences and similarities between the paired poems in the first and third sections are here briefly outlined. "The Maker" recalls "On the Circuit" in the sense that both poems are about makers, one poetic and the other metallurgical (though the analogy of the latter to poetic making is explicit). One of the differences between the two poems is revealed by the endings. In "On the Circuit," Auden calls for blessings to be conferred on his audiences and "the U.S.A.," but "The Maker" concludes as follows:

. . . beware, then, maladroit,
Thumb-sucking children of all ages,
Lest on your mangled bodies the court verdict
Be Death by Misadventure.

The isolation and desolation of the people in "At the Party" is far greater than Auden's in "Iceland Revisited," despite the fact that there is no language barrier. There is also no rescue in "At the Party," and no concluding vision of hope:

A howl for recognition, shrill with fear,
Shakes the jam-packed apartment, but each ear
Is listening to its hearing, so none hear.

"Lost" shares a common subject with "Hammerfest," which is simply a speaker isolated on a certain ground and seeing in it a religious significance. The vision of Eden in "Hammerfest," however, is replaced by one of Hades in "Lost." Both "Et in Arcadia Ego" and "Bestiaries are Out" contain comparisons of nature and man, but in the former poem the relationship is one of nearly complete harmony, and in the latter the complete disjunction between man and one of nature's creatures, the bee, is emphasized. "After Reading a Child's Guide to Modern Physics" deals with man's knowledge of the forces in nature and how they explain phenomena at "magnitude's extremes" from "the Great Nebulae" to "the atoms in our brains." It is similar to "You" in the sense that the earlier poem is an analysis of Auden's biological self, but this self is within viewing distance and can easily be grappled with. The scope of modern physics is so much greater that it threatens any sense of self, and can hardly be taken as a guide to understanding what man essentially is.

The reversal of the pattern now proceeds to the last lines of "Ascension Day, 1964," which are similar in tone and substance, though on a higher level of meaning, to the opening lines of "A Change in Air." Compare, "such minor ailments / Tell of estrangement between your name and you . . . ," with these lines describing an estrangement between God and man:

Absence remains
 The factual loss it is:

 Here on out as permanent,
 Obvious to all,
 As the presence in each

Of a glum Kundry,
 Impelled to giggle
 At any crucifixion.

The latter lines are immediately followed by the most profound "change of air," as it were, in which Auden for the first time in About the House situates himself in a Church -- the House, or the House of God. Ascension Day and Whitsunday are the two key dates in the foundation of the Church, and Auden treats them in a typological, and existential, manner in the sense that the events of Christian history are seen as contemporary phenomena to all people. Auden deals with the foundation of the Church, for example, as if his experiences on its most important dates are part of that same ongoing foundation. The thought of the world's loss of Christ brings to mind a corruption of the spirit for which the most suitable habitation would be, perhaps, a "windowless grave." But then the gift of Holy Spirit descends on Auden, after a fashion, as he 'endeavors in his own idiom,' as the disciples did before him, "to express the true magnalia"

"Whitsunday in Kirchstetten" ends with a reference to the final days, as does "The Common Life," and both cycle and volume, therefore, conclude with reminders of the apocalyptic images in the volume's opening epigraph. This set of correspondences is one of several indications that the progress of "In and Out" partially mirrors that of Thanksgiving for a Habitat. The cycle begins with a poem that is concerned with the construction of "a second nature of tomb and temple," a theme that is echoed in several lines of the epigraph for "In and Out," in which Auden wonders what mankind "still might do in the way / Of patient building, impatient

crime" The cycle takes the ideas of building and architecture a long way before its completion in "The Common Life," but these ideas are taken even further in "Whitsunday in Kirchstetten," which deals with the epitome of the Christian "second nature" -- the members of a Church, partaking in their separate ways of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. This poem's distinction from the preceding poems and their symmetrical organization calls attention to its supererogatory nature, which is in itself an analogue for the ultimate supererogation of God's providence and grace. This is the key to understanding why the volume is organized as it is, for Auden's wish to bear witness to the truth is, therefore, manifested in the overall structure as well as in individual poems.

1. An Affirmation of Images

No idea, image or setting is glibly or blithely identified with the good in the opening group of six poems. Auden takes great care to make every assertion, positive or negative, ring true, and his tentativeness is established at the very outset. In four tetrameter couplets, the epigraph speaks of time past, passing, and ~~to come~~, to come, and each period is marked by uncertainty, including

that awkward day
When, thoughtlessly, a human mind
Decided to leave the apes behind

These lines revise the Genesis account of creation, and will receive a little more clarification in "You." The adverb, "thoughtlessly," can be read either as a pejorative comment or a literal description of the evolution of man from ape. The latter reading is the most likely, since

it can hardly be thought of as wrong that the apes were left behind. Auden's line of thinking is similar to R.G. Collingwood's description of the evolution of consciousness.³ Collingwood argues that, in historical development as well as in the development of individual human minds, man becomes conscious of feelings only after he has named them (accidentally, or "thoughtlessly") and then reflected upon the names that have been given. Self-consciousness, or a consciousness of consciousness, is one quality which distinguishes man from animals, and it follows that an accidental naming of consciousness could have been involved in man's evolution from the apes. Auden's phrasing is deceptively simple, in the same way that it was in "the meaning of If," and in the "Prologue," too, it is the consciousness of man as a conditional being that leads to a naming and a consciousness of the Unconditional.

These ideas, as well as that of building "a second nature of tomb and temple," are brought to mind again in the uncertainty of the value of man's achievements expressed in the last lines:

. . . but who dare say
 If far be forward or astray,
 Or what we still might do in the way
 Of patient building, impatient crime,
 Given the sunlight, salt and time.

One may well ask what "salt" has to do with this, seeming to bear as much relevance to the future as "grapefruit" did to the understanding of past architectural achievements. "Salt" is not so difficult to deal with, since, apart from being a prominent ingredient in the development of civilization (as a seasoning and preservative), it may be seen as a metaphor for the spirit. Christ used it, for example, to describe his disciples as "the salt of the earth" (Matthew 5:13).

The subject of historical change gives way to a consideration of change of place in the first poem in "In and Out." The opening lines of "A Change of Air" suggest that Auden is returning to a belief held in youth that physical discomforts are direct manifestations of a corresponding spiritual malady. This belief found its way into many of his earliest poems. "Petition" contains one example of this kind of wild psychosomaticism, in which an inflammation of the throat, for example, is called "the liar's quinsy" ⁴ Auden never completely gave up this kind of thinking, but, as in "A Change of Air," he moderates it and thereby restores it to the realm of realistic possibilities. "Corns, heartburn, sinus headaches," and especially the first ailment, do not warrant too grave an analysis, and therefore "such minor ailments" merely "Tell of an estrangement between your name and you, / Advise a change of air"

The distinction between "your name and you" in this parable is mentioned by Auden as the distinction between persona and ego. ⁵ This is, more specifically, the distinction between the individual defined by "behaviour characteristic of the biological species and social group or groups to which we belong" and the unique "I am" of the "uncountable, incomparable, irreplaceable" person (SW, p. 120). Physical ailments may indicate some disharmony between the two, but the last half of the stanza again warns against making too much of them:

heed them, but let
The modesty of their discomfort warn you
Against the flashy errands of your dreams.

Some of the excessive, "mollycoddling" cures for one's health are

described in the second stanza, which may involve drastic alterations of appearance, an attempted severe modification of personality, or distant journeys to exotic lands. To "trade in an agglutinative tongue / With a stone-age culture," for example, would require travelling to Eskimo villages in Greenland.⁶ The last two lines,

To go Elsewhere is to withdraw from movement,
A side step, a short one, will convey you thither. . . .

recall a line from "The Quest" asserting that men are "their situation."⁷ The chief feature of any "change of air," as distinct from its otherwise "average elsewhereishness," is that it provides a period of rest which allows a reconciliation of "your name and you":

Your name is as a mirror answers, yourself
How you behave in shops, the tips you give:
It [Elsewhere] sides with neither, being outside both,
But welcomes both with healing disregard.

Nothing more of the way the reconciliation is effected is here described. To be somewhere which treats you with "healing disregard" seems to be its own cure, as if the estrangement was originally due to something like pride, a false self-importance, or to any pressure, external or internal, to be somebody other than yourself. Even retreat into a monastery (to "don monkish garb") might involve a violation of one's natural home, the "here . . . / Where luck and instinct originally brought you" Auden evokes the idea of following one's "calling" here, an idea that does not simply demand that a person follow a certain vocation, but also that he should remain true to himself and express himself authentically.⁸

Another reason that the exact nature of the reconciliation is not described in much detail in this poem is to reinforce the idea that

there is an abyss between a person's private life and the public's understanding of that life, which is unbridgeable in a way that separation "between your name and you" is not. Auden took advantage of most of his opportunities to attack the presumptions of biographers believing the opposite. Scholars writing "voluble biographies" could never "show, as judgement on a cure demands, / A sudden change in love, ideas, or diet" The latter triad reflects the original ailments that advised "a change of air" in that both lists pertain to body, mind and heart. As these ailments were minor, there is no major change of ideas and no major event that corresponds to what is nevertheless an extremely important personal event, and all is beyond the ken of even the most "Fanatic scholarship."

The strange appearance of a Grand Duke in the last line is discussed by Auden himself, and that discussion will be quoted at length, since, among other reasons, it is one of the rare instances in which a poet discusses the sources of a particular work in depth:

As in the case with most poems, the germ of "A Change of Air" was a real historical event. I had been translating Goethe's Italienische Reise and was fascinated by the circumstances under which it began -- how, without telling his friends, Goethe suddenly bolted from Carlsbad to Italy under an assumed name: his Weimar persona, his epistolary love-affair with Charlotta von Stein, etc., had become intolerable to him. For some time I had considered writing a poem specifically about Goethe, but decided against it for two reasons. I had in the past written a number of poems about historical characters and wanted to do something different this time; then, Goethe's actual flight into "elsewhere" was much too dramatic to suit the basic theme of my intended poem, the contrast between a person's inner and outer biography. It is, surely, a general experience that those events in a person's life which to other people seem decisive and with which biographers are concerned are never the same as those moments which he himself (or she herself) knows to have been the crucial ones: the

inner life is undramatic and unmanifestable in realistic terms.

I set out, therefore, to try to write a poem in which it would be impossible for a reader to be distracted from its personal relevance to himself by thinking of Goethe, or, even more mistakenly, of me. One relic of the never-written poem remains, the Grand Duke in the last stanza. There exists a letter written by the Grand Duke of Weimar, though not to a cousin, in which he complains that, since his return from Italy, Goethe has become, not less amusing, but more aloof -- the old intimacy is gone. I debated removing him, but came to the conclusion that, since no reader of mine was likely to know a real Grand Duke personally, he would do as a parabolic figure standing for Society, Literary Critics, etc.

It becomes clear that the last lines of the poem may also be considered a parable concerning Auden's own relationship with critics, who are often given to pointing out how his later poetry is so much "less amusing" than, specifically, his Thirties' poetry.

"You" deals again with a conflict between one's ego and persona, though this time it is primarily the body or the biological aspect of the "persona" and not the sociological one that causes the rift. Our sense of both the distinction and the bond between the person and individual, between the ego ("I am") and the body, is reinforced in each stanza by the repetition of "I" and "you" (though the latter is replaced by "your" in the last stanza), and, to a lesser extent, by the two stresses in each line.

Auden assumes the voice of one with Manichean or Gnostic leanings, rather put out by the constant presence of his body:

Really, must you,
Over-familiar
Dense companion,
Be there always?

The bond between us
 Is chimerical surely:
 Yet I cannot break it.

The speaking self-awareness thinks of the body as something that limits his religious expression, and in this context "Sacred play" must be seen as a desire for spiritual license, or a desire to be free from all necessity. This distinction must be made because Auden is wearing a mask here. A man who wrote, among other poems in the same vein, a hymn to his five senses ("Precious Five," CP, p. 447), as well as a haiku that reads, "Our bodies cannot love: / But without one, / What works of Love could we do?" ("Postscript" to "The Cave of Nakedness"), could never assert for long that his body was a hindrance to "Sacred Play."

This attitude is maintained through the first five stanzas, with the Manichean ego seeking out every conceivable reason to upbraid his physical nature. The key element in this process is that consciousness is attributed to the body, and the paranoia increases in complexity until the speaker says:

Can I trust you even
 On creaturely fact?
 I suspect strongly
 You hold some dogma
 Of positive truth,
 And feed me fictions:
 I shall never prove it.

This forgets the lesson taught by the quatrain in the "Postscript" to "The Cave of Making":

Nature, consistent and august,
 Can't teach us what to write or do:
 With Her the real is always true,
 And what is true is also just.

In other words, the body (Nature), if it were capable of teaching anything,

would teach a positivism that makes no moral distinctions, but this is exactly why the "I" has created false worries for itself. It has attributed base and insidious motives to something that has no motive except survival. Collingwood helps to explain this:

The problem of the relationship between body and mind is that it is a bogus problem. Mind and body are one and the same thing, man himself, as known in two different ways. The whole of man is body insofar as he approaches the problem of self-knowledge by the methods of natural science. The whole of man is mind insofar as he approaches the problem of self-knowledge by expanding and clarifying the data of self-reflection.¹⁰

Collingwood goes on to write that the "science of man and the natural sciences can only harm each other by trespassing on each other's haunts,"¹¹ and both forms of trespassing are at the heart of this poem.

The speaker begins to realize this in the sixth stanza, imputing part of the blame for the negative product of human conscience (sin) on the body, and at the same time describing its origin in the terms of natural science:

Oh, I know how you came by
A sinner's cranium,
How between two glaciers
The master-chronometer
Of an innocent primate
Altered its tempi

"That explains nothing", not just because the phenomenological method is insufficient to explain problems of good and evil, but also because the speaker is labouring under comically simplified, Manichean-leaning misconceptions, expecting to blame all on the body.

The last stanza restores the two ways of knowing oneself to their proper places, and in the process the essential life of both body and mind are unified in the single term, "Being." The repeated, accusing

"you" is also gone because the ego is forced to admit that, whatever the self's "faults are, / The fault is" his. This new beginning of a reconciliation between the "I" and "you" begins with an awareness of a being greater than any man, the being responsible for altering the "tempi" of "The master-chronometer / Of an innocent primate". A number of answers are implicit in the concluding questions. First, "Who tinkered and why?" God, most likely, though the "why" is not *as* easy to answer. Auden here attempts a reconciliation between the Biblical and evolutionary accounts of creation, in which the events of the Garden of Eden all begin at a much later point in the divinely-controlled evolutionary calendar.¹²

All the speaker's doubts are finally replaced by several new certainties, which do little more than raise a new set of questions:

Why am I certain,
 Whatever your faults are,
 The fault is mine,
 Why is loneliness not
 A chemical discomfort,
 Nor Being a smell?

It is, again, fairly certain that the only Being with perfect answers is God Himself, and that one can only do his best to rid himself of false explanations. Other certainties are that there is an entirely unchimerical connection between ego and self that is certainly not merely chemical in origin, and that something like original sin can be associated with the faults that the self-reflecting, free-willed ego is the source of.

Man's fall from grace also involved the establishment of a new host of difficulties to be overcome in nature, but in periods of peace and

prosperity, when nature has been subdued and harnessed to man's needs, it is easy to forget both the human propensity to do evil and the obstacles in nature. Auden begins "Et in Arcadia Ego" with the following haiku:

Who, now, seeing Her so
Happily married,
Housewife, helpmate to Man,

Can imagine the screeching
Virago, the Amazon,
Earth Mother was?

Man himself, particularly from the perspective of rural Kirchstetten, seems for the time being to be in no special need of grace:

As for Him:
What has happened to the Brute
Epics and nightmares tell of?

This is the dual substance of the arcadian vision of the poem, in which Auden, during the first six haiku devoted to Her (nature), seems genuinely amazed with the progress of the world. The last three haiku, however, cast the rest of the poem into an entirely different light, which is far from being peacefully "orient."

The first two haiku congratulate the new relationship between man and nature, though one's apprehension of their success may be upset with thoughts of the severity of the taming it must have taken to turn the shrewish Earth Mother into a happy housewife. The most striking feature of the next four haiku is the peculiar and often ambiguous diction. The first impression given by the ensuing images may be listed as follows, taking only the more pleasant meanings for each of the words used (all definitions are taken from the OED): "Jungle growths" are diminished;

once "exorbitant monsters" are shy, ashamed, and a little guilty of past misdeeds; Mother Earth's soil is "tumbled together"; crops are in neat rows and on the verge of glowing resplendence; horses, "Levant or couchant" as in a noble heraldic tableau, graze peacefully; and finally, geese waddle home under the church clock in the centre of a peaceful village. If all Auden wanted to do was to invigorate his description of an utterly placid scene, his diction would simply have to be classed as a happily guided pedantry.

Each strange usage has its darker side, however, and the effect, as seen in this revised list, is that a much gloomier picture is painted. "Abated" can also mean "beat down" or "rendered null and void"; "abashed" has harsher connotations both as an active verb and passive participle, and in the former it can mean "to destroy the self-possession or confidence of"; a second meaning for "mumbled," though it is, admittedly, less plausible in the context, is "to maul, handle roughly, mistreat"; "orient" could simply mean "sunward" or facing in the proper direction; "well-daunted" can mean "disheartened and intimidated" as well as "tamed" (which may be the result of gelding, as suggested by the final haiku); and even the now obsolete "podge" describes the slow, heavy walk of an extremely fat person. Man has subdued nature, indeed, but everything now seems to be rather too beaten down, or sterile, and is run according to the timetable of the church clock that efficiently "subdivides the day."

Auden repeats the same initially-praising description for Man himself, but this time the diction is straightforward. He subdivides these six haiku into two groups, and the first three give a rather spare

description of "the Brute" man used to be, using the examples of once violent bishops and tyrannical robber barons to round out an obviously weak argument. He cuts this argument off and concludes:

I well might think myself
A humanist,
Could I manage not to see

How the autobahn
Thwarts the landscape
In godless Roman arrogance,

The farmer's children
Tiptoe past the shed
Where the gelding knife is kept.

These images make it clear that Auden is not *greatly* impressed with the humanized landscape of the first half of the poem, for added to those images must be the desecration of the land by the modern highway, and also the idea that one of the chief weapons of all those in the farmer's arsenal for controlling his land and his animals is "the gelding knife." The "godless Roman arrogance," especially in conjunction with a highway since made over into an autobahn, raises a picture of two tyrannies, one ancient and the other too recent for a humanist's comfort, that reveals the much less flattering aspect of man's nature. Human nature is thus described in this poem in terms of both its greater and its lesser achievements, and in its former aspect it is obviously quite capable of creating a facsimile of "Arcadia." The problem is that there is nothing in human nature to ensure this harmonious state, and the ominous quality of the last haiku captures well this sense of man's ability to break out at any moment into the worst behaviour. It is not merely the insufficiencies of the humanist position, of course, that lead to a failure to check the

most violent impulses. The image of the bloodthirsty bishops, pursuing "Their archdeacons with axes," implies that the problem is pervasive, and there is no self-congratulation on Auden's part for belonging to a religion that provides a "validation of the values" that contradict human tyranny.¹³

From the struggles and the violence always inherent in the making and maintenance of any earthly Arcadia, and constantly threatening its survival, Auden goes on to describe another kind of paradise in "Hammerfest." "For over forty years" he had paid "atlas homage" to this "northernmost township on earth," and the poem ascends into paying it a fuller homage, though this too is not without qualifications.

The first stanza begins by giving little more than the quantitative, often unappealing information one is plied with in tour guides. For example, Hammerfest has "The best deep-frozen fish sticks you can buy" The information then becomes a little more intimate, though it leads further to the near sabotaging of his expectations:

Though miles beyond the Moral Circle, I saw
 No orgies, no great worms, nor dreamed of any during
 Three sunny nights: louts, though -- German this time --
 Had left their usual mark. How much reverence could I,
 Can anyone past fifty, afford to lose?¹⁴

Auden's cheaper, romantic visions are not fulfilled, but the sense that a vision of something more important will be revealed to him is sustained throughout the stanza. There is a Biblical aura about his forty-year wait (echoed in the poem's forty lines) to visit Hammerfest and, while there, about his "three days" of pottering around and "Three sunny nights"

of insignificant dreams. During this trial his reverence and expectations are considerably diminished: "Was it as worldly as it looked?"

Auden's reverence and excitement surge again in the second stanza. He has apparently moved to a more isolated area, since the land he was on before would have been "disappointed" in some way by human activity in the Second World War. Fittingly, it is a strange interplay of sound and silence, the latter being one of Auden's metaphors for truth, that restores his faith:

A word, a laugh, a footstep, a truck's outcry,
 Each utterance rang singular, staccato,
 To be cut off before it could be contradicted
 Or confused by others: a listening terrain
 Seized on them all and never gave one back in echo,
 As if to land as desolate, as far up,
 Whatever noise our species cared to make still mattered.
 Here was a place we had yet to disappoint.

It is odd that this stanza, describing a terrain that gives no echo, should be the only one that contains any semblance of a rhyme pattern. This stands out precisely because the three end-rhymes are "so," "staccato" and "echo," which counter the statement that the terrain gives back no echo. That this effect is intentional is indicated by the facts that they are evenly spaced in the first, fourth and seventh lines, and that each "o" dies away, so to speak, as the unstressed syllable of a trochée. It is as if Auden suggests that man can do his best to "profane" the ground with noise, but that this ground is equal to the task of transforming it to silence. Auden recognizes the strangeness of a vision that should idealize such desolate terrain. It has seen almost nothing of the history that the rest of the world has, and, for example,

had heard no tales
 of that preglacial Actium when the huge
 Archaic shrubs went down before the scented flowers,
 And earth was won for color. For all it knew,
 Religion had begun with the Salvation Army,
 Warfare with motorized resentful conscripts.

The landscape, despite its finer qualities in being "sworn to / Station and reticence," also seems to be merely ignorant. Such commentary, in turn, sounds absurd, and it is appropriate that part of the final stanza should consider the problem of anthropomorphized views of nature.

The stanza opens with a few scathing remarks on man's rapacity, and images such as the disgusting of "millions of acres of good-natured topsoil" and the antipathy with which "garden plants and farmyard beasts look at us," again reflects back upon and darkens the ambiguous arcadian vision that opens "Et in Arcadia Ego." It is to be wondered, however, whether such a view, even though it is sympathetic to nature, is any less absurdly anthropomorphic than picturing "all of them as dear / Faithful old retainers". Auden may well have been aware of the possibility of such a charge, which is perhaps why he lets his diatribe expire in the question, "but why / Bring that up now?" He concludes with a guarded affirmation showing that his faith in discovering something worthy of reverence in Hammerfest was well rewarded: "My intrusion has not profaned it: / If innocence is holy, it was holy." The lines indicate that he, too, seems "sworn to / Station and reticence", and he writes in the conditional mood, even though it can be assumed that he fully believes innocence, despite its possible association with a mere, prelapsarian ignorance, is holy. His reticence may also be seen as a consequence of the difficulties

involved in describing a numinous encounter, as well as part of a desire not to profane that experience in the telling.

"Iceland Revisited" also describes a series of small, personal trials that Auden goes through before his vision of the country as "holy ground"¹⁵ is restored. Auden's association with Iceland, apart from considerations of his ancestry,¹⁶ began in childhood with the reading of the Icelandic Sagas, and in 1936 he travelled there with Michael Yates and Louis MacNeice, producing with the latter the unique travelogue, Letters from Iceland. The third and fourth haiku refer to this experience:

Twenty-eight years ago
Three slept well here.
Now one is married, one dead,

Where the harmonium stood
A radio: --
Have the Fittest survived?

Auden kept up his associations with the country since this journey, taking part in several translations of Icelandic poetry, including a selection from The Elder Edda,¹⁷ and in 1964 he returned there as an honoured guest.

The haiku of "Iceland Revisited" are separated by three asterisks, except on two occasions when several are grouped together. The poem is predominantly built up, then, out of isolated, vivid images which are appropriate vehicles for the description of his experiences, since many of them are of isolation and discomfort. Auden's attitude to his difficulties is lighthearted, which has the effect of transferring several of the haiku into senryū, which "are humorous poems in haiku form, often more than slightly vulgar."¹⁸

Unwashed, unshat,
 He was whisked from the plane
 To a lunch in his honor.

.

Unable to speak Icelandic
 He helped instead
 To do the dishes.

* * *

The bondi's sheep dog
 And the visitor from New York
 Conversated freely.

The senryū ending the first half of the poem can be taken as a summation of Auden's sense of the ridiculous position he has fallen into, since "the town mouse" is somewhat analogous to "the visitor from New York" in a snow-bound country: "Snow has camouflaged / The pool of liquid manure: / The town mouse fell in."

The final seven haiku begin a reconciliation with the land of his dreams similar to that described in "Hammerfest." The desolate terrain in that poem seizes on all human noises, taking silent possession of them, as if "whatever noise our species cared to make still mattered." The desolate fjord in the eighth haiku here is associated with truth in a negative way: "The desolate fjord / Denied the possibility / Of many gods." The ninth gives an image of complete isolation and desolation as Auden waits out a blizzard in a bare room, and this prepares the way for the comic process of reconciliation that takes place in the next three, linked haiku:

The gale howled over lava. Suddenly
 In the storm's eye
 A dark speck,

Perseus in an air-taxi,
Come to snatch
Shivering Andromeda

Out of the wilderness
And bring her back
To hot baths, cocktails, habits.

Perhaps it was the knowledge that Cassiopeia, Andromeda's mother, was banished to the far north as a constellation in her afterlife, and was clearly visible over Iceland, that suggested this image to Auden.

Andromeda had been chained to a rock in the Mediterranean as a sacrifice to a sea monster sent by the Nereids, who wanted atonement for Cassiopeia's rash boast that she was more beautiful than they. Perseus, flying with the aid of Mercury's gift of winged feet, slew the monster and married Andromeda.¹⁹ Andromedan Auden's union is with his better nature and with civilization, and, viewed in conjunction with the final haiku, it seems that to be washed, shat, refected and restored to human company and to habits are necessary conditions for his re-awakened vision:

Once more
A child's dream verified
the magical light beyond Hekla.

* * *

Fortunate island,
Where all men are equal
But not vulgar -- not yet.

It was a wonder to Auden that Iceland had not yet suffered the inevitable fate of all egalitarian societies, and he repeats this last line in his introduction to a new edition of Letters from Iceland, which is also interesting in that it gives no sense of the difficulties the poem describes:

For me personally, it was a joy to discover that, despite everything which had happened to Iceland and myself since my first visit, the feelings it aroused were the same. In my childhood dreams Iceland was holy ground; when, at the age of twenty-nine, I saw it for the first time, the reality verified my dream. At fifty-seven it was holy ground still, with the most magical light of anywhere on earth. Furthermore, modernity does not seem to have changed the character of the inhabitants. They are still the only really classless society I have ever encountered, and they have not -- not yet -- become vulgar.²⁰

The fact remains that vulgarity and perhaps worse things are imminent. This seems comparable to the foreboding political conditions in the Thirties, under which the first edition of Letters from Iceland was written, and worries about them several times break through the generally bucolic happiness of that volume.

"On the Circuit" takes the reader into the heart of vulgarity as Auden takes another journey, this time on a lecture and reading tour across democratic America. All is not well here, but the poem is the account of a particular activity, and is not meant to be a consistent attack on the merits and demerits of a country. The form is completely different from those of the two foregoing poems, where Auden in one spends a good deal of time contemplating one particular area, and in the next focuses his attention on a series of singular, striking images or events. The slow pace in those poems is replaced by a rapid sweep through various locations across the United States, a daily routine of airplanes, hotels and lecture halls:

Though warm my welcome everywhere,
I shift so frequently, so fast,
I cannot now say where I was
The evening before last,

Unless some singular event
Should intervene to save the place,
A truly asinine remark,
A soul-bewitching face,

Or blessed encounter, full of joy,
Unscheduled on the Giesen Plan,
With, here, an addict of Tolkein [sic],
There, a Charles Williams fan.

Auden is clearly not entirely displeased with this kind of life, and each stanza is constructed to frame the steady stream of jokes in as effective a way as possible. The first three lines are iambic tetrameters, but the last line drops a foot to give a little more punch, as it were. The iambic rhythm is quite rigorously adhered to throughout "On the Circuit," and this helps lighten the tone as well as to embody the swift movement "From talking-site to talking-site".

The poem opens with a nasty insult of his fellow passengers, and one of the reasons Auden allows himself this liberty is that he is taking the comic and superior pose of one who is locked with them in the theological controversy between free will and predestination:

Among pelagian travelers,
Lost on their lewd conceited way
To Massachusetts, Michigan,
Miami or L.A.,

An airborne instrument I sit,
Predestined nightly to fulfill
Columbia-Giesen-Management's
Unfathomable will,

By whose election justified,
I bring my gospel of the Muse
To fundamentalists, to nuns,
To Gentiles and to Jews

More specifically Auden alludes to the argument between St. Augustine and Pelagius.²¹ Pelagius believed that men are not born with original sin,

and that they are capable of good without the assistance of divine grace. This belief in man's independence from God, in his free will and his own natural goodness, may be seen as "lewd and conceited" by anyone believing in man's utter dependence on God's grace. Another cause for the sharp words, perhaps, is Auden's envy for his fellow travellers' freedom in choosing where they want to go. He may be "kicking a little against the pricks," as it were, but all his feelings are transformed into a self-righteousness which he manages to bring off in a fine, haughty style.

Biblical jokes abound in the rest of the poem as the "disciple" continues his rounds. There is an echo of St. Paul (and Martin Luther) in the line, "Since Merit but a dunghill is," and its place in the quarrel "over Faith and Works" ("Encomium Balnei") again brings to mind the quarrel between Pelagius, who believed that "Merit" accumulated from good works was sufficient for *salvation*, and St. Augustine, who emphasized the necessity of faith. Auden sides with the latter since it excuses him from worrying too much about opinions of his worth and about the size of his reimbursements. Auden may also be alluding specifically to the "whisky priest" of Graham Greene's The Power and the Glory²² in these two stanzas:

Then, worst of all, the anxious thought,
 Each time my plane begins to sink
 And the No Smoking sign comes on:
What will there be to drink?

Is this a milieu where I must
How grahamgreeneish! How infra dig!
Snatch from the bottle in my bag
An analeptic swig?

Greene's priest is hounded across the Mexican countryside by the authorities

in the same way that Auden is "jet-or-prop-propelled" across America by "Columbia-Giesen-Management." One of the priest's solaces is brandy, which is considered by others to be beneath his dignity, and is a desire which he must occasionally apologize for. Auden attempts to disguise his desire for a drink with the word "analeptic" ("Restorative, strengthening, medicinal" (OED), but this is immediately exposed by its companion word, "swig."²³

The last stanza combines irony with genuine praise, though the irony dominates:

God bless the lot of them, although
I don't remember which was which:
God bless the U.S.A., so large,
So friendly, and so rich.

Both of the rhymed lines show that Auden's praise is not unmixed, especially in the way he pauses before the last phrase (with a comma) to emphasize the prime source of his good will. Auden has accepted the discomforts of his tour to make money, and he obviously shares in any vulgarity one may accuse America of. The country and the tour, nevertheless, have not been without their rewarding moments. No part of America that Auden visits is considered holy ground, but the country is rich, supports a poet, is often friendly, and is well worth a blessing.

The first subsection within "In and Out" thus comes to a close. All six poems refer in some way to an ideal place, even if the qualities of that place are mostly determined by the beholder's state of mind. This kind of qualification is repeated throughout the poems, and is partly reflected in the tentative quality of many of the endings. One could say

that the material and spiritual treasures won in them are rarely unalloyed with baser materials, but the fact remains that Auden affirms a number of images, attitudes and ideas as good. Auden's ironies simply help to lend credence to the emergent, overriding idea that this world and its creatures, if seen aright by people willing to treat them properly, are good and worthy of our praise.

2. The Turning Point

The "Four Occasional Poems" differ from the previous six poems most obviously in their focus on people other than Auden and in their observance of particular occasions. These four poems also take the praise-giving attitude to a new intensity, but this is soon to be turned around in the "Four Transliterations," and the middle subsection will end in images of grief and failure. This reversal is not intended in any way to support claims, such as the cynic's, that good will inevitably be overturned by evil, or the gnostic's, that good and evil oppose each other in a perpetual, unwinnable conflict. Joy and grief, honour and infamy, are not signs of an irreconcilable dualism, but are complementary attributes in a world that is essentially good. All the images and thoughts in "Symmetries and Asymmetries" help to explain this, showing how much can be envisioned as part of an overall, unified pattern, and how, underlying all, there is the individual's quest for understanding and his attempt to find expressions for his love. That his love may go awry, that he must experience grief and infamy, that he should endure periods of feeling a complete disruption with meaning, are all essential elements in his quest.

The "Four Occasional Poems" begin with "A Toast," which celebrates Auden's love of Christ Church at Oxford, nicknamed "The House." This suggests, briefly, a link with the ideal locations of the first six poems. However, its primary ties are to the three following poems, and all four occasions call for expressions of love, gratitude and praise, which are here extended to colleagues (and the college where they work), a story-telling philologist, a political leader, and a good friend.

A "Gaudy" is an annual dinner and party thrown for the past graduates of a college, and the sole purpose of "A Toast" and its "Perfect Social Number" ("Tonight at Seven-Thirty") of six stanzas is to express love for The House and its members in as high-spirited (or as drunken) a fashion as possible. A substantial knowledge of the workings and history of Oxford and Christ Church would certainly aid appreciation of the poem. The list of names and places, for which the slang version is used, is lengthy, and the in-jokes and stories constitute a main part of the poem. This could be seen as offensive only if one forgets that it is an occasional poem of the more private sort, and it is, after all, the only poem in the volume that is inaccessible in this particular way.

Parts of "A Short Ode to a Philologist" also seem inaccessible because of their complexity, particularly the end of the first stanza and the beginning of the second. The "occasion" of this poem is simply praise for J.R.R. Tolkien, and this takes the indirect form of praise for a subject loved in common by both men. It may be assumed that Tolkien would have preferred a lengthy consideration of the virtues of "Dame Philology" instead of his own, and that he would also have appreciated

the complexity of the poem's structure. The rhyme scheme, relying on quite a few half-rhymes or rhymes that have a mixture of masculine and feminine endings, is abbcacdd, and the line lengths are determined by syllable count following this pattern: 10, 4, 12 (with the exception of the third stanza which is one short), 8, 8, 10, 15 (with the exception of the second stanza, which has 16), 8 and 7.

The epigraph, from Karl Kraus, "Die Sprache ist die Mutter, nicht die Magd, des Gedankens", translates as "Speech is the mother, not the handmaiden, of thought." Collingwood's discussion of a fairly similar formulation in Hobbes' Leviathan throws some further light on this:

It was long believed that within the precincts of the individual mind the processes of thought could go on without language coming into operation Now it is a commonplace that language is not a device whereby knowledge in one mind is communicated to another's but is an activity prior to knowledge itself, without which knowledge could never come into existence The discovery of this truth is one of Hobbes' greatest achievements.²⁴

A passage from Secondary Worlds also elaborates on this point, and will be quoted at length since it helps clarify much of the opening stanza:

If we only used words as a communication code, then it seems probable that, as with animals, the human species would only have one language with, at most, dialect variations like the song of the chaffinch.

But as persons we are capable of speech proper. In speech one unique person addresses another unique person and does so voluntarily: he could keep silent if he chose. We speak as persons because we desire to disclose ourselves to each other and to share our experiences, not because we need to share them, but because we enjoy sharing them. When we genuinely speak, we do not have the words ready to do our bidding; we have to find them, and we do not know exactly what we are going to say until we have said it, and we say and hear something new that has never been said or heard before. Here are three statements about speech which deserve to be remembered.

The first is by Karl Kraus: "Speech is the mother, not the handmaid, of thought." The second is by Lichtenberg: "I have drawn from the well of language many a thought which I did not have and could not put into words." The last is by Rosenstock-Huessy: "Living language always overpowers the thinking of the individual man. It is wiser than the thinker who assumes that he thinks whereas he only speaks and in so doing faithfully trusts the material of language; it guides his concepts unconsciously towards an unknown future."

"Speech" is capitalized in the poem's opening line to designate "speech proper," which has no place in the realm of necessity where, for example, Karl von Frisch's "dancing bees"²⁵ are more "efficiently eloquent" than anything written by Shakespeare. To say that "free / Speech is a tautology" seems excessive if only in the sense that the ability "to disclose ourselves to each other and to share our experiences" is in many instances quite effectively thwarted. This is mere quibbling, however, since speech proper is free whenever it does occur, and such freedom here is conditional only upon the existence of a voice. The consequences of exercising that freedom are other matters. A payment must inevitably be made after one has spoken, whether it involves punishment from a disapproving authority or simply taking responsibility for anything said.

The second stanza is the most difficult of the poem:

Who means Good Morning reveals he is not
 Napoleon or
 Napoleon's cook, but quite as born, a new author,
 Ready in turn to answer for
 A story he cannot invent
 But must leave to others to tell with what
 Prejudice they prefer. Social climbers daren't invite
 comment,
 And a chatterbox doesn't: in
 Speech, if true, true deeds begin.

A gloss of these lines can be attempted as follows. To "speak genuinely" reveals a person in his uniqueness, or as an "uncountable, incomparable, irreplaceable" human being. The reason that he is made distinct from Napoleon and his cook, specifically, may simply be that he is distinct from any class of individuals and from any type of the great man or of the menial servant. He is simply being his unique self, not using his "good mornings" for any other purpose, utilitarian or otherwise, than expressing himself. He is "quite as born" as someone like Napoleon (a phrase as legitimate as the more usual "quite as dead"); he is an "original," "a new author"; and he is ready to take responsibility for the language he inherits and cannot invent, though most of its words have multiple meanings and can be used by others "with what / Prejudice they prefer."

Two passages from The Dyer's Hand are relevant to both the second and third stanzas:

Though a work of literature can be read in a number of ways, this number is finite and can be arranged in a hierarchical order; some readings are obviously "truer" than others, some doubtful, some obviously false, and some, like reading a novel backwards, absurd. That is why, for a desert island, one would choose a good dictionary rather than the greatest literary masterpiece imaginable, for, in relation to its readers, a dictionary is absolutely passive and may legitimately be read in an infinite number of ways. (p. 4)

.....

There is one evil that concerns literature which should never be passed over in silence but be continually publicly attacked, and that is corruption of the language, for writers cannot invent their own language and are dependent upon the language they inherit so that, if it be corrupt, they must be corrupted. But the critic who concerns himself with this evil must attack it at its source, which is not in works of literature but in the misuse of

language by the man-in-the-street, journalists, politicians, etc. Furthermore, he must be able to practice what he preaches. (p. 11)

Those who are "Ready . . . to answer for" the "story," or the language, that they "cannot invent" would be able and willing to "invite comment" on their language and actions, whereas "Social climbers daren't." A "chatterbox doesn't," perhaps because he is too caught up in his own noise. This rigorous attitude towards language, then, creates a matrix out of which "true deeds" begin, which implies that Speech, "if true," is the mother of action as well as thought.

The opposite result is "International Babel," and one is reminded of the language of the American military in justifying the slaughter in Vietnam, where killing was described in terms such as "mop-up operations," "sanitary measures," and so forth. Stockbrokers seem capable of thinking integrity to be some kind of disease,²⁶ and the rest of the third stanza attacks the corruption of language "at its source":

where noises abound
For throats to hire whose doom is to compel
Attention: Its Void costs money, being flood-lit, wired
for sound,
With banner headlines guaranteed,
And applause prerecorded.

The passage most similar to this in About the House is the "Vision of Hell" in "The Cave of Nakedness," where "Nature's wholesome genial fabric / lies utterly discussed"

A consideration of "Dame Philology" leads the poem into a happier mood, just as the sunlight dissipated the vision of hell in "The Cave of Nakedness." She is Auden's and Tolkien's "Queen," described in language usually accorded saints:

. . . [She is]
 Quick to comfort
 Truth-loving hearts in their mother tongue (to report
 On the miracles She has wrought
 In the U.K., the O.E.D.
 Takes fourteen tomes)

She also looks after the greatest and smallest subjects in her domain:

She suffers no evil,
 And a statesman still, so her grace prevent, may keep a
 treaty,
 A poor commoner arrive at
 The Proper Name for his cat.

The last pair of lines also nods in the direction of T.S. Eliot, whose first poem in Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats is entitled "The Naming of Cats."²⁷

The last lines lead up to Auden's tribute to Tolkien, and his debt to him goes back to his earliest days at Oxford:

I remember [a lecture] . . . I attended, delivered by Professor Tolkien. I do not remember a single word he said but at a certain point he recited, and magnificently, a long passage of Beowulf. I was spellbound. This poetry, I knew, was going to be my dish. I became willing, therefore, to work at Anglo-Saxon, because, unless I did, I should never be able to read this poetry. I learned enough to read it, however sloppily, and Anglo-Saxon and Middle English poetry have been one of my strongest, most lasting influences. (DH, pp. 41-42)

It is a sign of Auden's respect for languages that they can be ranked as high, or higher, than some of the subjects they have been used to immortalize, including heroes involved in so much blood and gore:

No hero is immortal till he dies:
 Nor is a tongue.
 But a lay of Beowulf's language too can be sung,
 Ignoble, maybe, to the young,
 Having no monsters and no gore
 To speak of, yet not without its beauties
 For those who have learned to hope: a lot of us are
 grateful for
 What J.R.R. Tolkien has done
 As bard to Anglo-Saxon.

"Ignoble" is here primarily defined as "common," or "undistinguished," but this implies that "the young" associate "nobility" with the same kind of violence, noise and spilt blood that are the special elements of "International Babel." "Hope" is linked with the desire for a better state of affairs in the realms of language and action, and a natural consequence of this would be an ability not only to preserve one's own language but to care for, and appreciate the beauties of, its ancestors.

Auden follows the triumph of this poem with one that in several spots reads like a parody of grave, elegiac emotions. "Elegy for J.F.K.," unfortunately, echoes "In Memory of W.B. Yeats"²⁸ in a number of places. Compare, for example, "The words of a dead man / Are modified in the guts of the living" with "What he was, he was: / What he is fated to become / Depends on us . . . "; or "In the prison of his days / Teach the free man how to praise" with "When a just man dies, / Lamentation and praise, / Sorrow and joy, are one." Some of the lines in the later poem, however, seem so flat that one suspects Auden of motives other than the ostensible one of seriously mourning Kennedy's death. The following passage from Osborne's biography attempts an explanation. When Kennedy was assassinated,

Auden, in company with millions of others, was profoundly shocked: like hundreds of artists all over the world, he tried later to shape his response into a work of art in his own medium. Dining with the Stravinskys in New York two months later, in January 1964, he found that Stravinsky wished to compose an elegy to Kennedy's memory, and began to discuss ways of doing it. "I'm an old hand at this sort of thing," he told the composer, as he worked out a form in which to write words for Stravinsky to set. (After Auden had left, the composer said to Robert Craft: "Wystan is wholly indifferent to J.F.K.; what he cares about is the form. And it is the same with his religion. What his

intellect and gifts require of Christianity is its form -- even, to go further, its uniform.")²⁹

This comment is profoundly unfair to Auden's attitude to both Kennedy and Christianity, but it does show that Auden, as a poet, could be carried away by the demands and difficulties of his craft. He was also operating under a double set of constraints here. The language had to serve the musical form, and it had to be simple enough to suit an audience wider than any to which he was accustomed. Greater verbal ingenuity would clutter the music, and draw attention to itself and away from the subject of the elegy, violating the demands of the occasion.

"Lines for Elizabeth Mayer" is composed of haiku in which Auden delicately enshrines his love for a friend. The first four deal with the passing of time and changes in the world which seem to have had a particular significance for the two of them. The withdrawal "from the Object-World" of "A Grand Duke's glass coach, [and] / His Chaplain's Sand-Uhr," for example, may refer to Goethe's time, its significance for Auden and Mayer being that they collaborated on a translation of Goethe's Italienische Reise.³⁰ The remaining haiku show how love for another can be reaffirmed by the simple consideration of that person's "Proper Name":

Here, now, as bodies,
We have no option:
Dates, locations divide us.

As You, as I, though, each
Is born with the right
Of liberal passage

To Dame Philology's Realm
Where, in singular,
Name may call to Name,

And Name to Name respond,
 Untaunted by
 Numerical haphazard.

So, today, I think that sound
 To which you have answered
 For eighty years

With this intent:
 That you shall think it happily,
 As Elizabeth

Through twenty-five has been
 For a happiness of mine
 Its Proper Name.

Twenty-five years goes back to 1939, the home of Elizabeth Mayer, and one of the happiest experiences in Auden's life, which is here partially recorded in "New Year Letter" (also dedicated to Elizabeth Mayer):

The very morning that the war
 Took action on the Polish floor, [the sun]
 Lit up America and on
 A cottage in Long Island shone
 Where Buxtehude as we played
 One of his passacaglias made
 Our minds a civitas of sound
 Where nothing but assent was found,
 For art had set in order sense
 And feeling and intelligence,
 And from its ideal order grew
 Our local understanding too. (11.43-54, CP, pp. 161-162)

"Symmetries and Asymmetries" is one of the key poems in "In and Out," if only for the reason that it is at the centre of the symmetrical organization of this entire section. A large number of "shorts" or "pieces" (here numbered according to divisions created by the asterisks) in this collection deal with some kind of opposition of values that could be thought of as symmetrical or asymmetrical. The first pair of haiku is one of the best examples of the former:

Deep in the earth's opaque mirror,
 The old oak's roots
 Reflect its branches:

Astrologers in reverse,
 Keen-eyed miners
 Conned their scintillant gems.

The second piece exemplifies an asymmetrical image, since the implied corollary is that above-ground roads are rarely tortuous:

The underground roads
 Are, as the dead prefer them,
 Always tortuous.

"Symmetries and Asymmetries" itself has been arranged into an overall pattern, though the divisions of the pattern are by no means completely distinct. There are eight haiku poems before the first quatrain and couplet, for example, and there are eight following the last couplet. Between the two couplets there are twenty-three haiku poems, and there is a fairly clear division between the twelfth (beginning, "Like the redstart . . ."), and the thirteenth, which begins a series dominated by the image of a quest.

The first eight pieces all reflect in some way the images outlined in the first, the tree's branches mirrored by its roots, and the stars by the gems in a mine. Three of the following haiku refer to Hell or Hades: "The underground roads" of the dead, Hercules' descent into Hades, and also the descent of Orpheus. Several other haiku in this section deal with the idea of elements, plants, and humans in various combinations of complementary and contradictory relationships. If "Symmetries and Asymmetries" is seen, on the whole, as a series of images and ideas to be found alongside the path of a quest for understanding, then it is only natural that they should begin in the depths of nature, of one's own nature,

and with a recognition of the dualities of existence and their potential harmony. The eighth piece makes clear that certain kinds of harmony, in this case between earth's elements and man's elemental passions, are not always beneficent:

Metal, extorted from stone
In a paroxysm of fire,
Was beaten,

Then ducked in water:
Outrage sealed into the sword
Fury for battle.

The quatrain and the couplet could be grouped with this first section, since the quatrain describes a similar meiotic process, from dignity to anger and shame, and because the couplet opens with a reference to Krakatoa, an image of explosive passion. The couplet also provides an entrance into the next section in the sense that a volcano sends material from the depths of the earth into the open air, and since the potential harmony or symbiosis between the dual aspects of nature has been lost:

After Krakatoa exploded, the first living thing to return
Was the ant, *Tridomyrex*, seeking in vain its symbiot fern.

The next twelve poems deal with a comparison between man and nature, and the resulting definition is often not *very* flattering to man. Like plants and animals, man has an instinct for growth and survival and many of his actions are determined merely by pleasure and pain, but unlike animals he can be consciously cruel, and has unnecessary, destructive habits. He is further differentiated by his conscience and self-reflection, however, and just as he can envy and admire in a way that a merely jealous cat cannot, for example, he questions the value of a life defined merely by the principles of pleasure and pain: "Flattered by Pleasure,

accused by Pain, / Which of the two / Should he believe?" He realizes also that there is an ideal life which he has lost and which may some day be recovered, an idea suggested by the last haiku in this section: "Like the redstart, / He recalls but a formless fragment / Of his real tune." This new consciousness of "the Brute Fact" of his insufficiency, and of the insufficiency of the natural world to explain what is unique in human nature (except to suggest that there are other reasons for which he was made), leads the search for answers into other areas.

The quest image dominates the next eleven haiku and concludes in a mood of utter failure in the couplet. The first three reveal the difficulties and the apparent futility of a quest that is necessary and yet has no clear directions, not knowing exactly what is being sought: "Hunting for some lost object / He was meant to forget, / He lost himself." The next four haiku present four images of man's so-called progress in the past, of which the only results are a "ruined cuisine," a new capacity for cruelty, and a greater flamboyance. The next four (beginning with "The iconoclast's home . . . ") mirror these in the sense that they present four modern images of the quest, and these generally constitute a reaction against older religions and customs: the pornography-loving iconoclast has a new, human icon, for example, and democrats despise "a lord" but respect "Customs and Immigration." Iconoclasts, mental parasites and honest democrats may be thought of as the "loud people" among whom little companionship can be found for the Knight of Faith: "How image today / The knight's lonely Quest? On all roads / Laute Leute." The couplet defines the reverse of the images of

struggle that begin this section -- the complete collapse of energy and hope:

Their lives were boring and undignified:
They worked a little, they consumed, they died.

The questing, defining and questioning spirit returns in the final section of eight haiku poems. The first recalls the question in "You" ("Who tinkered and why?"): "Life wrong already: / Each life an amateur sleuth, / Asking Who did it?" Even the search for pleasure, a prominent subject in this section, is seen as something more like a sublimation of the quest for truth: "Behind the perversions / Not lust for pleasure, / But a cry for justice." Auden also makes the point that the real danger to man is not his elemental nature but Pride, or the perversion of the will that regards pleasure as an evil:

Pride has always despised Pleasure,
Left gluttony, lust,
To underdogs:

Sought Joy and found it,
Taking life, destroying things,
Moving at high speed.

The last haiku suddenly brings the movement of "Symmetries and Asymmetries" to a halt with an implicit assertion that "The God of Love" is the ultimate goal of man's quest, which is linked with an assertion of the value of man's tribulations: "The God of Love / Will never withdraw our right / To grief and infamy."

One of the closest parallels to this in About the House is this passage in the fifth stanza of "Tonight at Seven-Thirty":

. . . the funniest
 mortals and the kindest are those who are most aware
 of the baffle of being, don't kid themselves our care
 is consolable, but believe a laugh is less heartless
 than tears, that a hostess
 prefers it.

It was the "god, / immune to grief," whose candidacy for the dinner party inspired this explanation of his rejection, and Auden elsewhere writes of the value of man's weaknesses. First, they help him to reject the more violent actions inspired by pride; second, they help him become aware of his incomplete, ineffective, and possibly meaningless life; and finally, they can lead him to God, Who alone can give his existence meaning.³¹ The highly condensed, cryptic nature of the haiku form, of course, does little more than provoke the questions for which this discussion attempts to provide answers. Given all the previous symmetries and asymmetries in the poem, and given the apparent futility of man's attempts to understand himself, this last haiku comes as a complete shock. "The God of Love" is in a completely asymmetrical position, as it were, to fallen man and all the "Laute Leute," and yet His existence and Love in some mysterious fashion make man's weaknesses and faults, his "grief and infamy," a "right."

The poems of "Four Transliterations" deal with a substantial measure of grief and infamy, much of which stems from love's heartbreak. In these senses they are a mirror image (with its reversal of values) of "Four Occasional Poems" and their expressions of praise and joyful love. A young girl is "The Romantic," and romantic love as "death-wish" dominates Adam Mickiewicz's poem. Such love seems to idolize another person, but it turns in upon itself in such a way that the self is

idolized -- the lover has a vision which the rest of the world cannot understand, and that vision is whole, pure and holy. It cannot be consummated within the limitations of a world that is dominated by time and necessity, and therefore its consummation can only be found in death:

Dearest love, let me die with you,
In the deep earth lie with you,
For this world is dark and dreary,
I am lonely and weary!

Alone among the unkind ones,
Who mock at my vision,
My tears their derision,
Seeing nothing, the blind ones!

Rather than scorn the girl, however, we are led by Mickiewicz to sympathize with her after she has finished lamenting the death of her "Johnny" who seems to have returned from the dead for her. The irritating "man with a learned air," who says that the girl's ghost "is treason / Against King Reason!", is answered as follows:

"Yet the girl loves," I reply diffidently,
 "And the people believe reverently:
 Faith and love are more discerning
 Than lenses or learning.

"You know the dead truths, not the living,
 The world of things, not the world of loving.
 Where does any miracle start?
 Cold eye, look in your heart!"

The last line indicates one of the reasons Auden took a special interest in this poem, for it recalls the conclusion of Yeats' "Under Ben Bulbin," which Auden heartily disliked: "Cast a cold eye / On life, on death. / Horseman, pass by!"³² This is not to say that Auden appreciated Mickiewicz's conclusion mainly because of an oblique correction of Yeats, for there are

man's unhappiness at the end of the next poem, Andrei Voznesensky's "Parabolic Ballad," is due quite simply to the fact that authorities have suddenly broken his ambitions by sending him to Siberia. The pun at the heart of the poem is that it is a parable about the parabolic courses strong-spirited men take to get what they want:

. . . [Gauguin] didn't steal into the Louvre by the front door,
 But on a parabola smashed through the ceiling.
 In finding their truths lives vary in daring:
 Worms come through holes, bold men on parabolas.

The young man seems to want greatness as much as he wants truth, and the parabolic trajectory may be as much a matter of cutting a dashing figure as it is of boldness. He is brought back to earth rather ignominiously, and Auden's declaration of the need for a careful balance of Spirit and Letter at the end of "The Common Life" is a lesson that the young man would have done well to learn:

Laughing at law with its warnings and paragraphs,
 Art, love and history race along recklessly
 Over a parabolic trajectory.

He is leaving tonight for Siberia.

Perhaps
 A straight line after all is the shorter one actually.

This is a sarcastic reference back to the safe route advocated by "The high priests," who echo the Bishop in Yeats' "Crazy Jane Talks with the Bishop": "Straight lines are shorter, less steep than parabolas. / It's more proper to copy the heavenly mansions."³⁴ The young man has called this kind of speech "jabbering," but the extent of Voznesensky's sympathy with his point of view cannot easily be ascertained. It is certain that there is no lack of sympathy for the young man's plight, regardless of how full of himself he seems to be.

There is less doubt as to what Auden's view is of the young man's point of view. His presence at Christ Church in the opening poem of the middle subsection makes him part of "the frowst of academies," with its porter-drinking and advice about "heavenly mansions." The theme of the opposition between spirit and law is important in both poems, and helps both to bring the subsection full circle and to show how two quite different poems can complement each other. The reward for the young man's laughing at law is a cold, desolate place. The mirror or reverse image of this is a dinner party in a setting that is, perhaps, too cosy. It is attended by men who value propriety of behaviour, spiritedness and intellect -- just as they wish their students to "Be anständig, have esprit and nous." "Parabolic Ballad" helps to show that the real worth of this formula can be degraded as much by a stuffy adherence to the rules of propriety as by a reckless ignoring of them.

Fairly similar themes are dealt with in "Crazy Jane talks to the Bishop," several lines of which show how important Auden's references to it are. Crazy Jane cries that "Fair and foul are near of kin, / And fair needs foul," and that

'A woman can be proud and stiff
 When on love intent;
 But Love has pitched his mansion in
 The place of excrement;
 For nothing can be sole of whole
 That has not been rent.'³⁵

Auden welds fair and foul together in the structure of this middle subsection, linking poems of love with poems of grief and infamy, his ultimate purpose being to show that all oppositions are ultimately part of a whole under the dominion of the God of Love.

3. A Negative Way

The shift to a bleaker, less hopeful kind of poetry in "Four Transliterations" from the happier mood of "Four Occasional Poems" also describes much of the difference between the last section of "In and Out" and the first six poems. Each poem in the third subsection is meant to be compared with a poem in the first, depending on their positions in the symmetrical organization. A passage from "Caliban to the Audience" in "The Sea and the Mirror" shows that Auden had had this kind of structural framework in mind for a long time, and also shows how he could yoke together poems which may be characterized as either affirmations or rejections of images:

. . . everything, the massacres, the whippings, the lies, the twaddle, and all their carbon copies are still present, more obviously than ever; nothing has been reconstructed; our shame, our fear, our incorrigible staginess, all wish and no resolve, are still, and more intensely than ever, all we have: only now it is not in spite of them but with them that we are blessed by that Wholly Other Life from which we are separated by an essential emphatic gulf of which our contrived fissures of mirror and proscenium arch -- we understand them at last -- are feebly figurative signs, so that all our meanings are reversed and it is precisely in its negative image of Judgement that we can positively envisage Mercy; it is just here, among the ruins and bones, that we may rejoice in the perfected Work which is not ours. Its great coherences stand out through our secular blur in all their overwhelmingly righteous obligation; its voice speaks through our muffling banks of artificial flowers and unflinchingly delivers its authentic molar pardon; its spaces greet us with all their grand old prospect of wonder and width; the working charm is the full bloom of the unbothered state; the sounded note is the restored relation. (CP, p. 340)

"In and Out," ironically, descends to its lowest point in "Ascension Day, 1964," but it is just here that the stage has been prepared for a poem commemorating the day when the Word in the form of the Holy Spirit

descended upon man. The fissure between the poems in the first and third subsections is not nearly so great as the one between this entire, contrived set of symmetries and "Whitsunday in Kirchstetten." This final poem acts, nevertheless, as "the sounded note [which] is the restored relation" -- it is itself a figurative sign of the descent of the Holy Spirit. It transforms what could have been a fairly depressing ending into a triumph, and puts the relations between the earlier poems into a much different light, in the same way that the descent of the Dove made possible the restoration of relations between men, and between man and God.

The title of the first poem in the third subsection, punning on a name for God, actually helps to emphasize the distance of the maker in this poem from Him. On a much lower level, "The Maker" also represents a complete inversion of the happy-go-lucky attitude of "On the Circuit." Auden paraphrases the tortuous emotions and the fanatical perfectionism of an "Unmarried, nearsighted, rather deaf, / . . . anonymous dwarf," which become comic only because of the ridiculous extremes to which his arrogant boasting and murderous threats are taken. There are, strangely enough, a large number of similarities between the weapon-making dwarf and "object-making" Auden concerning physical characteristics (Auden shares all the features just quoted except anonymity and height); nature of working place (Auden, too, has a cave "shut off" from "the vast background of natural / life"); and sundry other biographical details (Auden has his "sacred image" to dwell upon before sleeping ("The Cave of Nakedness"), while the dwarf "Dreams of the Perfect Object"). The dwarf

is something of a mirror image of Auden -- there are enough similarities to warrant comparison, but at the same time it is clear that there is a substantial reversal of values. The dwarf, with his pride and choler, represents the opposite of what Auden himself would like to be.

The humble beginning of the poem abruptly switches to proud assertions of the line the dwarf has established ("Legendary ancestor / of Gunsmiths to His Majesty") and of his continuing fame. The second stanza begins to show the extent to which his life must be defined by negatives -- by what he is not, where he is not, what he does not think and what he will not do. He is supremely diffident in a cave that excludes him from "weather and events." All that war means to his practical, uncompassionate heart is "A scarcity of bronze," and "the fall of princes" simply means "A change of customer."

The dislike of music expressed in the third stanza recalls Auden's own dislike for the "francophile gaggle of pure songsters" in "The Cave of Making,"³⁶ but the reasons given here are a little different:

. . . songs
Encourage laboring demes, amuse the idle,
But would distract a self-appointed worker
From listening to his hammer's dactyl.

These lines again express a sense of his own, unique importance: "demes" may mean "communes," but its meaning in the world of science is "any undifferentiated aggregate of cells, plastids or monads" (OED). The dwarf's humorless dismissal of others and his devotion to his "self-appointed work" (free from the demands of God and Kings) seem consonant with his singular love of the sound of his "hammer's dactyl." The sound of a hammer banging down and then followed by the familiar sound of a pair

of softer taps, like the automatic raps that follow the striking of a drum, is nicely captured by the phrase. As something that must be listened to all day, however, it is not particularly enticing, having all the attractiveness of listening to an epic written solely in dactyls. The last two lines of this stanza incorporate two acceptable assumptions, but put in a highly disdainful way -- all orators are sophists, and oratory and sophistry have nothing to do with the practical doing of "metallurgy."

The dwarf isolates himself further in the fourth stanza, imposing the barrier of high prices and insisting that others accommodate their schedules to his. He begins to associate himself with the archetypal smith for Anglo-Saxons, Weland, who gave "the Quality," as will shortly be seen in more detail, a bloody lesson on the subject "that charm is useless." The dwarf also makes a boast that only a Weland could make with confidence, though it may also be taken as an expression of unconfidence to feel compelled to say something like, "he has no rival, / And he knows you know it."

The speed with which the dwarf reverses fields in the final stanza makes for a dark kind of comedy:

His love, embodied in each useful wonder,
 Can't save them in our world from insult,
 But may avenge it: beware, then, maladroit,
 Thumb-sucking children of all ages,
 Lest on your mangled bodies the court verdict
 Be Death by Misadventure.

One wonders what the love in the first line is actually compounded of. The dwarf's deeper hatred is kept disguised during a second line that reveals some genuine compassion, but it immediately breaks down in a

lip-smacking desire for vengeance. One is again reminded of the story of Weland. King Nidudr had captured Weland, had him hamstrung, and kept him at work in isolation on an island. The king's sons and daughter "misadventured" one day onto this island, where Weland raped the daughter, murdered the sons, made bowls of the sons' skulls and gems from their eyes, and presented them to "the Quality," or to the King and his Queen.³⁷ The dwarf, however, is willing to go farther than Weland, ready to take on and avenge all the insult in the world.

This apotheosis of self-righteous hatred is reflected in one structural feature of an otherwise fairly formless poem. At first it seems as if the only similarity between the five stanzas is their six lines, but each succeeding stanza expands by exactly three syllables, from forty-six in the first to fifty-eight in the last. One would expect that a more intricate form would have served for this master craftsman, but he is so little different from his own materials that his proud choler, like steady flame applied to metal, simply causes the stanzas to expand slowly.

"At the Party" shares several features with "Iceland Revisited," one of which is the sense of isolation from others. In this poem, however, there is no dramatic appearance by a Perseus in an air-taxi, and there is no reconciliation. Both poems open with a pair of negatives ("Unwashed, unshat"; "Unrhymed, unrhythmical"), and "At the Party" echoes images of isolation from oneself and others in the earlier poem:

"He hears a loudspeaker / Call him well-known: / But knows himself no better," and he converses freely with a dog, but not with his hosts because he is "Unable to speak Icelandic". Apparently alone in the middle of a storm in "Iceland Revisited" ("The gale howled over lava . . ."), Auden is snatched "Out of the wilderness", and shortly afterward his childhood vision of Iceland and its "magical light" is restored. Here, in the middle of a party, or what may be called a wilderness of ostensibly happy people, the desolation is much greater than Auden's was in Iceland:

A howl for recognition, shrill with fear,
Shakes the jam-packed apartment, but each ear
Is listening to its hearing, so none hear.

Auden's discomforts in "Iceland Revisited" were circumstantial: the "messages of woe" in "At the Party" bespeak a spiritual malaise for which each party-goer is responsible.

"Lost" may be thought of as a complete inversion of the themes in "Hammerfest," though they do share a common subject, which is simply a speaker isolated on a certain ground and seeing in it something of religious significance. The voluble, four-stanza, forty-line poem, concluding with a vision of Hammerfest's innocent and possibly holy ground, is here contrasted by a four-line poem taking place on land which makes Auden think of the shores of Acheron:

Lost on a fogbound spit of sand
In shoes that pinched me, close at hand
I heard the splash of Charon's oar,
Who ferries no one to a happy shore.

Something in the second line, somehow a typically Auden-like detail, shows

that his poem cannot really be taken as one of the lowest points of this section. Apart from keeping the quatrain down to earth, so to speak, it seems possible that the shoes pinching his feet (or discomfiting his soles), helped give rise to the image of Charon coming to take his soul to Hades.

Both "Bestiaries Are Out" and its companion poem in the first section, "Et in Arcadia Ego," deal with comparisons between nature and man. In the earlier poem "Earth Mother" and Man are described as formerly being, respectively, a "screeching / Virago" and a "Brute," but that in present times an uneasy peace has been won: "She" has been tamed and "He" has, for the time being, controlled his cruelty. "Bestiaries Are Out" turns this around, since man and one of nature's creatures are seen as having had a harmonious relationship in the past, but the very idea of man learning anything about how to live from an insect is now repulsive.

It is clear from the first four stanzas that Auden has a certain fondness for the vision of bees afforded by bestiaries, and one may also recall his tribute to Frisch's dancing bees (their dance is seen as "Ballet") in "A Short Ode to a Philologist." The tetrameter couplets and the occasional archaism are, perhaps, designed to echo the language of bestiaries, and the steady, calm rhythm of these opening stanzas gives way to irregular accents and a more violent rush of words once he begins writing about "Research." Bees helped with the beginning of civilization, and the tribes that wandered through the woods ("nemorivagrant")³⁸ "at least / Could serve wild honey at a feast." Bees helped teach man to store up against the days of drought rather than "clem" passively, or to suffer the pangs of hunger or thirst. Man's "Estimation" (here the

word is most closely associated with "esteem") of their ways also helped him to look to the bee for instructions concerning civic life, but the tone of the fourth stanza is a little too close to parody for comfort. The lines, "Philosopher and Christian Preacher / Upheld the Bee as Civics Teacher . . .", regardless of possible references to Bishop Berkeley, William Law and others, bring to mind the lines of the Victorian jingle, "How doth the little busy bee / Improve each shining hour"39

The fifth stanza breaks even more from the images of harmony in the first four:

Now bestiaries are out, for now
 Research has demonstrated how
 They actually behave, they strike us
 As being horridly unlike us

The sarcasm with which "Research" is described, having come up with something resembling rather grave gossip, and the mock exaggeration of the last line indicate that Auden's opinion of man is not as high as it seems, even though he states in the sixth stanza that only "some" are contemptible for believing and even planning to create an insect "from Urban Man, / By Advertising plus the aid / Of drugs"

The final three stanzas begin with a strange, emphatic "No" that seems to dismiss both the old bestiaries and any new attempt to make man adopt the "virtues" of an insect. They continue through a series of images that apparently give a high estimation of man ("us children of the word") and a very low one of the newly revealed bee. Every image describing the bees, however, will do just as well to describe men whose "one love" is often labour, who conduct "aerial warfare," and whose "biggest show" is often a war between two sides with belief in the same

basic principles, like "A duel to the death between / A tooting and a quacking Queen." Research has certainly not shown that the behaviour of bees is so "horribly unlike" ours. It is also quite clear that man cannot avoid being "anthropomorphic and absurd" whenever he compares himself with nature, which invariably functions as a mirror to his ideals and fears. In the past men often used it to find models embodying their desire for order and civilization. A modern civilization intent on glorifying man and securing through technology a complete mastery of nature is going to see that nature in a harsher light. Nature must be seen in purely utilitarian terms if guilt is to be avoided in its exploitation, but if this happens nature's mirror may very well suggest that man, too, should be thought of and dealt with in utilitarian terms.

Several morals surviving out of the caustic ironies of "Bestiaries are Out" may be put as follows. A clear distinction must always be maintained between man and other living creatures, but at the same time that should not stop man from recognizing a certain kinship with them. Man should also recognize the pedagogical value of nature. There are analogies and contrasts which help him to understand himself, but he must never magnify the analogies into identities nor the contrasts into unbridgeable polarities. Finally, man should never presume to have the final, definitive understanding of nature -- modern research, too, will some day be "out."

Every stanza of "After Reading a Child's Guide to Modern Physics" (hereafter to be cited as "After Reading") contrasts some aspect of this modern scientific discipline's view of the world with that of a "commoner"⁴⁰

attempting to keep his foothold on a human, literally down-to-earth view of life. Auden seems to long for a return to the older study of natural phenomena directly apprehended by the five senses, though, conversely, in "You" he sought a knowledge of self that went beyond "some dogma / Of positive truth" suggested by the direct experience of his physical being. In that poem, however, his "biological you" is within viewing distance, and can be grappled with. The scope of modern physics is so much wider that it threatens any sense of self -- who, for example, has any sensible experience of "the Greater Nebulae," particles "pelting about the universe," the constant expansion of the universe, and so on? This dilemma is reflected in the rhyme scheme of "After Reading," which varies in each stanza, and suggests that Auden is struggling to find a form for his subject matter in the same way that he is trying to find a method of subjecting modern physics to a view of the world he can be comfortable with.

The opening lines sneer at physicists and their understanding of "the Truth," as if it is limited to what they can see through their instruments. These are trained upon fields either too small or too great for direct human observation, and it becomes clear in the following stanzas that somehow this distance from the middle and humanly apprehensible ground between the Greater Nebulae and the microscopic atoms spawns a view of life that makes it appear to be cold, destructive, and inconstant except in the sense that it is constantly changing or expanding. In other words, Auden not only suspects strongly that modern physics holds "some dogma" of what may be called a heartless, mechanical relativity, but he thinks that it may be true enough to have completely eliminated all

certainities concerning familiar ways of seeing ourselves:

Our eyes prefer to suppose
 That a habitable place
 Has a geocentric view,
 That architects enclose
 A quiet Euclidean space:
 Exploded myths -- but who
 Would feel at home astraddle
 An ever expanding saddle?

The myths are only exploded, however, from a view of the world which Auden describes as "The mechanized history created by the scientific illusion which would regard the world of faces as if it were a world of masses" (DH, p. 62), and, one might add, which would allow explanations like "the big-bang theory" to account for human history as well.

The question at the end of the just-quoted stanza itself contains the answer to many of the problems posed in the poem. Modern physics may tend to influence negatively the way men see themselves, but at the same time this is countered by an equally fictive vision, perhaps, that is inspired by a person's insistence on feeling "at home" in his world. Another aspect of this creative vision is the desire to maintain "Our common world," success in which gathers high praise in other poems such as "The Common Life." One has a choice of focus it seems, or a choice between fictions, and the more humane vision is clearly the more attractive one in the opening four stanzas. A problem of much greater magnitude concerns whether there is anything in this contrast of viewpoints that justifies one and relegates the other to a lower realm of knowledge. The second last stanza describes this problem:

This passion of our kind
 For the process of finding out
 Is a fact one can hardly doubt,

But I would rejoice in it more
 If I knew more clearly what
 We wanted the knowledge for,
 Felt certain still that the mind
 Is free to know or not.

The ogre of "mechanized history" makes it seem possible that even the desire for a more humane vision of the world is merely the inevitable product of a series of natural and historical forces.

The uncertainty of the last two stanzas here recalls that in the last two stanzas of "You." The earlier poem ended with a pair of questions, although it was implied that God had given man his distinctiveness from the natural world, and that further answers could be gained with a fuller understanding of man's sin, his conscience, and his responsibility for his actions. The last stanza of this poem again refers to the temptation to pride and the choice that led to man's fall from grace in the first place:

It has chosen once, it seems,
 And whether our concern
 For magnitude's extremes
 Really become a creature
 Who comes in a median size,
 Or politicizing Nature
 Be altogether wise,
 Is something we shall learn.

These lines are not very conclusive, however, and show that man is still in a very awkward position. For example, both the "modern physicist" and Auden, who clearly thinks it more becoming for man to correlate a 'median' viewpoint with his size,⁴¹ are involved in methods of knowing that tend to "politicize Nature."

In "In and Out" Auden attempts to counter any view of Nature that demeans or glorifies man with an equally plausible series of analogies

from a more moderate position. It is noteworthy that no poem in About the House, or any dealing with nature in his canon, is written without a self-consciousness about this anthropomorphizing process. The seven poems of "Bucolics" are excellent examples of this awareness, in which Auden writes more about man's changing conceptions of woods, streams, islands and so on than he writes directly about those items in nature.⁴² In any case, Auden ends "After Reading" on a very tentative note, and it is again apparent that the various methods of studying or "reading" Nature can never be completely satisfactory (or are merely primary texts, so to speak) in leading man to an understanding of his own nature.

"Ascension Day, 1964" articulates this problem anew, but this time in the context of one of the most important days in the history of the Church. Accordingly, by the end of the ninth haiku, Nature's immortal, repetitive commonwealth is abandoned as a locus of understanding and gives way to an exclusive, introspective look at man himself, who is distinguished as much by partaking in a series of unique historical events, each human possessing a unique self-consciousness and conscience, as he is by being the most complex of Nature's subjects.

The poem progresses from a description of spring's leaves to a reference to the perfect being, the conjunction of the divine and the natural in the person of Christ. The first six haiku form a section of their own, describing a progression from plant life to animal life, and from silence to the song of "Some occasional heavy feeder." These haiku may be further divided into three sections of two each, these pairs

indicated by the placing of periods and unified by a single dominating idea. The images in the first three pairs humanize nature. The progression of "The year's new green" may be likened to the passing of a torch in a relay race which has fallen slightly "behind schedule," since the "chestnut chandeliers" are still not in full bloom. The second pair takes the humanizing process still further as they describe the more spectacular effect of the coming of spring in the orchards, the trees of which are called "peoples," and who are likened more specifically to two kinds of young girls, perhaps -- the "Naive in white" and the "truculent in pink." They face a sky which is also given the attitude of indulgence, and the pleasant, mildly encouraging scene is filled out with descriptions of a pair of "mobile" creatures and their songs. The repetitive nature of the "Immortal Commonwealth" finds an apt correlative in the "one good remark" of the cuckoo, and the idea springing from this focus on nature that "all's well with the world" is crowned by the final image of the first section:

Well-satisfied,
 Some occasional heavy feeder
 Obliges
 With a florid song.

The middle three haiku, forming the second section of the poem and working as a transition to the last section of haiku, show the impossibility of man's joining entirely in the simple satisfactions of nature. Man makes a completely different set of distinctions for the governance of his life than nature's lives, when they make distinctions, do for theirs:

Lives content
 With their ecological niche
 And relevant objects,

Unable to tell
 A hush before storms
 From one after massacres,

As warriors, as lovers,
 Without mixed feelings:
 What is our feast to them?

These three haiku remind us of Auden's own progress in Thanksgiving for a Habitat. He begins by being pleased with his "ecological niche" or habitat -- pleased that he has a home that he is free to "go both in and out of" -- and he progresses to the high point of the cycle in the feast of "Tonight at Seven-Thirty." We may also be reminded of the distinctions made there between the feeding habits of plants and animals, and those of "man, / supererogatory beast," who alone "can / do the honors of a feast". The feast in "Ascension Day, 1964" refers to the celebration of the Eucharist or the Holy Supper, though the religious dimension of the poem is almost completely muted in Auden's reticence. Indeed, this dimension exists simply because of the reading demanded by the title and the last word of the poem.

The last six haiku form another section that is subdivided into three pairs. The first pair may be linked with the last pair in the first section in the sense that our "ritual / formulae of farewell" are somewhat similar to the repetition of the cuckoo's "one good remark" and the "florid song" of the "heavy feeder." There are more differences than similarities, naturally, several of them being that the human ritual is something that one may freely join in or avoid, it is unique

to one particular day, and the occasion has a singular and sacred importance. Christ departed on this day, and He will return but once. There is none of the necessary, continuous repetition that gives Nature her immortality, though man may repeatedly commemorate His ascension and look forward to His return. This is the point of the next two haiku, which mirror the middle two in the first section. The "general encouragement of the atmosphere" there and the waiting of the full coming of spring now give way to a new kind of waiting:

Will as we may to believe
That parting should be
And that a promise

Of future joy can be kept,
Absence remains
The factual loss it is

Auden treats the ascension as if it actually takes place on "This Thursday" in 1964, or in a completely new and unique context. The thought of its present, personal relevance leads into the collapse of strength in the final pair of haiku. Christ's departure is felt to be

Here on out as permanent,
Obvious to all,
As the presence in each

Of a glum Kundry,
Impelled to giggle
At any crucifixion.

The permanence of the loss is directly opposed to the scheduled, automatic yearly renewal of life in spring dealt with in the first two haiku. Our spiritual light seems permanently dimmed by Christ's absence: none of us has the strength to escape unaided the "glum Kundry" who holds us captive. Kundry was the enchantress who, in the *same* version of the Grail legend used by Richard Wagner in his opera, Parsifal, helped Klingsor the magician to delay temporarily the

knights of Titirel from accomplishing their quest.⁴³ She was also aided by flower maidens (one is reminded of the naive and truculent "orchard peoples"), and they succeeded until overcome by "Parsifal." The "Kundry" in each man, therefore, prevents his faith from progressing as it should, which in turn requires rescue from a source of strength without, in much the same way that the early Church, bereft of Christ, received new life through the descent of the Holy Spirit.

The organization of "In and Out" is actually mirrored in the six-three-six structure of "Ascension Day, 1964," which brings the main part of the overall design to its conclusion. The first fifteen titles of the section are arranged in a six-three-six pattern, and the middle poem, "Symmetries and Asymmetries," may be likened to a mirror in the sense that the first seven "titles" are reflected by the seven following it. We have already seen how "Four Transliterations" compares with "Four Occasional Poems," completing the middle subsection, and then how "The Maker" compares with "On the Circuit," "At the Party" with "Iceland Revisited," "Lost" with "Hammerfest," "Bestiaries are Out" with "Et in Arcadia Ego," and "After Reading" with "You." Each of these pairings has some solid basis for comparison, and yet there are also differences substantial enough to make the title "Symmetries and Asymmetries" an appropriate description for the entire section.

One of the differences in the six poems leading up to and including "Ascension Day, 1964" is that, overall, they are much gloomier than the first six, and this also generally describes the atmospheric shift that takes place between the first and the last six haiku in "Ascension Day, 1964." Its ending is also a far cry from the reunification of one's

"name and you" in the "healing disregard" of "Elsewhere" in "A Change of Air" (the "mirror poem"). "A Change of Air," then, begins "In and Out" with a description of reintegration and renewal just as the opening haiku of "Ascension Day, 1964" describe the renewal of natural life in spring. "In and Out" progresses through poems that may be likened to stages in a quest for truth that takes Auden through different countries, different conceptions of love, various methods of knowing, and through affirmations and rejections of images of the truth. But the last pair of haiku in "Ascension Day, 1964" close both poem and section on a very negative note, in which Auden feels the loss of a direct connection (through Christ) between God and man as a humanly ineradicable tendency to irreverence. The images in these lines, however, foreshadow reconciliation in three different ways: Parsifal overcame Kundry, Christ rose from the dead, and the Holy Spirit came to earth.

4. Whitsunday in Kirchstetten

Both main sections of About the House, Thanksgiving for a Habitat as well as "In and Out," are in fact directed toward the resolution in "Whitsunday in Kirchstetten." Auden's devotion to a personal re-creation and to truth, concluding in a confession of sorts at the end of "Ascension Day, 1964,"⁴⁴ are rewarded by a "Parsifalian" rescue taking the form of the reconciling descent of the Holy Spirit. One of the highest forms of a second nature of tomb and temple is a community of people gathered together because of their love for God, and suffused with the Holy Spirit, just as the highest form of truth apprehensible to man may simply be that,

though he never loses his freedom to accept or reject it, he is totally dependent upon God's providence and grace for his life, wisdom and salvation.

"Whitsunday in Kirchstetten" stands outside the main symmetrical pattern of "In and Out." It is supererogatory in this structural sense, and it is also a figurative sign of the Word in the sense that its theme is God's supererogatory grace to man. At the same time, "Whitsunday in Kirchstetten" is, obviously, as much a part of "In and Out" as any other poem, and its connection with "Ascension Day, 1964" is especially strong, despite the magnitude of the differences between them. Just as "Whitsunday in Kirchstetten" indicates a new beginning for Auden, Ascension Day and the Day of Pentecost are the two key dates for the origins of the Christian Church. According to Charles Williams, Christendom began at a "point out of time" which may theoretically be discovered by finding the intersection of "two heavenward lines; one drawn from Bethany along the Ascent of Messiah, the other from Jerusalem against the Descent of the Paraclete."⁴⁵ The new beginning for Auden is manifested in a suddenly different fullness of expression⁴⁶ (almost all the other poems in "In and Out" are distinguished by a spare, often reticent, and tightly controlled style) which pours out its ideas and images and rhetorical flights in a manner not really encountered since a number of the poems in Thanksgiving for a Habitat. The alternating nine and twelve-syllable lines are grouped into four verse-paragraphs, each of which begins with a different part of the Whitsunday ritual in a Catholic Church, and each of which inspires a new mass of ideas and reflections that sometimes seem ordered by little more than free association.

The dedication and the epigraph may be seen as the first signals of a change in Auden, since by them he honours two authors with whom he disagreed. Auden had, in the 1940s, become a friend of Father Reinhold, who was "a liturgical innovator whose writings were to influence a whole generation of American Catholics."⁴⁷ Despite the friendship, Auden developed an extreme dislike for liturgical innovation, complaining at various times in his life, for example, about the replacement of Latin formulae by English translations, or the re-translation of the seventeenth-century Anglican writings into modern English.

Acts of John is one of the "Gnostic Gospels," a text that the orthodox church found extremely difficult to suppress.⁴⁸ One of the main themes of this text is that Christ did not suffer and die completely on the Cross. Because "he was also 'Son of God,' the divine spirit within him could not die: in that sense he transcended suffering and death."⁴⁹ Auden might share, at least on this account, the dislike that Pope Leo the Great had for such teachings, but Pope Leo did not moderate his feelings and "condemned such writings as the Acts of John as "a hotbed of manifold perversity," which "should not only be forbidden, but entirely destroyed and burned with fire." But Auden's dislike is obviously not so great as to forego using part of the book as an epigraph, and we are also reminded of his gracious attitude to the gnostic at the table in "Tonight at Seven-Thirty." The epigraph is fairly similar, in any case, to a passage from Matthew 11:16-19:

"But to what shall I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the market places and calling to

their playmates,

'We piped to you, and you did not dance; we wailed,
and you did not mourn.'

For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they
say, 'He has a demon';

The Son of man came eating and drinking, and they say,
'Behold, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax
collectors and sinners!' Yet wisdom is justified by
her deeds."

The disciples were also accused of drunkenness by some when they began "speaking in tongues" (Acts 2:13), and perhaps it was to bring this to mind that Auden changed the spelling of "Herr Bayer" in the first publication of the poem to "Herr Beer."⁵⁰ Auden's singing voice would also not improve any new witnesses' impressions as he "bellows" out his invitation to the "conceiving" or "Creating Spirit":

Komm Schöpfer Geist I bellow as Herr Beer
picks up our slim offerings and Pfarrer Lustkandl
quietly gets on with the Sacrifice
as Rome does it

Much of the first verse-paragraph is written in a mildly critical vein. The offerings are slim, Auden indicates in a rather offhand way that he is not a Roman Catholic (something that he will refer to several more times), and both Anglican and Catholic are contrasted to the "successful cult" of "carworshippers."⁵¹ Despite his obedience "to Canterbury," Auden later "shall be well gruss-gotted," or given "God be with you's" by all, and

asked to contribute
to Caritas, though a metec come home
to lunch on my own land

A "metec", a term from Greek antiquity, was "A resident alien in a Greek city, having some of the privileges of citizenship" (OED). A

well-known aspect of this arrangement was the special tax imposed onmetics, and this is given a turn here in the sense that Auden's contribution will be entirely voluntary. As a "metic" Auden reminds us of a second potential source of alienation, which is simply the fact that he is an "Anglo-American" in Austria. We are reminded of the potential for discord in the last stanza of "Tonight at Seven-Thirty," none of which is realized in Auden's "vision," and here the negative possibilities (past, present or future) that Auden conjures up do not detract from the "Gemütlichkeit," an image for Grace, perhaps, in the sense that it is a free gift:

. . . no doubt, if the Allies had not
conquered the Ost-Mark, if the dollar fell,
the Gemütlichkeit would be less, but when was peace
or its concomitant smile the worse
for being undeserved?

The second section opens with the "clashing" of bells, the diction implying that Auden has not yet entirely overcome a sense of being at odds with the Church and the world. The bells keep ringing, as if they are calling upon the worshippers to accept the gift of grace that they had asked for in the opening song, and Auden responds with a language that, in its mixture of usage levels and in its long, soaring periods, bears certain similarities with a "speaking in tongues":

Rejoice, the bells
cry to me. Blake's Nobodaddy
in his astronomic telescopic heaven,
the Big White Christian upstairs, is dead,
and won't come hazing us no more, nor bless our bombs:
no more need sons of the menalty
divining their future from plum stones, count aloud
Army, Navy, Law, Church, nor a Prince
say who is papabile.

The command to rejoice is followed first by a lighthearted dismissal of Blake's satiric personification of the kind of "god whose temper tantrums are moral"⁵² ("Nobodaddy" was his "nickname for 'Urizen'"),⁵³ and who was considered the "Father of Jealousy." The "Big White Christian upstairs" refers to the image of God used by white rulers to oppress other races, and the language accordingly shifts for a moment into a mixture of a black blues-singer's slang and West Point diction ("and won't come hazing us no more"). This is followed by the formally correct, "nor bless our bombs", and the "no more" of the previous line is repeated in a new context, the language now evoking eighteenth-century England. "Menalty" is an "obsolete" word that simply means "the middle class" (suggesting that this class would prefer to think of itself in more exotic terms), the sons of which are no longer restricted to four professions. Auden completes this period and his quick tour through the social hierarchy by referring to a time when Princes did have some control over who was to become Pope. They are now, fortunately, divested of this sacrilegious responsibility.

This passage is qualified by several strangely pejorative remarks in the following parenthesis. One's first impression is that Auden's high spirits have been taken over and given a new direction by his "Kundry":

(The Ape of the Living God
knows how to stage a funeral, though,
as penitents like it: Babel, like Sodom, still
has plenty to offer, though of course it draws
a better sort of crowd.)

The funeral is presumably for both "Old Nobodaddy" and the old ways of

life. The term "Ape of the Living God" is most closely associated with the Great Schism that began in 1378 and continued for thirty-six years.⁵⁴ Catholicism was divided between two Popes, and each side claimed that it was led by the Vicar of Christ and the other by His Ape. The same kind of terminology appeared in the later schism between Protestantism and Catholicism, and Auden now seems to take Canterbury's side against Rome and her rituals which are seen (through the juxtaposing colon) to be a modern variation on Babel. But Canterbury has her share of rituals as well, so Auden's epithet may be directed at all churches, which can do little more than approximate what God demands of them, as well as at any use of language in a church service, which must always have an element of Babel in it insofar as "Speech can at best, a shadow echoing / the silent light, bear witness / to the Truth it is not" About the only thing that is certain is that Auden intended the *humour* and the lightness of tone to win out here over all other considerations, especially since he goes on to compare the pleasures of the perversion of language with those of the body. This may also be taken as a forgiving look at the lures of "Babel" and "Sodom," but Auden's brashness seems to have displaced the called-for penitence a little too completely.

The second command to rejoice brings Auden to the present moment:

Rejoice: we who were born
 congenitally deaf are able
 to listen now to rank outsiders. The Holy Ghost
 does not abhor a golfer's jargon,
 a Lower-Austrian accent, the cadences even
 of my own little Anglo-American
 musico-literary set (though difficult,
 saints at least may think in algebra
 without sin): but no sacred nonsense can stand Him.

Auden saw the gift of the Holy Ghost to be an awakening of all powers in the act of communication, especially those of listening:

One event described in the New Testament has, in the long run, had a great cultural influence, namely Pentecost. The gift of the Holy Spirit on that occasion is aptly called the gift of tongues. It might be more aptly called the gift of ears. I have never been able to understand how belly-talkers, from Montanus to the Irvingites, can have taken the story in Acts to mean that to make verbal noises which nobody else could understand was a proof of Divine inspiration. What happened at Pentecost was exactly the opposite, a miracle of instantaneous translation: "Behold are not all these which speak Galileans. And now hear we every man in his own tongue wherein we were born, hear them speak in our own tongue the wonderful works of God." The curse of Babel, one might say, was redeemed because, for the first time, men were willing in absolute fullness of heart to speak and to listen, not merely to their sort of person, but to total strangers.⁵⁵

The fact remains that no form of human language can "stand" the "Holy Ghost" or, in a second sense of "stand," embody Him (as in the difference between "put up with" and "put up"). Any attempt at making language itself "sacred" automatically makes it "nonsense," though all attempts in whatever form at expressing the sacred, or any object of our liking, would not necessarily be abhorred by the Holy Ghost.

One is still left with the problem of knowing what it means to "speak in tongues," or exactly what language is capable of:

Our magic syllables melt away,
our tribal formulae are laid bare: since this morning,
it is with a vocabulary
made wholesomely profane, open in lexicons
to our foes to translate, that we endeavor
each in his own idiom to express the true magnalia
which need no hallowing from us, loaning terms,
exchanging graves and legends.

The first few lines recall the last stanzas of "The Common Life," where

"the sacred spells" and "ancient magic" of those protecting their homes are used to quell "the Dark Lord and his hungry / animivorous chimeras." This is one of the "good" functions of the language, to reject falsehood, just as one of the *few* "good" uses of poetry in anyone's "little . . . / musico-literary set" is "to exorcise the Gentile" in one. These merely involve the negating powers, however, of a language that is, by definition, "profane," or simply, distinguished from what is sacred. In the new context, the event of Pentecost, these uses for language are themselves relegated to an inferior role. Auden and the others have been drawn out of their protected and protective homes, as it were, and they are called upon to attempt an expression of the "great and wonderful things" for all to hear, friend and foe alike. Language is not "useful" in this regard, as for example it cannot affect "the true magnalia / which need no hallowing from us" Language in its highest, most positive capacity can be used for praise, and for "bearing witness to the truth it is not," and it is made available to anyone willing to listen.

This willingness makes for a true exchange, "loaning terms, / exchanging graves⁵⁶ and legends", and it is clear that a speaker's spiritual attitude has a far greater importance than the standards (aesthetic, grammatical) by which language is usually judged. Art may improve upon nature, but no extraordinary artistic or intellectual skill will increase the spiritual value of the message of the gospels, for example, or add greater significance to the actions of a saint. The truth can be stated or acted out in simple and direct ways, and it can be both comprehended and stated by the simplest of men without the

intermediation of poet, philosopher or priest.

Auden addresses the problem of finding a medium of exchange between art and Christianity in the following passage from Secondary Worlds, a passage which also helps explain the rather odd conclusion to the second verse-paragraph of "Whitsunday in Kirchstetten":

The gospels shattered the Classical conventions, but it would be wrong to suppose that they replace them by any positive aesthetic principles. They made and make it possible for artists to look for subjects in areas which they had hitherto ignored, but the nature of the human imagination as of the human reason cannot change. It is only excited by what seems to it extraordinary, and it can only deal with what it can make publicly interesting. For example, neither in poetry nor fiction is there, I believe, a convincing portrait of a saint. Sanctity, it would seem, can only be hinted at by comic indirection, as in Don Quixote.⁵⁷

Auden plays a rather saintly role himself in remembering "Franz Josef the Unfortunate" (1830-1916; emperor of Austria, 1848-1916) in his prayer for the dead. Part of the comedy comes from the details considered most significant in Franz Josef's life, his avoidance of dancing and the telephone. Auden's saintly concern is also a little mixed with a non-Austrian's pride in being the only one in the Church to remember a former Austrian emperor. Despite all this "indirection," Auden still manages to provide an echo, however faint, of the Holy Ghost, whose comfort is extended even to the least significant and least fortunate among us.

The third verse paragraph again opens with an unflattering description of a sound (compare it with Auden bellowing, and bells clashing), and again this is followed by a comment critical of humans:

An altar bell makes a noise
as the Body of the Second Adam
is shown to some of his torturers, forcing them

to visualize his enemies
with the same right to grow hybrid corn and be wicked
as an Abendlander.

The typological theme is reiterated in several ways. Adam was a type of Christ, and Christ's crucifixion and resurrection make possible redemption from the sin man inherited from Adam. Just as men are guilty because of this sin, they are in a sense co-responsible for torturing Christ. They are forced to visualize their absent enemies behind the Iron Curtain because of Christ's commands: "Love your enemies" (Matthew 5:44) and "love thy neighbour as thyself" (Matthew 19:19). Auden thus reminds us of the fact that the "descent of the Paraclete" does more than cause us to rejoice for salvation and for the "magnalia" in our lives -- it also commands us to make peace with our enemies, however impossible and ridiculous that may seem given the constant and obvious threat from "peace-loving Crimtartary"

Auden humorously dismisses as negligible the West's differences from the communist bloc. One of these, the absence of stockbrokers, may actually be a point in communism's favour. Another difference, the official attitude regarding the Church, is far more serious, but in most other respects the lives on both sides are the same, and it is both unreasonable and spiritually corrupt for either side to wish the other ill. Khrushchev's prophecy, brought to mind in the lines, "We shall bury you / and dance at the wake," is also comparable to the attitude of Christ's torturers, and stands in total contrast to the image of Grace dancing. Auden makes his own timid prophecy in the concluding lines of the third verse paragraph, reminiscent of the fact that the disciples made a number

of prophecies on the first day of Pentecost. Auden, though, merely suggests that a catastrophe more likely than a Russian conquest would be one involving an inversion of the old, white imperialist-black servant relationship, in which case it would be his own British, looting kin's "turn / for latrine duty and the flogging block"

A third kind of catastrophe, or sudden change in the order of things, is dealt with in the final verse paragraph:

Down a Gothic nave
comes our Pfarrer now, blessing the West with water:
we may go. There is no Queen's English
in any context for Geist or Esprit: about
catastrophe or how to behave in one
I know nothing, except what everyone knows -- 58
if there when Grace dances, I should dance.

As the Church service comes to an end Auden considers the end of man in two senses of the phrase -- the goal, the communion with God, to which man's spirit should lead him, and the final days during which the final revelation of God's will takes place. The comment on the impossibility of translating "Geist" or "Esprit" is juxtaposed with the sudden meditation on catastrophe to suggest that God will be the cause of the catastrophe. This may be thought of in terms of the complete victory of the Holy Spirit,⁵⁹ whether at the end of time or in men's hearts now, just as His first victories in the Church's beginning took place on the day of Pentecost. The phrase "Geist or Esprit" even sounds like "catastrophe," thus reinforcing the connection.

What this actually will entail, how it will occur, and how to behave when it does occur, are matters beyond Auden's ken. This is the second confession of an inability, the first being the impossibility of

translating "Geist or Esprit" into "Queen's English," showing the limitations of something often associated with the idea of final authority concerning the meaning and proper use of words. It is here understood, however, that the limitations of languages can be overcome in the pentecostal, translating spirit. A third expression of humility comes in the final line. Although he may not be one of the blessed, now or in the final days, Auden should join Grace in the dance if he is.

Auden most likely had Williams' The Descent of the Dove in mind again when he wrote this ending, just as the linking of "Ascension Day, 1964" with "Whitsunday in Kirchstetten" derives from that book's beginning. These are the words that conclude Williams' last chapter:

If Christendom indeed feels intensely within itself the three strange energies which we call contrition and humility and doctrine, it will be again close, not only to the wars of the Frontiers, not only to Constantine, but to the Descent of the Dove. Its only difficulty will be to know and endure him when he comes, and that, whether it likes or not, Messiah has sworn that it shall certainly do. (p. 233)

Auden should dance (the modal auxiliary expressing both expectation and obligation) if there when the Dove descends and beckons him to, because he would freely desire to and because he would have to. In a later formulation, expressed in both City Without Walls (1969) and Epistle to a Godson (1972), the ideal construction of a second nature of both our lives and "our human city" is envisioned as a state "Where Fate is Freedom, / Grace and Surprise."⁶⁰

NOTES

¹The poems of "Four Occasional Poems" and "Four Transliterations" can be treated, as Auden seems to treat them, as numbered parts subsumed by the covering title. Auden also does not list the separate poems on the title page.

²See below, pp. 205-207, and footnote # 43.

³The ensuing discussion is based on a number of ideas outlined in the chapter entitled "Language" in The New Leviathan, pp. 40-46.

⁴English Auden, p. 36. The phrase is part of the following passage:

Send 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.

⁵Ostroff, p. 204. The term "parable" is from the same passage.

⁶Ibid., p. 206.

⁷From the second sonnet, CP, p. 224.

⁸Auden elaborates this at length in Ostroff, pp. 206-207.

⁹Ibid., p. 205.

¹⁰New Leviathan, p. 12.

¹¹Ibid., p. 13.

¹²The idea of the seven days of creation also likely affected Auden's decision to write seven seven-line stanzas.

¹³Cf. Auden's essay in Pike, p. 40.

¹⁴Auden provides his own footnote to this passage: "The Moral Circle: a jocular term, used by southern Norwegians, for the Arctic Circle. German this time: in 1945 the retreating Wehrmacht burnt down every single house."

¹⁵The phrase, "holy ground," comes from Auden's introduction to a new revised issue of Letters from Iceland (London, 1967), p. 8.

¹⁶His "family is said to have come originally from Iceland" (Osborne, p. 9).

¹⁷With Paul B. Taylor (London, 1969). The introduction, which will be quoted later on, is by Peter H. Salus and Paul B. Taylor. Henceforward this book will be cited as Elder Edda.

¹⁸Harold G. Henderson, An Introduction to Haiku (New York, 1958), p. 69. Henceforward this book will be cited as Henderson.

¹⁹Edith Hamilton, Mythology (New York, 1964), pp. 46-48. Henceforward this book will be cited as Hamilton.

²⁰p. 8. This passage also shows the freedom with which Auden borrowed from his poetry in writing prose and vice versa. He comes close to flaunting this process at times, taking no pains for concealment.

²¹Cf. Descent, pp. 65-70.

²²New York, 1960, p. 37.

²³Reprogle (p. 226) makes a similar point.

²⁴New Leviathan, p. 46.

²⁵Auden refers to Frisch's book, The Dancing Bees: An Account of the Life and Senses of the Honey Bee, trans. Dora Ilse (New York, 1953).

²⁶In an interview conducted by Michael Newman, Auden says: "The most outrageous use of words I've ever experienced was once when I was a guest on the David Susskind TV program. During a break he had to do a plug for some sort of investment firm, and he announced that those people were 'integrity-ridden!' I could not believe my ears!" George Plimpton, ed., Writers at Work: The "Paris Review" Interviews, Fourth Series (New York, 1977), p. 252.

²⁷The Complete Poems and Plays of T.S. Eliot (London, 1975), p. 209. Henceforward this book will be cited as Eliot.

²⁸Ehrenpreis also points this out, p. 164.

²⁹Osborne, pp. 278-279.

³⁰Cf. my fn. 66 in Chapter II, p. 141.

³¹Cf. "Memorial for the City" (CP, p. 450), Auden's elegy for Charles Williams. The fourth section is a lengthy speech given to "Our Weakness" in which its value to man throughout history is catalogued.

³²Yeats, p. 401. This last poem in Last Poems may have been in the forefront of Auden's thoughts when he wrote:

To get the Last Poems of Yeats,
 You need not mug up on dates;
 All a reader requires
 Is some knowledge of gyres
 And the sort of people he hates.
 (CP, p. 518)

³³Yeats, "The Circus Animals' Desertion," p. 391.

³⁴The Bishop tells Crazy Jane, "Live in a heavenly mansion, not in some foul sty." Yeats, p. 294.

³⁵Ibid., pp. 294, 295.

³⁶Apart from his dislike of the attempt to make poetry as much as possible like music, however, Auden's love of good music knew few bounds.

³⁷Kemp Malone, ed., Deor (London, 1966), p. 5.

³⁸"Nemorivagrant" should be "nemorivagant," unless Auden wishes to emphasize the less flattering association of vagrancy and wandering. It is more likely a mistaken reading of the OED or a typographical error, since Auden opposed coining new words.

³⁹Both Berkeley, in a work entitled "Alciphron" (1732) and Law, in a work entitled "Remarks on the Fable of the Bee" (1723), disputed Bernard Mandeville's argument in "The Fable of Bees, or Private Vices, Public Benefits" (1714) that "Society, like a hive of bees, thrives on a system of mutual rapacities." Cf. Oxford Companion, pp. 15, 84, 467, 511. Auden may have had other philosophers and preachers in mind, but it is certain that Mandeville's views are compatible with his.

⁴⁰Auden used this class terminology a number of times with regard to scientists and others, as in the following: "When I find myself in

the company of scientists, I feel like a shabby curate in a drawing room full of dukes" (DH, p. 81).

⁴¹One is reminded of one of Auden's most enjoyable formulations of this at the end of "Under Which Lyre" (CP, p. 259), though in other respects the poem is hardly a call for moderation:

If thou must choose
Between the chances, choose the odd:
Read the New Yorker, trust in God;
And take short views.

⁴²CP, p. 426. Replogle writes: "In 'Mountains,' as in all the 'Bucolics,' Auden writes ostensibly of nature, but never of nature as a sensuous thing. He describes not the three-dimensional affective object, or even his emotive reaction to that object, but his response to ideas about physical nature" (pp. 248-249).

⁴³Cf. H.F. Garten, Wagner the Dramatist (London, 1977), pp. 142-143.

⁴⁴The "gift of the Holy Ghost" (Acts 2:38) is dependent on repentance, a condition that is at least partially fulfilled by the tone and substance of the last pair of haiku.

⁴⁵Descent, p. 1.

⁴⁶Even the number of lines, 77, may have been chosen to link the smallest details of the poem with the idea of plenitude -- similar associations are made in the Bible, in which the number seven is almost sacred, signifying wholeness, for example (as in the seven days of creation), and in which a pair of sevens are used in different combinations (as in "seventy times seven") to indicate either plenitude or infinity.

⁴⁷Cf. Ursula Niebuhr's contribution to Stephen Spender, ed., W.H. Auden: A Tribute (London, 1975), pp. 112, 117. Henceforward this book will be cited as Tribute.

⁴⁸Elaine Pagels, The Gnostic Gospels (New York, 1979), pp. 73, 75. Henceforward this book will be cited as Pagels.

⁴⁹This and the ensuing quotation are from ibid., p. 75.

⁵⁰Cf. the index of first lines in Spears, p. 358. Spears quotes the version used in The Reporter, Dec. 6, 1962.

⁵¹Auden may have had the following passage from Williams in mind:

"Social importance, in 1870 and onwards, remained for a little on the Christian side, as it had done in the eighteenth century. The middle-class in England, for example, did not wholly lose the habit of going to church until they acquired motor-cars (so negligible in the end is intellect itself)." Descent, p. 222.

⁵²From "In Praise of Limestone," CP, p. 414.

⁵³Hazard Adams, ed., William Blake; Jerusalem, Selected Poems and Prose (New York, 1970). Adams' comment on the possible origin of "Nobodaddy" is from his "Notes and Commentaries," p. 698. The next phrase quoted, "Father of Jealousy," is from Blake's poem, "To Nobodaddy," p. 57.

⁵⁴Descent, pp. 146-154. All further information about the Schism in this paragraph is taken from these pages. *An earlier, more pejorative version of the term Auden uses is Diabolus simius Dei -- the Devil is the ape of God.*

⁵⁵SW, p. 139. In this quotation Auden has conflated part of the seventh, all of the eighth, and part of the eleventh verse of Acts 2. The first sentence of his quotation should end with a question mark. Acts 2:8 also reads as follows: "And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we are born?" (my emphasis).

⁵⁶Auden's primary meaning for "grave" here is most likely the grave accent, which performs a different function in many different languages. It is impossible, however, to avoid thinking that Auden has in mind the ludicrous possibility of an exchange of cemetery graves. The pun evokes the idea that our life and death are with our neighbours, so that we share in some way in their deaths as well as in their lives.

⁵⁷p. 139. Auden has just finished a brief discussion of Professor Auerbach's book, Mimesis. Auden writes: "The contrast between the claim of the Gospel narratives to be the Word of God, and the outward appearance and social status of the characters in them must, if the claim is believed, abolish the assumption of the classical aesthetic . . ." (p. 138).

⁵⁸Auden changed the beginning of the second last line to "what do I know" (CP, p. 560), perhaps because he felt "I know nothing" to be illogical as well as excessively modest.

⁵⁹Auden's word for such a sudden turn for the good becomes "eucatastrophe" in "Epistle to a Godson," a word constructed by Tolkien to describe the birth of Christ, His Resurrection, and "the Great Eucatastrophe" of the second coming. "On Fairy Stories," The Tolkien Reader (New York, 1966), pp. 71-72. Henceforward this book will be cited as Tolkien Reader.

⁶⁰"Runner," in "Four Commissioned Texts," CWW. The same lines conclude "United Nations Hymn," EG.

CHAPTER IV
THE VAULT STRUCTURE OF EPISTLE TO A GODSON

In City Without Walls (1969) and Epistle to a Godson (1972), as in About the House (1965), Auden contrasts bleak visions of the present and future state of civilization with a vision of life in which men recognize their dependence on God. In the latter vision, which for Auden is heavily influenced by his recognition of the legitimate place of the Way of Affirmation in Christianity, the present world, despite all its apparent faults, can be considered an index to the kingdom of God.

In the following chapter, I will attempt to show specifically how these ideas are incorporated in Epistle to a Godson. Before considering this volume in more detail, however, I will sketch the lineaments of the construction of City Without Walls to show developments in form and content that took place between About the House and Epistle to a Godson. City Without Walls, unfortunately, cannot be dealt with here in the detail that it requires, primarily because an in-depth consideration would expand this dissertation to a very trying length.

1. City Without Walls

City Without Walls is generally much darker in tone than any of the other later volumes. There is a pervasive consciousness of death and solitude, and many of the poems deal with tyranny and the evils of modern civilization. The difference in tone may largely be due to Auden's shift

of focus from the problems^{in About the House} of smaller paradigms of the "City" in home and church, to the larger City or civilization in general, the problems of which are far more difficult to deal with. In other words, it is easier to ask "brawlers and foul-mouths . . . to quit" one's own "sacral dining area / instanter" ("Tonight at Seven-Thirty") than it is to countenance an Ogre, as "drive! gushes from his lips" ("Song of the Ogres"), after it has subjugated a defenceless country.

Auden is extremely cautious about his fitness to address the problems of civilization. He is, first of all, conscious of the tendency to self-righteousness in any attack on others. A super-ego-like voice scorns him at the end of the title poem:

"What fun and games you find it to play
Jeremiah-cum-Juvenal:
Shame on you for your Schadenfreude."

Auden is also of little account compared to "authentic martyrs / like Regulus" ("The Horatians") or to true saints ("Insignificant Elephants"), but he is still faced, as all citizens are, with the modern equivalent of Chaldeans or Babylonians pulling down the walls of Jerusalem and destroying the temple (Jeremiah 39). Freedom in the secular city and reverence for the City of God are everywhere threatened by tyrants, "sacrilegious technocrats" ("Prologue at Sixty"), and by the lapse of modern culture into an unworldly "Nothing," attested to partly by widespread dependence on the "vulgar rubbish" and "witless noise" of "newsprint and network" ("City Without Walls").

Auden, therefore, attempts throughout the volume to establish a new respect for limits, boundaries and laws that man must accept

in maintaining a secular city in which freedom to choose (ultimately for or against the City of God) is possible. The modern followers of "Baalim" (Jeremiah 9:12-14) opposed to this are the idolaters of self and power, or those who would deprive others of their hopes and desires, making them adjuncts of the tyrant's will. This tyranny, stemming from the idolization of power, can take personal, political or religious forms, and variations on this theme constitute at least a part of almost every poem in the volume. Idolization of self is closely connected with that of power, and easily leads to tyrannous behaviour, but it can also have results which do a "merely" personal damage. For example, people may retreat into a womb of minor pleasures supported by "newsprint and network" in avoiding confrontation with what they may see as the meaninglessness of their lives, their leisured egos being

"left to dig
value and virtue from an invisible realm
of hobbies, sex, consumption"
(*"City Without Walls"*)

These "nobodies living for nothing" are easy prey for the Devil in "The Song of the Devil." Their understanding of themselves as mere units of pleasure, and their judging themselves and others in terms of image, has led them to become "ciphers of Hell's." Idolization of one's own imagination takes the form of bombast in poetry, as that practised by all those "foudroyant masters" who believe in the immortal and immortalizing qualities of poetry (cf. "The Horatians"), and who believe in achieving effects at whatever cost to the truth of their subject matter:

. . . abhorred in the Heav'ns are all
self-proclaimed poets who, to wow an
audience, utter some resonant lie.
(*"Ode to Terminus"*)

Opposed to all these forms of either self-aggrandizement or self-devaluation are, first of all, the classical or cardinal virtues: wisdom, justice, courage, and "temperance or moderation and propriety."¹ The "Horatians" of the sixth poem in this volume exemplify these, and Terminus, the god of boundaries and of "walls, doors and reticence," is a mythical embodiment of the impulse to abide by the rules and regulations governing civilized behaviour ("Ode to Terminus"). Access to a well-bounded private realm is also necessary for the cultivation of these virtues which eventually find expression in the public realm,² and the boundaries between people must be respected. The tyrant seeks to break these boundaries down, and people often willingly give them up. The results in either case are individuals who are simply the tyrants' pawns, or particles in a crowd with like feelings and thoughts.

A faith in the abiding strength of the classical virtues, however, is closely linked to a faith in the basic goodness of mankind. This faith holds that the desire for justice, for example, is a natural and predominant feature in man's view of things and will, more often than not, find fulfillment in human affairs. It is a commonplace in Auden's thought from 1940 onward that this is clearly a false view, and he cites the sudden collapse of German idealism into the horrors of the Third Reich as an example of the insufficiencies of a faith in any form of humanism.³ The values of such a faith can find "validation" only in personal strength or strength of numbers: the tyrant as well as the temperate man are both being "human" according to their particular desires, and one can resist the other ^{only} with superior force.

In Christianity Auden discovered what was believed to be a firmer foundation for "humane" action. The belief that "Man is a fallen creature with a natural bias to do evil"⁴ has as its corollary the belief that man may find redemption only through faith in God, and through an attempt to love one's neighbour as oneself in accordance with the will of God. The Christian virtues -- faith, hope and love -- thus gain ascendancy over the classical ones, but at the same time give them a new vitality. Jesus came not to contradict the prescriptive wisdom of Moses but to fulfill the Law, and thus it may be said that both the Mosaic commandments and the actions required by wisdom, justice, prudence and fortitude are given a new sanction and strength. St. Augustine makes a similar argument, paraphrased here by Charles N. Cochrane:

The problem of salvation is . . . not to destroy or to suppress the affections; it is rather that they should be reoriented with a view to the supreme good. That good lies in God, the search for whom . . . may thus be described as the appetitus beatudinis, of which love constitutes the dynamic. From this point of view, love subsumes the four cardinal virtues of Classicism which, at the same time, it irradiates with fresh significance. In this way the self-same principle which, when directed to the pursuit of mundane ends, gives rise to moral confusion and ruin, is conceived by Augustine to yield the motive power necessary to a realization of creative peace, the Kingdom of God within.⁵

The establishment of a secular city analogous to New Jerusalem, or at least that canonizes the right of each citizen to choose freely, requires that one accept limitations on his will and recognize his obligations to others. Much of "City Without Walls," therefore, attacks those who would "keep the walls of civilization down." Auden deals with the enemy without and the enemy within, or with the tyrant as well as those citizens who willingly cede their freedoms. Auden also attempts to

strengthen the walls through praise of persons who, among other virtues, accept their responsibilities in the maintenance of the city, and through praise of God, who is the ultimate source of both life and the impulse to order our lives. Poetry, whatever its theme, is itself an expression of order, and reading it is to partake in its ordering spirit. If About the House is concerned with the construction of "a second nature of tomb and temple" in the individual life, home, and Church, then City Without Walls is ultimately concerned with the construction^{of}, or at least the desire to construct, a second nature of "The City" or of civilization generally.

Auden takes the ordering impulse several steps further by taking great care with the form and content of each poem in the volume and of the volume as a whole. City Without Walls, in fact, has an overall structure almost as elaborate as that of About the House. All that can be given here is an outline of the system of correspondences by which the volume is ordered, beginning with a consideration of the way that Auden numbers its poems.

There are thirty-seven "pieces," or poems, songs, sections of "marginalia" and other "texts," in this volume. Each of the four "groups" of verse may be considered, however, as single pieces united by common verse patterns, subject matter, and other qualities that group them under one title. The "Five Occasional Poems," for example, are all addressed to individuals worthy of praise in some respect, and the dominant prosodic element in each poem is simply that the numbers five, seven, ten and

twelve dominate in each of them, whether applied to syllables per line, the lines in each stanza, or the number of stanzas. A similarity of tone, subject matter and prosodic elements also applies to "Two Songs" and "Eight Songs from Mother Courage." Though "Four Commissioned Texts" does not at first seem to form quite so homogeneous a group, its four texts touch on, in turn, almost all of the themes that are essential to Christian teaching. The groups of poems will be considered as single titles, therefore, and so the number of titles in the volume add up to twenty-two.

These may be divided initially into twenty titles and a denouement that deals more specifically than anywhere else in the volume with Christian themes. Thus the last two titles ("Four Commissioned Texts" and "Prologue at Sixty") close out the volume in much the same way that "Ascension Day, 1964" and "Whitsunday in Kirchstetten" (especially the latter, since it stands outside the symmetrical, "mirrored" organization of "In and Out") conclude About the House. The first twenty titles in City Without Walls are bounded by the title poem, a Jeremiad excoriating "Megalopolis," and "Ode to Terminus," a poem that strongly suggests the termination of a sequence in that it seems to have found the means by which civilization can be re-walled, as it were:

You alone, Terminus the Mentor,
can teach us how to alter our gestures.

God of walls, doors and reticence, nemesis
overtakes the sacrilegious technocrat,
but blessed is the City that thanks you
for giving us games and grammar and meters.

A development of the qualities and virtues associated with Terminus are not enough, however, to establish or maintain anything more than the "democratic" or "just city." It can only be developed into the "City of God" through the Word and the Grace of God, and this theme forms a major part of the themes of "Four Commissioned Texts" and "Prologue at Sixty."

Another way of looking at the two "terminal points" or the two concluding groups of poems in City Without Walls is as follows. The four poems beginning with "Fairground" and concluding with "Ode to Terminus" deal with the progress of individual lives and the potential for regeneration or "translation" to a better life. "Fairground" compares the games of the young and old, the old having learned the value of "patience, foresight, maneuver" "River Profile" sketches the progress of a river from origin to conclusion, and its analogy with human life becomes especially pointed in the final two stanzas with their references to atonement and re-birth. "Insignificant Elephants" is a circumlocutory attempt to get at the heart of the mysteries of sainthood. The effect of these considerations is, for Auden at least, to inspire humility. "Ode to Terminus" describes man's need to find a place allowing his humanity to flourish, a place in which man may accept and understand his limitations, his "creatureliness," and his weakness. "Ode to Terminus" concludes this section of four titles (cf. Appendix B) and the main sequence of twenty titles with a definition of man's place in the universe and a call to accept the limits imposed on us by the classical virtues. It is suggested that we "temper our outlandish extravagance," and that we curb our "colossal immodesty," our "tall stories" and "resonant lies."

A much more positive and a more explicitly Christian understanding is provided by a secondary conclusion of City Without Walls in "Four Commissioned Texts" and "Prologue at Sixty." Metaphorically speaking, the walls of the city are re-established by "Ode to Terminus," but their abiding strength and value can only derive from God. Perhaps Auden had this passage of the Bible in mind in organizing this volume:

And the angel said to him Run, speak to this young man, saying, Jerusalem shall be inhabited as towns without walls for the multitude of men and cattle therein:

For I, saith the Lord, will be unto her a wall of fire round about, and will be the glory in the midst of her.⁶

"Prologue at Sixty," furthermore, embodies the structure of the volume to the degree that it has twenty-two stanzas, and that there is a sudden break between the twentieth stanza and the denouement of the last two. After directing a blast at "Cosmocrats" (similar to the one directed at the "technocrats" at the end of "Ode to Terminus"), Auden writes:

Can Sixty make sense to Sixteen-Plus?
What has my camp in common with theirs,
with buttons and beards and Be-Ins?
Much, I hope. In Acts it is written
Taste was no problem at Pentecost.

This echoes the concern for "the Word" and Pentecost in "Four Commissioned Texts," the twenty-first title, and then the twenty-second stanza concludes the poem and the volume with a prayer:

To speak is human because human to listen,
beyond hope, for an Eighth Day,
When the creatured Image shall become the Likeness:
Giver-of-Life, translate for me
till I accomplish my corpse at last.

The "spiritual development" of the volume is indicated by the fact that, although the same five-line stanzas of alliterative "epic meter"⁷ are used in "Prologue at Sixty" as in "City Without Walls," there is a marked difference in attitude. The driving, thumping mockery of the City in the first poem is replaced by a quiet, contemplative consideration of Auden's past and the life around him.

The difference between the two poems is all the more striking in view of the fact that almost every stanza in "Prologue at Sixty" has an element reminding one of its counterpart in "City Without Walls." One example of this may be seen in the contrast between the image of the well-cultivated "blond and fertile . . . fields" in "Prologue at Sixty" and its exact opposite in "City Without Walls" -- "the Unbounded / beyond the Pale, unpolicied spaces" The progress of the volume is also indicated by a comparison of the last forward-looking stanzas in each poem. In the first Auden hopes to "feel better by breakfast time", whereas in the last he is listening "for an Eighth Day, / when the creatured Image shall become the Likeness."

Finally, the poem that sets this entire organization into motion is also, structurally speaking, a microcosm of the whole. "City Without Walls" is composed of twenty stanzas of five lines each and a concluding epilogue of five three-line stanzas. This is yet another feature in a carefully organized set of correspondences which are all intended to buttress Auden's main themes -- the importance of maintaining civilization's walls, and, to this end, of our need to recognize that the supreme good lies in God. The structural similarities between "City

Without Walls" and "Prologue at Sixty" suggest that the volume has progressed not just linearly, well-distanced now from the title poem's jaundiced vision of the city, but that the volume has come full circle. To paraphrase Eliot, in Auden's "beginning is his end," for the city appears to be doomed in "City Without Walls," and "in his end is his beginning,"⁸ for "Prologue at Sixty" expresses a revival of faith. The love that should spring from the seemingly otherworldly devotion to God must be expressed "substantially" in this world. The fact that the poem is called a "Prologue," and that it is in so many ways a "re-beginning" of work on the problems catalogued in "City Without Walls," suggest that Auden will not in age simply await the beginning of the Kingdom of God, but that he will continually turn his attention to the world's troubles. The last two stanzas of the final poem begin with the hope that he will be able to "make sense to Sixteen-Plus", perhaps with a view to helping the incoming generation cope with modern life. In Epistle to a Godson, Auden attempts to do precisely that. The title poem contains a lengthy section outlining past, present and future "abominations," and Auden offers advice to a godson, whose generation was itself soon "To be responsible for the happiness / of the Universe"

2. Epistle to a Godson

Auden was sixty-five years old at the time of the publication of Epistle to a Godson, and many of the problems besetting an aging man are reflected in this volume: loneliness, depression, the death or proximity

to death of friends, disrespect for the old, a world changing to the point of being incomprehensible, and a world that continually seems to be changing for the worse. These by no means exhaust the themes in this volume, nor can they be said to be problems that preoccupy exclusively the elderly. The reader is nevertheless constantly reminded of Auden's age, beginning with the epigraph:

Each year brings new problems of Form and Content,
new foes to tug with: at Twenty I tried to
vex my elders, past Sixty it's the young whom
I hope to bother.

He proceeds to do something along these lines in his capacity as godfather in the title poem by reminding Philip Spender of the poor condition of the human world and of his generation's responsibilities to it. "Epistle to a Godson" has an effect on the volume in more ways than providing a title, which first of all tends to link the rest of the poems under the aegis of the epistle. Auden in his poem offers a guide to what he may or may not offer the young in terms of advice, warning and "written nourishment." The rest of the volume is constructed in accordance with this guide.

The key to its structure is provided in these lines:

For such wayfarers,
what should we write to give them the nourishment,
warmth and shelter they'll be in need of?
Nothing obscene or unpleasant: only

the unscarred overfed enjoy Calvary
as a verbal event. Nor satiric: no
scorn will ashame the Adversary.
Nor shoddily made: to give a stunning

display of concinnity and elegance
is the least we can do, and its dominant
mood should be that of a Carnival.
Let us hymn the small but journal wonders

of Nature and of households, and then finish
 on a serio-comic note with legends
 of ultimate eucatastrophe,
 regeneration beyond the waters.

"Concinnity" (the harmonious arrangement of parts) and "elegance" are apt as descriptions of many of the poems in this volume, but it is difficult to think of more than a few worthy of the phrase, "a stunning / display." It is perfectly appropriate, however, when the harmonious arrangement of the poems themselves is taken into account. The structure is similar to the "mirror pattern" of the "In and Out" section of About the House in that the first half of the poems stands in a symmetrical arrangement to the second half, with one poem in the middle acting as the turning or dividing point. In "In and Out" that centre-piece is "Symmetries and Asymmetries." Here it is "The Ballad of Barnaby," and each poem before it is thus linked with a poem after it according to their positions in the symmetry. Therefore "Epistle to a Godson" is linked with the last poem, "Talking To Myself," "The Art of Healing" is linked with the second-last poem, "Talking to Mice," and so on.

The clearest indication of this through the titles alone, which also indicates that Auden was anxious to aid the reader in seeing an arrangement that is not immediately clear, is found in the middle section of the volume. "Shorts I" is mirrored by "Shorts II" and "Doggerel by a Senior Citizen" by "Old People's Home." A cursory reading of the poems just before and after these also clearly reveals their connections. Both the fourteenth and twentieth poems, "The Aliens" and "Circe," deal with, alternately, the transformation of beings into insects and into "sessile fatalists" or "flower children." In both, a "Seducer"

woos them with speeches that have many similar elements. The connection between the thirteenth and twenty-first poems, "Natural Linguistics" and "Short Ode to the Cuckoo," is again fairly obvious from the titles. "Stark bewölkt" ("completely overcast") is connected by contrast with "Ode to the Medieval Poets," which has as its main image, "a thundery / jovial June when the judas-tree is in blossom" This pairing also shows how the second poems can be mirror images conveying, as Caliban says in The Sea and the Mirror, a "reversal of value" (CP, p. 330). The second poem, therefore, usually provides a new understanding, a completion, or a correction of ideas and attitudes in the first poem of a pairing. In another example, the elevated spirit of "United Nations Hymn" completely reverses the depression of "A Bad Night." These two poems also show how similar poetic forms (verse paragraphs of two-stress lines) can be used to achieve completely different results.

One final aspect of this remarkable structure is that the thirty-three poems are thematically grouped into a 3-4-4-4-3-4-4-4-3 pattern (cf. Appendix C). The first three poems, "Epistle to a Godson," "The Art of Healing," and "Lines to Dr. Walter Birk on his Retiring from General Practice," deal in large part with sickness, death and aging, and with the qualities necessary to a good doctor (Auden plays the role of reluctant spiritual physician in the title poem). Death, aging and sickness play equally prominent roles in the last trio of poems (given in reverse order to accord with their linkage with the first three), "Talking to Myself," "Talking to Mice" and "Talking to Dogs." A phrase that can be used to indicate the relationship of all six poems is

"managing life and death." Auden not only discusses methods of helping those lives placed in his or a physician's care⁹ (including animals, friends, young people and himself), but also how to manage when those lives are taken away.

The four poems, "A New Year Greeting," "Smelt and Tasted," "Heard and Seen" and "I Am Not a Camera," may be characterized as studies of the relationships between body, mind and soul. The group of four poems with which these are linked are (again given in reverse order) "Loneliness," "A Toast," "Contra Blake" and "To Goethe: A Complaint." Each of these enlarges in some way upon the themes of the first four, all of them dealing in part with the ways that the writings or influences of other beings, human or ghostly, help or hinder Auden's appreciation of life.

The poems, "A Bad Night," "Moon Landing," "The Garrison" and "Pseudo-Questions," are linked in turn with "United Nations Hymn," "Anthem," "A Shock," and "An Encounter," and all may be grouped under a subheading such as "Art and the World." All the poems here have as one of their main features an exploration of the relationship between events in the world at large and artistic expression. Religious figures are also recurring elements in these poems.

Similarly, a subheading for the next two quadruplets of poems, "Stark bewölkt," "Natural Linguistics," "The Aliens" and "Doggerel by a Senior Citizen," and "Ode to the Medieval Poets," "Short Ode to the Cuckoo," "Circe" and "Old People's Home," could be "Nature and Human Nature." The emphasis in these poems is largely on defining the differences between the two, though at times there is a self-conscious and humourous humanizing of nature ("Stark bewölkt") and at others descriptions of times when the

difference between the two has become truly negligible, as in some of the vegetable-like elderly in "Old People's Home."

The central and top-most piece of this poetic edifice is "The Ballad of Barnaby," which is separated from the other poems and buttressed on either side by the two collections of "Shorts." Auden's proposed "display of concinnity and elegance", the "dominant mood" of which "should be that of a Carnival" and which is supposed to "finish / on a serio-comic note with legends / of ultimate eucatastrophe," reaches its high point (structurally, not qualitatively) in the airy lyrics of this poem. The last three stanzas describe the conclusion and result of Barnaby's last tumbling display for "Our Lady":

"Lady", cried Barnaby, "I beg of Thee
To intercede with Thy Son for me!"
Gave one more leap, then down he dropped,
And lay dead still, for his heart had stopped.

Then grinning demons, black as coal,
Swarmed out of Hell to seize his soul:
"In vain shall be his pious fuss,
For every tumbler belongs to us."

(Ballet music)

But Our Lady and Her angels held them at bay,
With shining swords they drove them away,
And Barnaby's soul they bore aloft,
Singing with voices sweet and soft.

These lines also help explain the structure of Epistle to a Godson. The volume rises from Auden's desire to do well, to do one's Christian or godfatherly duty, as it were, in "Epistle to a Godson." It reaches what he sees to be the height of several of his intentions in the entertainment of "The Ballad of Barnaby." The poems then return to a point at which Auden literally prepares for the death of his body in "Talking to Myself":

Time, we both know, will decay You, and already
 I'm scared of our divorce: I've seen some horrid ones.
 Remember: when Le Bon Dieu says to You Leave him!,
 please, please, for His sake and mine, pay no attention
 to my piteous Dont's, but bugger off quickly.

The structure of the volume, then, may be likened to a vault in two senses of that word: a tumbler's vault, and a burial chamber of which the central, highest point is a poem about the death and ascent to heaven of a tumbler, and of which the two lowest points on either side are poems in which Auden writes of old age and of impending death or "ultimate eucatastrophe."

If all that has been seen in this description of structure is the fact that Auden has once again merely shown himself to be enormously clever, then the description has not been adequate. It should be noted that, for all the jocularly of "Epistle to a Godson," Auden is taking his duties seriously as a godfather to Philip and as a public figure writing to the "young he hopes to bother," or to the

New
 Generation whom it's our duty
 to disappoint since, until they notice
 our failings, they will never bother
 to make their own mistakes.

("Talking to Dogs")

He gives advice, though often in a cryptic way (perhaps to avoid sounding too typically avuncular), and he explores a large number of distinctions (between the natural world and human nature, art and other human activity, nature and history, the "I" and the self, and so on), which may be taken as aids by the young and other readers in their search for truth. The structure of the volume, by linking poems in several different ways, helps to place the themes addressed in individual poems in different and

larger perspectives, and this in turn gives them an impact greater than they would have individually. The pattern of the volume represents the outcome of a struggle with form, and Auden is quite successful insofar as he wishes to render through art a vision of the harmonious order of life that man should hope to attain. Insofar as he may have wished to give a personal example to Philip Spender, or to show that his own actions in writing correspond to his prescriptions, Auden is again successful. In overcoming the temptations to despair that accompany so many older men, in accepting his limitations, in continually finding grounds for hope, Auden shows that he has himself forsaken neither the task of looking "at / this world with a happy eye / but from a sober perspective" ("The Horatians," CWW), nor the discipline that results in helping others "better to enjoy life or better to endure it."¹⁰

I shall examine the poems in more detail by dealing with the paired groups in succession in accordance with Auden's arrangement. At times the procession will be from one pairing of poems to the next until all within the two mirrored groups have been dealt with, and at other times all the poems in one group will be examined first and then compared with the poems with which they are linked. In other words I will begin by looking at the first three and the last three poems, then at the first group of four poems ("A New Year Greeting" to "I Am Not A Camera") and the last quadruplet ("To Goethe: A Complaint" to "Loneliness"), and so on until "The Ballad of Barnaby" and the two "Shorts" are dealt with. The difficulty in writing of such a structure is that it offers such a variety of interconnections: to exhaust them all would be as

difficult as it would be boring, and the intention here is simply to cover what seems to be essential. My procedure has the further disadvantage of not following the poems in serial order, in which there is a tendency to forget, for example, the importance of a poem such as "Talking to Myself" as the concluding poem. The procedure has the advantage, however, of making the pairings and groupings clearer, and of avoiding lengthy recapitulations of the first sixteen poems when dealing with any one of the last sixteen.

3. Managing Life and Death

In "Epistle to a Godson," Auden attempts to fulfill his duties as a godfather, one of which is to be responsible for a child's religious training. Auden uses St. Paul's "Epistle to the Philippians" as a model or point of reference in writing his epistle to Philip Spender -- even his use of a Greek poetic form (the Alcaic strophe) evokes the Greek of Paul's writing.¹¹ All the parallels and verbal echoes that can be pointed out between Paul's letter and this poem, however, serve more to emphasize and provoke laughter at Auden's disabilities compared to Paul's strengths. It may be said, for example, that Paul acted as something of a godfather to the Philippians, having founded and fostered their Church. The following contains part of his opening exclamations, "I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, Always in every prayer of mine for you all making request with joy . . ." (1:3-4). The opening of Auden's epistle shows, first of all, that he is often full of a different kind of wine from that of the Holy Spirit, and secondly that he is full of hesitation about giving anyone spiritual guidance:

DEAR PHILIP: "Thank God for boozy godfathers"
 you wrote in our guest-book, which was flattering:
 though I've reached the years when discretion
 calls for a yearly medical check-up,

who am I to avouch for any Christian
 baby, far less offer ghostly platitudes
 to a young man?

Auden goes on to specify the hardships for an old man in this age in giving advice to the young. Whereas Paul was in a real prison at the time he wrote, Auden is in a sense imprisoned in a past that has few apparent connections with the present, preventing him from speaking or giving advice "from experience." He is also unable to confer any special knowledge of the present:

 You don't need me to tell you what's
 going on: the ochlocratic media,
 joint with under-the-dryer gossip,
 process and vent without intermission

All today's ugly secrets.

The cynically humourous attack on the present age is reminiscent of that in "City Without Walls," and both reach a height of inventive disgust in the vision of the future. The following lines also far outstrip anything that Paul warns about concerning the need to "Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the concision" and of a "crooked and perverse nation" (3:2, 2:15):

 Imageable
 no longer, a featureless anonymous
 threat from behind, tomorrow has us
 gallowed shitless: if what is to happen

occurs according to what Thucydides
 defined as "human", we've had it, are in for
 a disaster that no four-letter
 words will tardy. I've beheld in nightmares

(who hasn't?) likely abominations: seething
 behavioral sinks, the Muses scuttering,
 smelly, from eutrophied Helicon,
 the Witches' Sabbath on Garbage Mountain,

Herod's genetic engineers commanded
 to modify the Innocents.

Thucydides defined history as a product of the interaction between man's will and circumstances.¹² Man is seen as one organic part of the whole of nature, like any other part though quantitatively superior, and his main motivations are simply to secure health and peace through an economic security, the gain and increase of which is justified even at the expense of so-called moral considerations. A human life is much like a stimulus-response mechanism: the "movement . . . of human life consists of doing and suffering . . . , of response to stimuli which it seeks to understand and control." In the face of so many destructive events and pressures in the world that seem completely irrational -- the products of blind fate -- social order breaks down rather easily, and often no combination of reason and individual strength seems capable of restoring peace for that "acquisitive animal" known as man. Thucydides' doctrine of expedience to secure the physical well-being of the greatest number is not unlike Hobbes' philosophy, which Auden so much disliked, and it is not surprising that Hobbes was attracted by Thucydides enough to translate him in 1629.¹³ Such a view is also compatible with behaviour modification theories, and hence Auden's references to "seething / behavioral sinks" and "Herod's genetic engineers."

"Epistle to a Godson" has thus been brought to an impasse.

Although Auden figures on escaping this horrid future himself, the question still remains, "Yet who can / issue proper instructions?" After one more negative answer, "Not, certainly, / our global Archons," it becomes even more urgent that something be said and done. Auden's lengthy disavowal of proper qualifications to instruct, as well as the description of a world careening to destruction, may not be seen as a preparation and an excuse for the words that he is about to utter in his role as reluctant prophet. The shift from negatives to positives in the poem is also stressed by the fact that for the first time since the opening line of the fourth stanza, a period is begun at the beginning of a stanza:

To be responsible for the happiness
of the Universe is not a sinecure:
in elite lands your generation
may be called to opt for a discipline

that out-peers the monks, a Way of obedience,
poverty and -- good grief! -- perhaps chastity,
yet in this world's ill-weathered open,
a stern venture pre-figured in folk tales

as the Quest Perilous.

Auden thus begins fulfilling his own small duties by suggesting what preparations may be in order, but he does pass the main responsibility of acting upon the world at large to the younger generation. It is also interesting that his language is largely derived from religious sources, making it apparent that it is something in the quality of an individual's faith that will decide whether the world is made a better place or not.

Auden's actions in the world will be confined to writing something that may give the youthful wayfarers "nourishment, / warmth

and shelter." Several options are thought of and rejected:

Nothing obscene or unpleasant: only

the unscarred overfed enjoy Calvary
as a verbal event. Nor satiric: no
scorn will ashame the Adversary.
Nor shoddily made

It seems, initially, that Auden believes an understanding of Christ's passion will be of no avail in attempting to effect "the happiness / of the Universe," and it also seems incredible that he should dismiss "Calvary" as "obscene or unpleasant." He is referring, however, to the transformation that poetry effects on its subject matter. Poetry makes of this matter a "verbal event," making everything in its realm of possibilities take the character of a game, no matter how serious, and one of its inevitable effects is to make its subject matter take on the status of entertainment. Auden also implicates that school of critics who would treat the Bible solely as literature. An interesting side-light to these lines, as well as to earlier lines in the poem, is that Auden comes dangerously close to breaking his own injunction by scorning attitudes that may be linked with those of "the Adversary," or of all the lesser adversaries of a just and happy civilization.

Auden, however, is still interested in "ashaming" such adversaries and he wishes to do this through laughter, but it is laughter of a rather unaggressive kind that he hopes to generate with the effusive rhetoric and oddly mixed diction of much of this poem. Some of Auden's discussions of past, present, and future events are described here, perhaps too solemnly, as "attacks," for Auden certainly does not sustain for long the idea that he is writing out of either a spirit of utter disgust or

superiority. As Timothy Green writes,

. . . Auden identifies genuine laughter with "the spirit of Carnival" and insists that "when we truly laugh, we laugh simultaneously with and at" (Auden's emphasis). That is, genuine laughter and the Carnival spirit are both a protest against and an acceptance of human mortality and the contradictions inherent in the human condition.¹⁴

Shortly after quoting Auden's line that the "dominant / mood" of his poetry "should be that of a Carnival", Green continues:

Auden's conception of poetry as a game coincides with his notion of the spirit of Carnival; for Auden's later poetry fashions a world of play in which comic frivolity, however irreverent it may seem, is a parabolic indication of the participant's spiritual well-being and a direct affirmation of the goodness of the phenomenal world.¹⁵

Auden, appropriately, turns the play of "Epistle to a Godson" from his own and other's limitations to a consideration of both the good that a poet may attempt to do and of the good that exists in the phenomenal and human worlds:¹⁶

. . . to give a stunning

display of concinnity and elegance
is the least we can do, and its dominant
mood should be that of a Carnival.
Let us hymn the small but journal wonders

of Nature and of households, and then finish
on a serio-comic note with legends
of ultimate eucatastrophe,
regeneration beyond the waters.

Such a passage also has its foundation in Auden's Christianity, but again he is careful to keep overt references to Christian subject matter muted. The phrase, "legends / of ultimate eucatastrophe, / regeneration beyond the waters", is an example of this coyness. To begin with, "eucatastrophe" is not even in the OED, though it clearly means some

sudden turning, or a catastrophe with good consequences. Auden found this word in Tolkien's essay, "On Fairy-Stories":

I would venture to say that approaching the Christian Story from this direction, it has long been my feeling (a joyous feeling) that God redeemed the corrupt making-creatures, men, in a way fitting to this aspect, as to others, of their strange nature. The Gospels contain a fairy-story, or a story of a larger kind which embraces all the essence of fairy-stories. They contain many marvels -- peculiarly artistic,¹⁷ beautiful and moving: "mythical" in their perfect, self-contained significance; and among the marvels is the greatest and most complete conceivable eucatastrophe. But this story has entered History and the primary world; the desire and aspiration of sub-creation has been raised to the fulfillment of Creation. The Birth of Christ is the eucatastrophe of Man's history. The Resurrection is the eucatastrophe of the story of the Incarnation. This story begins and ends in joy. It has pre-eminently the "inner consistency of reality." There is no tale ever told that men would rather find was true, and none which so many sceptical men have accepted as true on its own merits. For the Art of it has the supremely convincing tone of Primary Art, that is, of Creation. To reject it leads either to sadness or to wrath.¹⁸

Auden must also have had in mind a connection between the "mood of Carnival" and "legends of ultimate eucatastrophe" in that Mardi Gras, the Christian Carnival, is the first stage in the season concluding in the celebration of Easter.

The three stanzas with which Auden concludes "Epistle to a Godson"¹⁹ begin with another jibe at his own faculties and profession:

But perhaps you think poems are as foolish
as most poets, and would rather spend your spare
moments romping around in Cantor's
logical paradise, or beseeching

such knotty points as Can we hang a robber
who is not there? or What is the color of
the number three? Why not? All pleasures
come from God.

One wonders whether Philip Spender actually was interested in Georg Cantor's (1845-1918) mathematics and in abstract philosophy, perhaps the only discipline capable of answering these questions. If so, it is apparent that Auden is jibing him in turn by suggesting these alternatives to poetry in this form. They are not completely whimsical suggestions in several senses, one being that "all pleasures / come from God." It is easy to think, however, that these "knotty points" also have some further significance. In "Shorts I," after all, Auden writes, "God never makes knots, / but is expert, if asked to, / at untying them", and he may have had in mind this aphorism of Lichtenberg's: "With God thoughts are colors, with us they are pigments -- even the most abstract one may be accompanied by physical pain" (Aphorisms, p. 351). It is admitted, however, that this neither clarifies Auden's riddle very much nor does it qualify as an allusion that the reader could possibly have been expected to pick up, though the same does not seem the case for the next riddle. The hanging of "a robber who is not there" likely refers to the thief on the cross, to whom Jesus promised paradise on that same day (Luke 23:43). In any case, the irony is that the knotty points are incorporated into the poem, and that there are enough of them elsewhere in Auden's poetry to satisfy anyone with a bent for difficult riddles and an aversion to poetry.

The reference to Georg Cantor may also be an attempt at puzzling Spender. For many readers the last name would first bring to mind Eddy Cantor, the famous entertainer. In speaking of "Cantor's / logical

paradise," however, Auden is quoting the English mathematician, David Hilbert, who wrote in 1916: "No one shall expel us from the paradise which Cantor has created for us."²⁰ Much of Cantor's work grew out of the attempt to define the concept of infinity, especially as it applied to the relative sizes of different classes of numbers:

Cantor's greatness lies in his perception of the importance of the one-to-one correspondence principle and in his courage to pursue its consequences. If two infinite classes can be put into one-to-one correspondence, then, according to Cantor, they have the same number of objects in them. For example the class of positive whole numbers

1 2 3 4 5 6 . . .

and the class of the reciprocals of these numbers

1 1/2 1/3 1/4 1/5 1/6 . . .

are in the one-to-one correspondence whereby each number in the first class corresponds to one and only one in the second, namely, its reciprocal.²¹

This has an obvious relevance to the structure of Epistle to a Godson, with all its one-to-one correspondences between poems, and Auden's consideration for Spender's preferences again comes through in this provision of a poetic facsimile of one aspect of Cantor's mathematics.

After all the riddling and hesitation, the first unqualified religious assertion comes as something of a shock: "All pleasures come from God." As if taking confidence from these bold words, Auden actually dares to give advice:

Since I am your godfather,

I'll close this letter with some wordly maxims:
Be glad your being is unnecessary,
then turn your toes out as you walk, dear,
and remember who you are, a Spender.

It is difficult at first to see the distinction between the first strange maxim and the "ghostly platitudes" scoffed at in the second stanza, since it is difficult to know exactly what is meant. Perhaps the answer is simply that no person's life is necessary to anyone else or to the world, for that matter, and that one should feel glad to possess the freedom to make of life what one wills. This is not to say either that one is free of responsibilities or that one's life is merely accidental or a "random event," as Auden makes clear in "Talking to Myself":

" . . . for who is not certain that he was meant to be?" Auden makes a similar distinction between physiological and spiritual "being" in "Shorts I": "Cosmic trivia / we all are, but none of us / are unessential."

The last two "wordly maxims" are borrowed directly from one of the Red Queen's many pieces of advice to Alice in the third chapter of Through the Looking Glass: "Speak in French when you can't think of the English for a thing -- turn out your toes as you walk -- and remember who you are!"²² The Red Queen then hurries off quickly -- one is tempted to say "buggers off quickly", as Auden hopes to do himself in the last lines of the volume -- and Alice will not meet her again until the climactic dinner party near the end of the story. Here Alice is continually contradicted, given faulty lessons in manners and mathematics, bullied about, and given several nearly unanswerable riddles by both Queens, though the Red Queen is the most disruptive force. It is tempting to characterize some of Auden's criticism of, and advice to, the young as the posturing of a Red Queen,²³ especially when it is seen

in terms of Auden's stated intention "to bother the young." The Red Queen's effect on Alice was certainly salutary enough, for it is through her impudence that Alice at last asserts herself, takes hold of the Queen who has once again diminished to the size of a chess piece, and shakes her back into a kitten (Alice, pp. 336-339). Alice re-enters the real world, and one commentator has likened her journey through Looking-Glass country as analogous to a journey "into womanhood."²⁴

Even with his direct quotation of the Red Queen, it is going too far to say that Auden wishes to show that he is merely operating at her level. The best demonstration of this is that parallels to all three maxims may also be found in Paul's "Epistle to the Philippians." Paul's continued existence -- it must be remembered that at the time of writing Paul felt himself to be near death -- is needful but not necessary to the Philippians (1:23, 24). He enjoins them to rejoice (4:4), and in few other writings does Paul strike such a hopeful note in such a high-spirited way. And finally he thanks the Philippians for what they have spent in his care:

Now ye Philippians know also, that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church communicated with me as concerning giving and receiving, but ye only. For even in Thessalonica ye sent once and again unto my necessity.
Not because I desire a gift, but because I desire fruit that may abound to your account (4:15-17).

In reminding Philip that he is a Spender, Auden may be telling him to spend his energy in action upon the world so that some good may abound to it, and to himself. But he is also certainly telling him to have a good time, as in sexual pleasure, a rather worldly maxim to be coming

from a godfather. It comes, however, from a godfather who believes, as many Christians apparently do not, that sexual pleasures, too, "come from God."

The "Art of Healing" and "Lines to Dr. Walter Birk on his Retiring from General Practice" deal firstly with the passing away of Auden's personal physician in New York, Dr. David Protetch, and then with the retirement or the passing out of the "Public/Realm" of his Kirchstetten physician. As befits a eulogy and an affectionate farewell, there are few of the verbal fireworks and "knotty points" found in "Epistle to a Godson," which may have served well as part of the desire to bother the young but which would merely vex his elderly brethren.

The key point in both poems is that a good doctor, too, is something of a spiritual physician. Auden was certain that Dr. Protetch thought as his own father did:

"Healing,"
Papa would tell me,
"is not a science,
but the intuitive art
of wooing Nature.

Plants, beasts, may react
according to the common
whim of their species,
but all humans have
prejudices of their own
which can't be foreseen.

To some, ill-health is
a way to be important,
others are stoics,
a few fanatics,
who won't feel happy until
they are cut open."

Protetch also knew this:

"Every sickness
is a musical problem,"
so said Novalis,
"and every cure
a musical solution" . . .

* * *

Not that in my case
you heard any shattering
discords to resolve

One wonders, however, to what extent Dr. Protetch knew Auden's prejudices against medical science and against perversions of the medical profession, and looked upon them with a magnanimity that helped to ease Auden's "small ailments." It may be true that healing often requires trust in the doctor and is considerably aided by a doctor's awareness of his patient's personality, but one almost loses sight of an equal need for sheer competence in the technical or the "engineering" side of medicine.

Many of the themes of "The Art of Healing" are reiterated in "Lines to Dr. Walter Birk," although the more spacious forum of the sapphic as opposed to the spare 5-7-5-5-7-5 syllabics of the earlier poem allow Auden to sound a more garrulous note:

The healer I faith is
someone I've gossiped

and drunk with before I call him to touch me,
someone who admits how easy it is to misconster
what our bodies are trying to say, for each one
talks in a local

dialect of its own that can alter during
its lifetime. So children run high fevers on
slight provocation, while the organs of old men
suffer in silence.

Auden proceeds to treat Dr. Birk to a discussion of the difference between the never quite regular recurrence of Nature's cycles, and the

voluntary but punctual honouring of dates by humans. Some animals may share a "sense of theatre" ("Talking to Dogs") with people, but humans are "beasts with a sense of / real occasion, of beginnings and endings" "Henceforth," as Auden writes,

the First of October
shall be special for you and us, as the Once when
you quit the Public

Realm to private your ways and snudge in a quiet
you so deserve. Farewell, and do not wince at
our sick world: it is genuine in age to be
happily selfish.

This ending is not nearly as complimentary as the one in the previous poem, where Dr. Protetch is seen to be "condign / of our biased affection / and objective praise." Though to be "happily selfish" may be "genuine," it is hardly of exceptional merit, and Auden may not have been very pleased about Birk's retirement.²⁵

"Talking to Dogs" ("In Memoriam Rolfi Strobl, Run over, June 9th, 1970"), is the companion poem to "Lines to Dr. Walter Birk." A dog, too, can aid in providing "physick" to a soul in need:

Being quicker to sense unhappiness
without having to be told the dreary
details or who is to blame, in dark hours
your silence may be of more help than many
two-legged comforters.

The dog may also be said to lead a "happily selfish" life, and if connections like these mean something, it would become clearer that Auden was not completely accepting of Dr. Birk's decision, just as it would seem impossible to imagine Auden accepting the idea of retiring himself. A Roman expression for death, after all, was that a man had ceased "to be among men,"²⁶ or had taken leave of "the Public// Realm," and the

break between these two words in "Lines to Dr. Walter Birk" emphasize the disruptive effect of retirement. To renounce one's place in the public places where events and meaningful actions occur, to give up on performing those tasks and operations, as it were, for which one has a skill and vocation, is also in some senses a renunciation of "a sense of theatre."

"Talking to Dogs" begins a triptych of energetic monologues²⁷ concerning the relation between man and the mobile creatures, including that between Auden and the physical part of his being in "Talking to Myself." Auden's primary interest in dogs, apart from the enjoyment they afford and the work that they help man to do, is in their value as aids to self-definition. He is also, as usual, more interested in meanings and in general cases than in specific, detailed descriptions. The dominance of these interests does not preclude love, however, as it might in the cool detachment of a biologist's description, and the best illustration of his respect for these creatures is the fact that there is little hint of the usual human assumption of superiority. Comparisons tend, rather, to disfavour humans:

And what do we,
 those of us who are householders, not shepherds
 or killers or polar explorers,
 ask from you? The admiration of creatures
 to whom mirrors mean nothing, who never
 false your expression and so remind us
 that we as well are still social retards,
 who have never learned to command our feelings
 and don't want to, really.

The fact that "mirrors mean nothing" to dogs, of course, does not stop them from acting as part of nature's mirror in revealing men and their

not occasioned any joy:

To move from where we'd been sipping
cocktails and giving ear, translated out of ourselves, to
Biedermeyer Duets of Strauss in Metamorphosen,
mourning the end of his world, and enter the kitchen to
find there
one more broken cadaver, its black eyes beadily staring,
obumbated a week. We had felt no talent to murder,
it was against our pluck. Why, why then? For raisons
d'État. As
householders we had behaved exactly as every State does,
when there is something It wants, and a minor one gets
in the way.

That the sight of one cadaver should "obumbate" (cast a shadow over²⁸) a week, and that he should refer to such a death as "murder," are fairly strong indications of self-disgust. His ironic description of his highly cultured response to music is reminiscent of the art-loving torturers he refers to in other writings.²⁹ Auden has also acted after the fashion of the "medical engineers" in "The Art of Healing" who "atom-bombed" (meaning, presumably, treated with radiation) Dr. Protetch's "sick pituitary, / and over-killed it." It cannot be said, furthermore, that Auden acted quite without their condescension or "their arrogance." The comic aspect of the serio-comic banter of "Talking to Mice" is abated, therefore, throughout the third verse paragraph, and it is thoroughly quashed in the concluding aphoristic lines.

Auden anticipates yet another death, his own, in "Talking to Myself." This poem may be classified with others in his later work as variations on ars moriendi. They proceed by taking stock of some facet of Auden's situation in the world and they conclude with a reference to the "last days," accompanied by a statement as to how Auden wishes to act at that time. Two other poems in this mould, which also conclude

their respective volumes, are "Prologue at Sixty" in City Without Walls, and "Lullaby" in Thank You, Fog.

As "Epistle to a Godson" is addressed to a young man beginning his journey into life, "Talking to Myself" is addressed to an old body that is taking its last steps. The calmness of Auden's opening, "Spring this year in Austria started off benign, / the heavens lucid, the air stable," establishes the measured, orderly progression that continues throughout the poem and that stands in sharp contrast to the wild exuberance of "Epistle to a Godson." There the lines and stanzas continually spill over into each other; here the twelve-syllable lines often end with the period or with the natural pauses in the sentence. Every stanza also comes to a full stop at sentence end and at the sixtieth syllable, a number Auden just possibly may have chosen to correspond to his status as a sexagenarian.

The difference between the treatments of similar subject matter in the two poems is also striking. In the earlier poem Auden writes of the present in splenetic terms ("all today's ugly secrets"), and of the future as something that "has us / galled and shitless". Here he writes,

Shadows of course there are, Porn-Ads, with-it clergy,
and hubby next door has taken to the bottle,

and then he immediately refers back to himself and describes the source of the "shadows" within, or the ones for which he is responsible:

but You have preserved Your poise, strange rustic object,
whom I, made in God's Image but already warped,
a malapert will-worship, must bow to as Me.

Another comparison may be made with regard to the spirit with which Auden undertakes responsibility for the two different beings (his godson and himself) placed in his care. He begins "Epistle to a Godson" with a series of disavowals concerning his capacity "to avouch for any Christian / baby". He has no choice but to accept responsibility for his own body, rather drily describes this fact, and immediately considers other matters:

My mortal manor, the carnal territory
 allotted to my manage, my fosterling too,
 I must earn cash to support, my tutor also,
 but for whose neural instructions I could never
 acknowledge what is or imagine what is not.

It must be remembered, however, that Auden ended in the earlier poem by overcoming his hesitations and beginning the performance of his self-imposed duty to write something for his godson, and that this poem concludes with the fulfillment of that duty. This exploration of the relationship between his own soul and body (or between the "I" and the "self") is an expression of how the two may be properly distinguished (even though all distinctions must fail to exhaust the mysteries of either); how the body may rightly be praised for what it is (and how at times its own promptings need to be controlled); how the body may serve as an emblem for understanding larger matters; and finally, how one may respond to its eventual decay and destruction.

The body or "the flesh" is often blamed for the problems caused by the ego's own distorted perception of things, as well as by its "malapert will-worship." Auden in several stanzas rectifies that misunderstanding, as in the following:

You are the Injured Party for, if short-sighted,
 I am the book-worm who tired You, if short-winded
 as cigarette addicts are, I was the pusher
 who got You hooked. (Had we been both a bit younger,
 I might well have mischieved You worse with a needle.)

In the fifth stanza the mystery and the wonder of being are expressed in lines that may also be seen as a correction of the attitude held by Thucydides (see my pp. 246-247) among others in ancient times, as well as that held by modern science:

Unpredictably, decades ago, You arrived
 among that unending cascade of creatures spewed
 from Nature's maw. A random event, says Science.
 Random my bottom! A true miracle, say I,
 for who is not certain that he was meant to be?

This may also be seen, again, as a clarification of the line, "Be glad your being is unnecessary". One may be "unnecessary," but existence is certainly neither without purpose nor the profoundest significance.

The analogies between body, personal estate and the world, and between the ego, master and government, come to a conclusion in these stanzas:

Thanks to Your otherness, Your jocular concords,
 so unlike my realm of dissonance and anger,
 You can serve me as my emblem for the Cosmos:
 for human congregations, though, as Hobbes perceived,
 the opposite sign is some ungainly monster.

Whoever coined the phrase The Body Politic?
 All States we've lived in, or historians tell of,
 have had shocking health, psychosomatic cases,
 physicked by sadists or glozing expensive quacks:
 when I read the papers, You seem an Adonis.

When Auden writes in a much earlier poem that he must obey

That singular command
 I do not understand,
Bless what there is for being, ("Precious Five", CP, p. 450)

an extra emphasis may be placed on the "what," for everything existing is seen as God-given and cannot be blamed for the evils which the human will perpetrates. In Auden's view, then, a phrase like "the evils of the flesh" is a euphemism for sin that has its origin in the ego's will.

The body seeks harmony, and the ego is the source of personal "dissonance and anger" and of the "shocking health" of all "political bodies." This is not to say that the perceiving and willing ego does not also seek harmony -- Auden has, for example, overcome antagonism toward the body for matters over which he simply cannot have full control. He has to learn to live with his profile, his body was "a bother" during the "many years" it was "a martyr to horn-colic," and he reproaches the body for dreams, though "quite irrationally." The desire of the ego for harmony is here expressed as a wish to make even "nocturnal manias" "conform to some prosodic discipline".

The image of the marriage of the "I" and the "self" in the tenth stanza is repeated in the last, and both are quoted here:

Our marriage is a drama, but no stage-play where
 what is not spoken is not thought: in our theatre
 all that I cannot syllable You will pronounce
 in acts whose raison-d'être escapes me. Why secrete
 fluid when I dole, or stretch Your lips when I joy?

Time, we both know, will decay You, and already
 I'm scared of our divorce: I've seen some horrid ones.
 Remember: when Le Bon Dieu says to You Leave him!,
 please, please, for His sake and mine, pay no attention
 to my piteous Dont's, but bugger off quickly.

It is interesting that "divorce" should be the word used to describe death, for it implies that neither body nor soul dies. A haiku near the end of "Shorts I" explains how this is true for the body:

What is Death? A Life
disintegrating into
smaller simpler ones.

As to what it means for the ego, or any other term that expresses what has traditionally been called the soul, Auden is reluctant to say, just as he is reticent about direct references to God, almost always using descriptive phrases such as "Giver-of-Life" (Prologue at Sixty"), appellations from foreign languages, and so on. Thus the "spirit of Carnival" in one sense of that word (a serio-comic celebration of life) is not allowed to transgress overtly upon the more serious elements of the Christian story. This does not prevent the poetry from pointing to these elements, however, nor from suggesting how they form the framework in which life and death may best be managed.

It should here be recalled that the original (and still applicable) meaning of Carnival was "to remove the flesh." As Mardi Gras precedes Ash Wednesday and Lent -- a time of penitence, discipline and spiritual renewal -- so Auden presents Philip Spender in the opening epistle with the prospect of a "Quest Perilous," of the possibility of opting "for a discipline / that out-peers the monks, a Way of obedience, / poverty and -- good grief! -- perhaps chastity" The course of Eastertide may be seen, then, as a microcosm of what happens during the whole course of a life which results in a literal removing of the flesh and the promise of resurrection and eternal life. The beginning and end of a soul's progress are, in turn, reflected in the progress suggested by a comparison of "Epistle to a Godson" and "Talking to Myself."

4. Body, Mind and Soul

"A New Year Greeting" begins a section of four poems in which Auden plays the twin roles of enlightened biologist and anthropologist reflecting upon bodily things such as micro-organisms and senses. He shows how these reflections are themselves affected by the subjectivity of the thinker, but also how they may lead to a larger understanding of human nature. The section of four poems with which this section is linked provides further commentaries on and, occasionally, correctives to the thought of the earlier poems.

"A New Year Greeting" could be subtitled "Talking to my Skin," for it greets the micro-organisms that live in and on it:

On this day tradition allots
 to taking stock of our lives,
 my greetings to all of you, Yeasts,
 Bacteria, Viruses,
 Aerobics and Anaerobics:
 A Very Happy New Year
 to all for whom my ectoderm
 is as Middle-Earth to me.

There are also enough similarities with "Talking to Myself" to make both poems seem like variations on a theme, and they also show that the structure of Epistle to a Godson is not so strictly defined as to exclude comparisons between poems that fall outside the paired groups. The same "body-part, body, body-politic and world" system of analogies is employed, and there are a number of direct verbal echoes, as the following comparison of passages shows:

Does my inner weather affect
 the surfaces where you live?
 Do unpredictable changes
 record my rocketing plunge
 from fairs when the mind is in tift

and relevant thoughts occur
 to fouts when nothing will happen
 and no one calls and it rains?
 ("A New Year Greeting")

Demands to close or open, include or eject,
 must come from Your corner, are no province of mine
 (all I have done is to provide the time-table
 of hours when You may put them): but what is Your work
 when I librate between a glum and a frolic?
 ("Talking to Myself")³⁰

One of the main differences between the two poems lies in the fanciful elevation of the micro-organisms to the status of sentient beings, whereas the self in "Talking to Myself" does not need such elevation.

The following lines of "A New Year Greeting" make clear that humans stand in a completely different relation to the world than all other beings:

If you were religious folk,
 how would your dramas justify
 unmerited suffering?

By what myths would your priests account
 for the hurricanes that come
 twice every twenty-four hours,
 each time I dress or undress,
 when, clinging to keratin rafts,
 whole cities are swept away
 to perish in space, or the Flood
 that scalds to death when I bathe?

The Biblical event to which these lines refer makes clear that man often merits his suffering, as people in Noah's time did, though there still remains the suggestion that the caprices of Nature may have been "mythologized" even by the writers of the Old Testament. The one thing that is clear, nevertheless, is that man is held accountable for his beliefs and actions, and that a final day of reckoning will come after he

has been freed from both the joys and the accidental tribulations of this world:

Then, sooner or later, will dawn
 a Day of Apocalypse,
 when my mantle suddenly turns
 too cold, too rancid, for you,
 appetising to predators
 of a fiercer sort, and I
 am stripped of excuse and nimbus,
 a Past, subject to Judgement.

The poem thus comes full circle to a point where, after mentioning it in the opening lines, Auden has actually taken stock of his own life, though for a while it looked as if he would be contented with merely taking stock of those lives inhabiting his skin.

"Loneliness," the companion poem to "A New Year Greeting," also deals with something invisible to the eye but felt to be quite as close as, for example, "Yeasts" or "Viruses." Loneliness is personified by Auden in a host of epithets which constitute part of a lengthy "flyting" similar to that practiced occasionally in Middle English and skaldic poetry. Apart from the frequent alliteration, however, these seven-syllable lines have little in common with any skaldic metre:

dirty devil, befouling
 fair fancies, making the mind
 a quagmire of disquiet,
 weakening my will to work,
 shadow without shape or sex,
 excluding consolation,
 blotting out Nature's beauties,
 grey mist between me and God,
 pestilent problem that won't
 be put on the back-burner,
 hard it is to endure you.

The second section cites routine as "the one technique" Auden knows "that enables / . . . [him] to ignore" the "Gate-crashing ghost"

that he is too disgusted to name anywhere except in the title, and he is "safe from . . . [its] haunting / only when soundly asleep." The third section provides the forecast of victory:

History counsels patience:
 tyrants come, like plagues, but none
 can rule the roost for ever.
 Indeed, your totter is near,
 your days numbered: to-morrow
 Chester, my chum, will return.
 Then you'll be through: in no time
 he'll throw you out neck-and-crop.
 We'll merry-make your cadence
 with music, feasting and fun.

This conclusion shows how "Loneliness" reverses the pattern of "A New Year Greeting." There the initial, enthusiastic greeting of the micro-organisms is followed by images of death, and the poem ends on a very sombre note, in which Auden foresees the day when his death will be followed by a "Judgement," presumably leading to either eucatastrophe or damnation. Here Auden begins with an excoriation of his "aggressive / invisible visitor," but then his gloom gives way to a prediction of future happiness in which only loneliness will be banished. It also becomes apparent that another way of managing depression is simply to focus on anything that sustains hope, just as Auden's anticipation of his friend's arrival seems to be enough to get the "blackmailing brute" close to the front door.

In "Smelt and Tasted" and "Heard and Seen," Auden describes in epigrammatic, matter-of-fact form exactly what functions the senses perform for us. The iambic tetrameter couplets thus convey their information in a style that suits the business-like way that senses convey their information. "The nose and palate," for example,

"instantaneously condemn / or praise each fact that reaches them";
 "Events reported by the ear / Are soft or loud, not far or near"; and
 "What-has-been and what-is-to-be / To vision form a unity". This only
 describes the senses in isolation from an interpreting intelligence,
 however, and such a separation is impossible. Both poems show how
 information from the senses is, first of all, immediately transformed
 into something more significant. We almost always and immediately
 guess, for example, whether a sound is "far or near," and "a rifle shot"
 will certainly be considered a matter for concern. This conjunction of
 sensory data and interpreting intelligence, however, still remains
 something that can be done by either an animal or a machine such as a
 computer. Auden, therefore, goes on to show how the senses can become
 part of actions that only humans can perform:

The seen hill stays the way it is,
 But forecasts greater distances,
 And we acknowledge with delight
 A so-on after every sight.
 ("Heard and Seen")

Compared with almost any brute,
 Our savouring is less acute,
 But, subtly as they judge, no beast
 Can solve the mystery of a feast,
 Where love is strengthened, hope restored
 In hearts by chemical accord.
 ("Smelt and Tasted")

These last lines recall those in "Tonight at Seven-Thirty":

Only man,
 supererogatory beast,
 Dame Kind's thoroughbred lunatic, can
 do the honors of a feast

The point in all these poems is that the senses, the intelligence, and
 that part of man which is capable of delight, hope and love, cannot be

treated fully in isolation from one another. The senses themselves are subject to several limitations, but they are absolutely essential to the "chemistry" of man's more exalted states of being.

The fitness of "A Toast" ("to Professor William Empson on the occasion of his retirement in 1971") as a companion piece to "Smelt and Tasted" goes beyond the fact that a toast is one highlight of a feast. The many ambiguities of feeling in this poem stem from Auden's difficulties in unreservedly praising or condemning Empson's work, showing that taste in cultured matters is far more complex than that which concerns the tongue. At the risk of belabouring the image, Auden has tongue in cheek from the opening lines of the first sapphic:

As quid pro quo for your enchanting verses
when approached by Sheffield, at first I wondered,
if I could manage Just a Smack at Empson,
but nothing occurred.

In 1938 Empson had written a poem called "Just a Smack at Auden" in which every line except three in the first stanza rhymes with "end." The opening stanza has five lines, and there are nine further quatrains. Here is a sample:

Waiting for the end, boys, waiting for the end.
What is there to be or do?
What's become of me or you?
Are we kind or are we true?
Sitting two and two, boys, waiting for the end

Shall we send a cable, boys, accurately penned,
Knowing we are able, boys, waiting for the end,
Via the Tower of Babel, boys? Christ will not ascend.
He's hiding in his stable, boys, waiting for the end

What was said by Marx, boys, what did he perpend?
No good being sparks, boys, waiting for the end.
Treason of the clerks, boys, curtains that descend,
Lights becoming darks, boys, waiting for the end.³¹

This seems to have been intended as a parody of various elements of Auden's early poetry -- the cryptic messages, the omniscient grandiloquence, the light verse alongside poems full of images of doom (one is reminded of all these in, especially, "The Orators") -- but Empson's poem seems excessive to the point of parodying itself. Auden's use of the adjective "enchanted" certainly does not apply to this poem, and in any case "enchanted" as an adjective for all the rest of Empson's verse seems rather faint praise. Another irony here is that Auden manages to get in "a Smack at Empson" anyway, even though, supposedly, "nothing occurred," and even if the "smack" consists of nothing more than reminding Empson of his earlier poem.

Auden criticizes Empson openly in the second stanza:

All I could fault was your conceit that Milton's
 God, obtrusive prolix baroque Olympian,
 is our Christian one. Who, though, but you has pondered
 so deeply on Alice?

The very association of Milton and God in the title of Empson's study, Milton's God (London, 1961), which vigorously defends Milton's conception and rendering, must have been offensive to Auden (cf. SW, p. 136) -- hence the break between "Milton's" and "God" at the end of the first line and the beginning of the second. After the guarded praise of Empson's work on Alice,³² Auden directs another mild smack at Empson's poetry that is softened still more by the conditional mood as well as by the self-deprecatory remark (Auden attended Oxford) at the end:

. . . if Graves was right, if at Cambridge
 the tuning's a wee bit sharp, then at Oxford
 it well may be flat.³³

Despite any differences in point of view and poetic practice, a fact which is in any case considered praiseworthy ("Our verbal games are separate, thank heaven"), Auden is at least "twinned" to Empson by "Time," and in the last verse he gives his affection and best wishes to the person of "Bill" Empson. The "feast," if the end of "Smelt and Tasted" may be recalled, would be spoiled by a toast that ended with anything less, or that in any way prevented some "strengthening of love."

"Contra Blake" is more of an aphorism than a poem, and Auden once again takes liberties with what is normally considered important enough to include in a collection of poems. His usual procedure is to gather pieces like this together under headings such as "Shorts," "Marginalia" and the like, but this seventeen syllable "short" is marked out for special status and honoured with a title.³⁴ An idea of the importance that Auden attached to certain "shorts" is given in this passage from his introduction to The Faber Book of Aphorisms, and as it ends with a discussion of the aphorism on which "Contra Blake" is based, it is worth quoting at length:

An aphorism . . . must convince every reader that it is either universally true or true of every member of the class to which it refers, irrespective of the reader's convictions. To a Christian, for example, The knowledge of God is very far from the love of Him is a true statement about a defect in the relation between himself and God; to the unbeliever, it is a true statement about the psychology of religious belief. An aphorism can be polemic in form but not in meaning. Do not do unto others as you would they should do unto you -- their tastes may not be the same -- is not a denial of the Gospel injunction but an explanation of what it really means. The road of excess leads to the palace of wisdom is a borderline case. It is a valid aphorism if one

can safely assume that every reader knows the importance of self-control; one cannot help feeling that, were Blake our contemporary, he would have written sometimes leads. (p. vii)

"Contra Blake," then, supplies this correction:

The Road of Excess
leads, more often than not, to
The Slough of Despond.

One may respond in kind, however, and say that this is valid only "if one can safely assume that every reader knows" Blake's original line, and that the traveller on this road may occasionally reach "the palace of wisdom."

"Contra Blake" also qualifies the concluding lines of its companion poem, "Heard and Seen": "And we acknowledge with delight / A so-on after every sight." If a road on which one is travelling has been made excessively long, in other words, there may seem to be an endless succession of hills to be crossed, and delight may give way to despondence. Another side to the idea of "The Road of Excess" is that this may also be applied to a Christian's exaggeration of his duties and of his fear concerning the consequences of sin. The aptness of the term, "The Slough of Despond," is that Christian in The Pilgrim's Progress has become mired there because of this excess of fear. As "Help" says,

"This miry slough is such a place as cannot be mended. It is the descent whither the scum and filth that attends conviction for sin doth continually run, and therefore it is called the Slough of Despond; for still as the sinner is awakened about his lost condition, there ariseth in his soul many fears, and doubts, and discouraging apprehensions, which all of them get together, and settle in this place.³⁵ And this is the reason of the badness of this ground."

A completely different kind of excess is to be found in Auden's

dual attack on the camera and on the attempt to "see things objectively" in "I Am Not a Camera." Auden throws down the gauntlet, as it were, in his quotation from Eugen Rosenstock-Heussy as an epigraph: "Photographable life is always either trivial or already sterilised." This statement is clearly faulty. All life is photographable, except that which may be said to belong to the inner life (psychological or spiritual), or that which is revealed in speech. As Auden writes in "Runner" (City Without Walls): "The camera's eye / Does not lie, / But it cannot show / The life within" Insofar as this life, however, may be revealed in outward signs, or in the actions that a movie camera may record, the inner life is also photographable. Auden in fact seems to acknowledge this in "Shorts I" when he writes: "Does God ever judge / us by appearances? I / suspect that he does." The importance of the life that cannot be photographed, or that cannot be dealt with adequately by the camera, simply cannot be so great as to render the remainder of life trivial or sterilised.

This quotation, unfortunately, detracts from the value of the string of "shorts" constituting the poem. All these pieces can be seen as effective defences of the subjectivity of vision, or of the way that each human being looks at things in his own distinctive manner, and as pertinent attacks on the way the camera can be used in a rude, deceitful and intrusive way. Given the epigraph, however, one is tempted to add a qualification to many of the statements, especially the first three. The photograph as an object, for example, may be given the status of subject in our "Vision"; a photograph, or the content of one, may also be "named / or beheld as a symbol"; and when Auden writes, "We never look at two people / or one person twice / in the same way", one is

tempted to reply that one never looks at a photograph twice in the same way either. It is also rather excessive to suggest, with or without the combined influence of the epigraph, that choice "On the screen" is reserved exclusively "for camera-crews." Even there we scan the screen in fashions peculiar to each of us, we interpret as well as "witness human behaviour" in different ways, and we are also capable of going beyond passivity by judging and criticizing the movie-maker's choices of subject matter, camera angles, sequences and so on.

Despite these qualifications, "I Am Not a Camera" serves its main purposes well. It strengthens the points made in the three previous poems, that objects and events in the world only come to have meaning through the subjective interpretation which is unique to every person. The main problem with Auden's poem is that it seems to confuse the result of camera-work with the process of attempting to see objectively, merely to "witness human behaviour" in the present and to ignore that "the Past" is affected by "the remembering Present." Whatever the dangers of the latter's desecration of "Vision" may be, Auden has himself shown, by the example of this poem, that its products, the "objects" of photograph and film, may be made "subjects" or "beheld as symbols."

It may be thought that Christopher Isherwood is the main target of Auden's attack on any attempt to appropriate the objectivity of "camera-vision." Isherwood's narrating persona begins Goodbye to Berlin with the now famous statement, "I am a camera," and since the narrator's name is, after all, "Christopher Isherwood," many critics have assumed

an equation which Isherwood resents:

He [Isherwood] is the detached foreign observer, getting his first impressions. "I am a camera," he says to himself, "quite passive, recording, not thinking."

This phrase, I am a camera, was the title John van Druten chose for the play he made out of the novel, in 1951. Taken out of its context, it was to label Christopher himself as one of those eternal outsiders who watch the passing parade of life lukewarm-bloodedly, with wistful impotence. From that time on, whenever he published a book, there would always be some critic who would quote it, praising Mr. Isherwood for his sharp camera eye but blaming him for not daring to get out of his focal depth and become humanly involved with its sitters.³⁶

It is difficult to see such critics as entirely unjust, however, if only because, even while saying this, Isherwood once again goes to the extreme of referring to himself in the third person.

"To Goethe: A Complaint" complements "I Am Not a Camera" by attacking one example of the excess to which the subjectivizing of objects is prone. The "objects" in question here are the "sweethearts," who "never sound as if they mattered", whom Goethe seems to feel compelled to "drag" into the songs that begin "wonderfully . . . / With praise of Nature and her beauty" Auden has lodged a similar complaint against Goethe in an earlier poem, "Good-bye to the Mezzogiorno," which also treats of the association between appearances and reality. The poem is based on the different kind of vision that a different setting (that of the Mediterranean countries) can inspire in a visitor from Northern Europe:

. . . We are rather shocked,
But we need shocking: to accept space, to own

That surfaces need not be superficial
 Nor gestures vulgar, cannot really
 Be taught within earshot of running water
 Or in sight of a cloud. As pupils

We are not bad, but hopeless as tutors: Goethe,
 Tapping homeric hexameters
 On the shoulder-blade of a Roman girl, is
 (I wish it were someone else) the figure

Of all our stamp: no doubt he treated her well,
 But one would draw the line at calling
 The Helena begotten on that occasion,
 Queen of his Second Walpurgisnacht,

Her baby

Goethe's excess may therefore be seen as a mirror image of the camera's defect, the one elevating ordinary beings to an importance far beyond their "true natures," and the other viewing beings, human and otherwise, in terms of nothing but their natures, or in as plain a light as possible. All through the second and second-last sections of poems ("A New Year Greeting" to "I Am Not a Camera" and "To Goethe: A Complaint" to "Loneliness"), then, Auden explores and attempts to show something of the ways in which body and mind, the senses and the understanding, and objectivity and subjectivity of thinking stand in relation to each other.

5. Art and the World

A phrase that can be used to describe the next paired sections of four poems each -- "A Bad Night" to "Pseudo-Questions" and "An Encounter" to "United Nations Hymn" -- is "Art and the World." These two terms are seen as defining opposing realms, though "Anthem" is one exception since it contains little sense of any kind of opposition. Art, whether poetry, music or other forms, is limited in its ability to affect actions in the world, and yet it has its greatest value in helping to reconcile the world

to the individual and to reveal, in its individual productions of harmony and order, ideals to which human orders might attain.

"A Bad Night" is described in an accompanying parenthesis as "a lexical exercise," and one realizes fairly quickly that Auden at least partially recovers from his dispiriting dream and subsequent depression through the countering effect of this word-play. The point of the exercise is to imitate and express feelings and ideas through the sounds of the words themselves. Plain English surfaces just often enough to ensure that the connections of the narrative will be kept clear, as in the opening and closing lines, but a whole slough of rare, archaic, obsolete and dialectical words mire this progress, which is precisely the effect desired. One is not stayed for an excessive period of time, however, for words and phrases such as the following need little translation to convey the essence of what is being said: "ensorcelling" (bewitching); "hirple" (hobble); "stolchy" (from the verb "stoach", meaning to trample wet ground into a mess of holes); "Snudge" (sneaking, niggardly); "Snoachy of speech" (to snuffle, or speak through the nose); and "Cag-mag sheep" (small or inferior sheep; decayed or loathsome meat).³⁷

The second stanza begins with a pun on "consciousness": "Fetched into conscience / By a hoasting [coughing] fit". Two obsolete meanings for "conscience" are "consciousness" and "inner thoughts," but Auden also uses the usual meaning of "conscience," since part of his "darkling," enervated state is due to his inability to care about right and wrong:

Too ebb of verve
 Even to monster [to point out as monstrous]
 Social trifles,
 Or violent over
 The world's wrongs

The solution seems for the moment to be the reading of some good poetry:

To re-faith himself,
 He rummages lines,
 Plangent or pungent,
 By bards of sentence,
 But all to his sample
 Ring fribble or fop,
 Not one of them worth
 A hangman's wages.

This is the only time that Auden speaks so poorly of art or poetry in the eight poems under consideration, and is also one of the only times he fails to "violent over / The world's wrongs". Even so, the act of writing his own poem clearly manifests the restoration of some of his verve, even if some of these lines themselves "Ring fribble or fop," or frivolous and foolish. The transformation also seems to have begun when he, perhaps, left the "bards" to themselves and turned to a favourite pastime -- rummaging the dictionary. Just as Auden considered Speech to be "the mother, not the handmaid, of thought" (SW, p. 122), one may consider the OED to be the mother of both this poem and of the spirits sufficient to write it.

"United Nations Hymn" is different from "A Bad Night" in almost every respect except that it is written in a two-stress metre and is one line short of being the same length. This extremely optimistic work was commissioned as "the official Hymn for the United Nations which was composed by Pablo Casals."³⁸ One of the only negative notes in these lyrics, in fact, is in Auden's attitude to words:

Let mortals beware
 Of words, for
 With words we lie,
 Can say peace

When we mean war,
 Foul thoughts speak fair
 And promise falsely.

The "ensorcelling powers" that "Have contorted space" in "A Bad Night" are here replaced by the enchantments of musician and choir: "all within / The cincture of the sound / Is holy ground". Though Auden earlier failed "To re-faith himself" with poetry, music ("for peace / The paradigm") here inspires him with a great deal of hope. Whereas in the earlier poem he is too spiritless to "violent over / The world's wrongs," here he is too "Elated, Optative" (that mood in which desires or wishes are expressed) to care for anything but that hoped-for day when the world knows a perfect peace:

So may the story
 Of our human city
 Presently move
 Like music, when
 Begotten notes
 New notes beget,
 Making the flowing
 Of time a growing,
 Till what it could be
 At last it is,
 Where even sadness
 Is a form of gladness,
 Where Fate is Freedom,
 Grace and Surprise.

Auden notes at the bottom of the page, "Some of the lines in the last stanza I wrote for a Canadian Film Board Documentary, Long Distance Runner. I found I needed them again." He should have written that most of the last stanza was written for this documentary (cf. "Runner," CWW). Here the couplet, "Where even sadness / Is a form of gladness," has been added, and thoughts of running have no effect on the lines. Here are the lines of "Runner" preceding those just quoted, and it should be kept

in mind that the narrator has just announced the top three placings in a mile event:

The camera's eye
Does not lie,
But it cannot show
The life within,
The life of a runner,
Or yours or mine,
That race which is neither
Fast nor slow,
For nothing can ever
Happen twice,
That story which moves
Like music when

Though Auden in this poem has helped transform a documentary on runners into a consideration of human history and its race, so to speak, it is impossible not to associate the reference to "Fate" in part with the arguable idea that "Toronto's own Bruce Kidd" was destined to win: it was said earlier, after all, that "Fate forbids / Mortals to be at their best always. / God-given is the great day." One may also feel that at the mention of the word "Surprise," the image of the winner breaking the tape flashes simultaneously on the screen. The re-cycled lines find a happier setting, then, in "United Nations Hymn," if only because all human action and civilization ("our human city") form the unalloyed focus of the music's movement.

The last pair of lines are the most disturbing in the poem because words such as "Fate," "Freedom" and "Grace" have a variety of different meanings, and their equation into a series of paradoxes makes them even more difficult to comprehend. Specific explanations can be chosen from a host of speculations, of which the following is but one. A score of music presupposes a composer, who is God, and orchestra and choir are fated to follow it. Fate is not seen as an

inexorable predestination of all specific events, but more as something like an unalterable moral and spiritual imperative which can be disobeyed. The consequences of disobedience on one side of the analogy between music and the ideal city are dissonance and the musician's disgrace, and on the other, the citizen's loss of "Grace," or spiritual death. Beautiful music excellently played transports the listener beyond all knowledge that a score is being followed, which accounts in part for the delight, the "Surprise" of even the most familiar music. Any vision of a new Jerusalem or a fulfilled civilization should also take into account the idea that life will have this character of wonder and surprise. Such a life will not merely serve a predestined, perfect mechanism. The smooth running of "the World-Clock" would be its underlying rhythm, not the monotonous domineering expression of order.

"Moon Landing" deals with an event that appeared to be a "giant-step forward for mankind," and for civilization, but to Auden was little more than a triumph for the biological drives of the male species:

It's natural the Boys should whoop it up for
 so huge a phallic triumph, an adventure
 it would not have occurred to women
 to think worth while, made possibly only

because we like huddling in gangs and knowing
 the exact time: yes, our sex may in fairness
 hurrah the deed, although the motives
 that primed it were somewhat less than menschlich.

The distinction between "male" and "menschlich" (the inadequate translation is "human") is further developed in the second pair of stanzas. The ancestor of man as "an individual member of the biological species" was

the "flint-flaking" cave man; the ancestor of man as a moral being, as "a unique person, with a unique perspective of the world," is Adam, "the myth of our common descent" from him being a way of accounting for all that is greater in man than his biological data and that which is determined by social conditioning (SW, pp. 119-120). "Moon Landing" is largely an attempt, then, to place an event subject to such overblown praise into the perspective of the "unique person":

A grand gesture. But what does it period?
 What does it osse? Wewere always adroiter
 with objects than lives, and more facile
 at courage than kindness: from the moment

the first flint was flaked this landing was merely
 a matter of time. But our selves, like Adam's,
 still don't fit us exactly, modern
 only in this -- our lack of decorum.

Perhaps the "hype" attending the landing leads Auden to say that what is modern about ourselves is the lack of a sense of what is seemly and fitting, for the fifth stanza seems to develop the idea with the comment that "Hector," for example, "was excused the insult of having / his valor covered by television." One cannot help thinking, however, that "Homer's heroes" would have welcomed such an "insult," gaining thereby a world-wide audience as part of the attempt to win glory in the eyes of men. Though it is merely speculation, one also wonders whether Hector would have felt the camera's "degradation of sorrow" ("I Am Not a Camera") to be as insulting as Achilles' ignoble curses and the desecration of his corpse, dragged around the walls of Troy behind Achilles' chariot.

Auden begins the second half of the poem by inverting a saying of Samuel Johnson's ("Worth seeing? Yes; but not worth going to see"),³⁹ saying that the moon could only be "Worth going to see". The differences between the desert of the moon and a "watered / lively garden" on earth go much deeper than aesthetics, for Auden once again attempts to describe the importance of the world that is present to our senses and that saves our sanity, as he writes in "Ode to Terminus" (CWW):

. . . that heavenly
freak for whose manage we shall have to
give account at the Judgement, our Middle-

Earth, where Sun-Father to all appearances
moves by day from orient to occident,
and his light is felt as a friendly
presence not a photonic bombardment

Not only does Auden restore the moon to her place in his personal world ("Unsmudged, thank God, my Moon still queens the Heavens / as She ebbs and fulls, a Presence to glop at"), he also considers any attempt to displace her as sacrilegious. His garden is reminiscent of Eden in several ways. As, perhaps, the original gardeners did, Auden "on August mornings . . . can count the morning / glories," and just as Adam and Eve were the first to learn the meaning of death because of a creature that caused them to "shift their perspectives," Auden writes that death "has a meaning" in his garden, though it is, he hopes, a place where "no engine," like a new incarnation of the serpent, "can shift his perspective." It may be inferred that Auden's access to such a garden is also made possible by the fact that "the old warnings / still have power to scare" him:

. . . Hybris comes to
 an ugly finish, Irreverence
 is a greater oaf than Superstition.

The garden remains "remote from blatherers / about the New, the Von Brauns and their ilk," and it is implied that they are guilty of "Hybris" and "Irreverence." It is also implied that Auden himself is susceptible to "Superstition," but this is not nearly as reprehensible as the other two crimes.

"Moon Landing" follows a structure of two pairs of linked stanzas and a concluding single stanza (repeated twice), so that stanzas five and ten specifically sum up what has been said in the four preceding stanzas. The first pair of stanzas, with its key words, "the motives / that primed it were somewhat less than menschlich", seems meant most specifically for comparison with the eighth and ninth stanzas with their warning against "Irreverence" and "Hybris." The second pair of stanzas, with its two questions and a reference to Adam, is most clearly linked with the sixth and seventh stanzas, which also begin with two questions and contain a number of allusions to the garden of Eden. The fifth stanza concludes the first half of the poem, all of which discusses what the landing "periods" for Auden. It may also be said, metaphorically, that he actually "lands on the moon" in this stanza, for his mention of "our Trio" of astronauts evokes an image of their landing, and it is also his first direct reference to any of the actual participants. The second half of the poem may easily be characterized as a "return to earth," and the tenth stanza sums up what the moon landing "osses," or augurs:

Our apparatniks will continue making
 the usual squalid mess called History:
 all we can pray for is that artists,
 chefs and saints may still appear to blithe it.

This new trio is deliberately contrasted, then, to the "Trio" of astronauts, whose mere bravery and technological competence pales beside those capable of making glad or "blithing" History, or at least appearing to do so ("appear" in this line can mean either "come into view" or "to seem").

The poet speaks as one may imagine a saint might in "Anthem," an effusion of thanksgiving for the creation so uninhibited and so like a "speaking in tongues" that it is momentarily difficult to believe that Auden is the author. Auden's second line, perhaps, derives from George Fox, who, writing in the seventeenth century, "felt the whole creation give forth a new smell to him."⁴⁰ The rest, appropriately enough, reads like an inspired speech from one both glad for peace and trembling at the word of God, themes one may at times expect to hear at Quaker meetings (the sect, also called "The Society of Friends," was founded by Fox):

Let us praise our Maker, with true passion extol Him.
 Let the whole creation give out another sweetness,
 Nicer in our nostrils, a novel fragrance
 From cleansed occasions in accord together
 As one feeling fabric, all flushed and intact

These lines also evoke an image of nature after a wild storm, which is metaphorically true, in one sense, since the poem was written at the conclusion of the war in Europe in 1945.⁴¹

The word "anthem" derives from "antiphon" (OED) which can mean "a responsive hymn or psalm." Such a description is certainly in

harmony with the "one / multitudinous oecumenical song" announced by "Phenomena and numbers" in all their attributes, of which being ("An authoritative This") and time ("an unthreatened Now") are but two. This harmony is in turn the result of God's creation, and "Anthem" itself may be seen as antiphonal to "His Word":

For, united by His Word, cognition and power,
System and Order, are a single glory,
And the pattern is complex, their places safe.

Part of Auden's inspiration in collecting this poem for the first time may have been the moon landing, in which all attention was focussed on space, and the glories of "our Middle- / Earth" ("Ode to Terminus") forgotten. It is also tempting to see the poem as a "blithing of history," as called for at the end of "Moon Landing," but it is about the natural order of all created beings more than it is about human history or any of the results of man's freedom to act for good and ill. Such "blithing" more specifically occurs in "United Nations Hymn," where the vision of the potential movement of "our human city" is put into the best possible light, and where the harmony of human relations may some day be said to echo that of the natural world.

"The Garrison" expands upon the conclusion of "Moon Landing," and begins with a picture of two poets (one of them doubling as a chef) settling in for the night with drinks, music and one of Chester Kallmann's "savory messes." Like the curtain they draw against the night, their "culture" is drawn, so to speak, against the "squalid mess called History" ("Moon Landing") and all else that threatens them with insignificance:

Time crumbs all ramparts, brachypod Nemesis
 catches up sooner or later with hare-swift
 Achilles, but personal song and language
 somehow mizzle them.

Thanks to which it's possible for the breathing
 still to break bread with the dead, whose brotherhood
 gives us confidence to wend the trivial
 thrust of the Present,

so self-righteous in its assumptions and so
 certain that none dare out-face it.

The continuation of traditions in "personal song and language" helps
 confound the destructiveness of "Time," and this "mizzling," conversely,
 places "the trivial / thrust of the Present" into perspective.

This aptly describes what Auden attempts to do in "Moon Landing,"
 in which the latest triumph of technology is seen as trivial and in
 which "apparatriks" are seen to place far too great an importance on
 "the New." "The Garrison" ends with an elaboration of the roles that
 the two friends "and the choir . . . [they] sort with" should play in the
 world:

Whoever rules, our duty to the City
 is loyal opposition, never greening
 for the big money, never neighing after
 a public image.

Let us leave rebellions to the choleric
 who enjoy them: to serve as a paradigm
 now of what a plausible Future might be
 is what we're here for.

It is quite possible that Auden was fully conscious of sounding rather
 smugly self-righteous himself as he takes up the station he has been
 assigned to garrison. The poem with which "The Garrison" is linked,
 after all, deals with the world's shocking lack of concern for his
 paradigmatic refinement.

"A Shock" is misread if Auden is taken too seriously. One expects the telling of some horrifying tale from the opening:

Housman was perfectly right.
Our world rapidly worsens:
nothing now is so horrid
or silly it can't occur.

Auden had a letter of Housman's in mind, part of which is quoted in Forewords and Afterwords: "George Eliot said she was a meliorist: I am a peyorist (i.e., someone who believes the world is steadily getting worse)."⁴² This attitude is often reflected in Housman's poetry. The following selections are from two late poems, the first one beginning with this stanza,

"Oh is it the jar of nations,
The noise of the world run mad,
The fleeing of earth's foundations?"
Yes, yes; lie quiet, my lad.

and the second with these stanzas,

Tis five years since, "An end", said I;
"I'll march no further, time to die.
All's lost; no worse has heaven to give."
Worse it has given, and yet I live.

I shall not die today, no fear:
I shall live yet for many a year,
And see worse ills and worse again
And die of age and not of pain.⁴³

One suspects immediately that Auden's idea of how the world is worsening cannot be quite as serious as anything Housman had in mind when he writes: "Still, I'm stumped by what happened / to upper-middle-class me" The tone of these lines notwithstanding, he attempts to build the story up by delaying its conclusion with a lengthy description of his background and personal attributes. Despite the ill-omen of

having been born in the year Strauss started Elektra, a work that deals with no small amount of violent passion, Auden goes on to describe himself as one of the gentlest souls ever to live.

Then comes the shock:

. . . when I, I, I, if you please,
at Schwechat Flughafen was
frisked by a cop for weapons.

This is, certainly, one indication of increasing violence in the world, and Auden's outrage at the suspicion directed at him crowns the description of his sensitive, peace-loving nature, but it is all too exaggerated to be very convincing. Auden is mocking himself, perhaps suggesting he is not quite as good as he has made himself out to be, and Housman's view of the world is also undercut. The two following poems, "Anthem" and "United Nations Hymn," in many ways further contradict the idea of a world continually worsening, as does the poem preceding it, "An Encounter," which shows that the world affected by Attila the Hun was as bad as, if not worse than, the one in which Auden could be frisked.

"Pseudo-Questions" seems to mock all the earnest considerations in this section of the relationships between artist, art and the various aspects of the world. One irony of the poem is that it makes its own small contribution to the "debates on / Art and Society" which Auden passionately avoids, and another irony is that the poem cannot help but instigate further debate through both the choleric nature of its attack and through its cryptic brevity. The questions Auden asks are false because they presume a certain kind of relationship between Art and

Society, even if it is an antagonistic one. Adalbert Stifter, for example, may have written "his noble idylls" in any "milieu," whether liberal, totalitarian or otherwise, though it is also possible he may have felt compelled to write in that form to avoid pressure from "Metternich / and his Thought Police." Richard Wagner was certainly not a noble character, and he worked in a "liberal milieu" which was at least partly composed of "God-fearing Magistrate[s]," yet he "wrought masterpieces." The implications by the end of the second sapphic are that an artist's makings do not necessarily have a perceptible or provable relationship to his morals or to those of the society to which he belongs.

There is a relationship, nevertheless, and Auden has several times earlier spent a good deal of energy discussing what it means for him.⁴⁴ The last stanza, for example, could in part be directed at the Christian and the critic who wrote The Dyer's Hand:

Wild horses could not drag me to debates on
Art and Society: critics with credos,
 Christian or Marxist, should keep their trap shut,
 lest they spout nonsense.

The focus here, however, is on the words "Society" and "credos," and on their potential misuse in the prescriptive tendencies of critics.

"Credo" is clearly a term of contempt by its association with "trap," a very apt use of the colloquialism for "mouth" because it suggests that a critic's dogma has become so firmly set it does not allow for change and is used at the same time to trap those who disagree. This is not to say that a critic who also happens to be a Christian or a Marxist should never write, or that he should pretend he can quell the influence of his

beliefs while writing. He should, however, remember that membership in a society neither explains a person's inner life, the source of artistic expression, nor accounts entirely for the forms this expression takes. If an artist's only role is to further the specific goals of a society, he ceases to be an artist and becomes a propagandist. There is no possibility of a perfect agreement between art and society in any case, just as one person is different from another person and from any collective of which he is a member. To expect conformity of the artist or his art to a particularly rigid credo is the same as denying a person's uniqueness and his right to personal expression, whether in art or any other form. As regards art, then, such credos are nonsensical, and they are potential justifications of tyranny regarding society.

"An Encounter" may be considered as an expansion of "Pseudo-Questions" in several ways, one being that, in a purely formal sense, it has three times as many sapphics, and another being that it also hinges on an unanswerable question, "What can Leo have / actually said" to Attila to cause him to leave Rome unravaged in 452 A.D.? "An Encounter" is arranged into three fairly distinct sections of three stanzas each. The first introduces the story, describing "Attila and his Hun Horde, . . . / the creatures of an animist horse-culture," as being on the verge of defeating all "further hopes of a Western and Christian / civilization." The second three sapphics outline what was visible of the encounter between the Pope and Attila in Rome. The third section reports the outcome and all that can be known with certainty concerning the nature of what actually was said:

Their parley was held out of earshot: we only
 know it was brief, that suddenly Attila
 wheeled his horse and galloped back to the encampment,
 yelling out orders.

Next morning the site was vacant: they had vanished,
 never to vex us again. What can Leo have
 actually said? He never told, and the poets
 can only imagine

speeches for those who share a common cosmos:
 all we can say is that he rose to the occasion,
 that for once, and by His own standards, the Prince of
 this world showed weakness.

The temptation to fill out the story can take a number of different directions, and several are suggested in Auden's own description of the encounter. One is that Leo convinced Attila in some way that he was transgressing against the will of God. Perhaps the apparent virtue of Leo, accompanied "by psalm-singing brethren," not only "astonished" Attila with their strangeness but convinced him of their holiness. It may be that Attila simply decided, superstitiously, to avoid the risk of plundering a city he half-suspected of having gods equal in strength to his own, not considering their goodness or holiness in the least. The trappings of pomp, splendour and power in a city like Rome, and in a person with the presumably regal bearing of Pope Leo, who may have appeared to Attila as simply another "Prince of the World," may also have had some influence on his decision.

The fact remains that none of this can go beyond speculation, and the event is far enough back in time to prevent even today's poets from being able to ascertain with any validity what their speeches were -- they "can only imagine / speeches for those who share a common cosmos" The barrier between "Art and Society" as suggested in

"Pseudo-Questions" is here extended to that between art and societies past, but there are, after all, several things that can be said without hesitation. That Pope Leo "rose to the occasion" does not say very much except that he obviously did something besides make a show of physical strength. Brute force is the main standard by which "the Prince of / this world" measures things, no matter in whom he is incarnated.⁴⁵

Attila had no "earthly reason" (my emphasis) for not sacking Rome, and one moral that may clearly be drawn from "An Encounter" is that even the most violent men will at times recognize that there is something greater than their strength and their earthly reasons. That a Pope should have been the means by which this was revealed to Attila has its own implications with regard to the definition of this "something," but, again, neither the poem nor the event it refers to warrants further elaboration. "An Encounter" also accentuates the comic tone of "A Shock" since Auden in the latter has his own encounter with the "Prince of this world" in the form of an airport security man. Auden cuts an absurd figure compared to Pope Leo's calm self-command, and the only thing that rises to the occasion in "A Shock," so to speak, is Auden's comically exaggerated indignation.

One of the main aspects of the comparison of "art and the world" in all these poems of the third and the seventh sections is that the artist as such is for the most part ineffectual in his dealings with humanity. Even at his best he is far less important than minor religious figures, let alone saints and Popes. Despite all the insults that the world inflicts upon artists, and despite all the references to the

limitations and the secondary status of art with regard to world events, Auden rises to new heights of confidence in "Anthem" and "United Nations Hymn." In so doing, he shows exactly what an artist's powers (specifically those of poet and musician) can be directed to and what the chief glory of art can be. A poet can praise God and bear witness to His Word, whether this is done overtly through a praise of his creation (as in "Anthem"), or in subtler forms. Although anyone can praise God in many different ways, a poet's arrangement of ideas and words can itself be seen as an approximation of the glory and order of the phenomenal world. The same verbal order can be seen as an image of what human order can be:

Every poem, therefore, is an attempt to present an analogy to that paradisaical state in which Freedom and Law, System and Order are united in harmony. Every good poem is very nearly a Utopia. Again, an analogy, not an imitation; the harmony is possible and verbal only. (DH, p. 71)

"United Nations Hymn," then, takes the analogy yet a step further by referring directly to and building up an image of this Utopia throughout, concluding with the lines, "Where Fate is Freedom, / Grace and Surprise."

6. Nature and Human Nature

The poems in the fourth section ("Stark bewölkt" to "Doggerel by a Senior Citizen") and the sixth ("Old People's Home" to "Ode to the Medieval Poets") revolve around comparisons and contrasts of nature and man, and, to a lesser extent, of different kinds of human nature. Plant and animal life, inorganic material, and weather are all seen in the light of likenesses with and differences from man that reveal both their kinship and the wideness of "the interrupt" that divides them ("The

Aliens"). All that is not human or man-made is, of necessity, treated anthropomorphically, and Auden makes no pretense of attempting to do otherwise. The fabric of analogies Auden sees within the realm of nature and between man and nature does not presuppose a completely happy and comforting understanding of natural order. He berates the "weather-god" in "Stark bewölkt," for example, for making the weather continually glum, and "the interrupt" between man and nature becomes "a prohibitive fracture" where insects are concerned. There is a profound disorder as well whenever analogies threaten to become identities, an idea that comes to the fore especially in "The Aliens," "Circe" and "Old People's Home," in which "insect," "flower" and "vegetable" describe certain kinds of behaviour more aptly than the adjective, "human."

"Stark bewölkt" (completely overcast) is a light entertainment in the form of an address to the "weather-god." Auden is alternately glum, angry, exasperated, imploring and demanding in the attempt to get his personification of the weather to change its mind. He cites all the disadvantages of overcast skies for man, plant and beast, as well as the advantages of sunny skies, though the opportunity to sun-bathe is not one of them: "ultra- / violet vapids the brain, / bids us be stodge and stupid." The main advantage is cited in the little moral of the last verse paragraph:

Have done! What good does it do,
 dumb god, just to deject us?
 Foul our function may be, but
 foul weather won't reform it.
 If you merely wish our world
 to mend its ways, remember:
 when happy, men on the whole
 behave a wee bit better,
 when unhappy, always worse.

This light message is not directed at an imaginary being so much as it is at anyone with an interest in having the world "mend its ways." The ending, in other words, suggests an analogy between man and the weather that recalls Auden's desire "to be to my water-brethren as a spell / of fine weather" ("Thanksgiving for a Habitat," AH). His attitude in "Stark bewölkt," however, is not as "bright" as he would like it to be, and several times he ascribes attitudes to the weather-god for which he himself is responsible. He clearly turns his own "scowling, vindictive, frowning face" to the skies when he writes:

Day after day we waken
to be scolded by a scowl,
venomous and vindictive,
a flat frowning Friday face,
horrid as a hang-over,
and mean as well

Auden also refers to the making of "brandy or beer" several lines later, and says in the next verse paragraph that drunkenness would be one means of ignoring the bad weather, but that he is "dead sober all day." This suggests that sobriety does not necessarily extend into the night, and that he may be having his own struggles with hang-overs when he describes the "horrid" countenance of the heavens on successive mornings. The simple point remains, however, that one's behaviour or attitude rarely improve when confronted by another's dolefulness, anger, vindictiveness or censure, and the lesson has value only for men since the weather-god is deaf as well as "dumb."

Such a lesson is especially applicable to poets, and Auden sees it as a duty to "look at / this world with a happy eye / but from a sober perspective" ("The Horatians", CWW).⁴⁶ "Ode to the Medieval

Poets," the companion poem to "Stark bewölkt," can be considered a continuation of the lesson. "Chaucer, Langland, Douglas, Dunbar" and all their "brother Anons" were faced with hardships from temporal, political and religious sources, but still managed "to write . . . cheerfully, / with no grimaces of self-pathos". Having just shown a certain moroseness himself in "Stark bewölkt," Auden is clearly not always free from being associated with those modern "makers" who,

beset by every creature comfort,
immune, they believe, to all superstitions,
even at their best are so often morose or
kinky, petrified by their gorgon egos.

In "Ode to the Medieval Poets," Auden attempts a dissociation from such a sterile atmosphere, an idea that is further emphasized by the virgule in the following lines (it is deleted, however, in Collected Poems):

We all ask, but I doubt if anyone
can really say why all age-groups should find our
Age quite so repulsive. / Without its heartless
engines, though, you could not tenant my book-shelves,
on hand to deflect my ear and chuckle
my sad flesh: I would gladly just now be
turning out verses to applaud a thundery
jovial June when the judas-tree is in blossom,
but am forbidden by the knowledge
that you would have wrought them so much better.

These lines contrast with the earlier inability of lines from "bards of sentence," none of which are considered "worth / a hangman's wages" ("A Bad Night"), to rescue Auden from depression. That his attitude has also improved significantly from "Stark bewölkt" is found in his desire "to applaud a thundery / jovial June", a month which sounds as if it had

its own large share of completely overcast days.

The excuse for remaining "dumb" on the subject of good weather, however, does not seem an entirely satisfactory one. It suggests, especially since he has been a little "long-winded" in "Stark bewölkt," that bad weather is, for him, more amenable subject matter. There is also a hint that Auden will not allow his ego to be bruised by a comparison with the nature poetry of the medieval poets. On the other hand it is a simple fact that Auden could not write the kind of nature poetry that takes account of the manifold, specific details of flora and fauna. He did not know them,⁴⁷ to begin with, and he was also more interested in the general order of nature, in the history of ideas about nature, and the kind of reflections it could give rise to concerning man's place in the world. An attempt at a lengthy description of something like a "judas-tree," for example, would likely result in something not "worth a hangman's wages", regardless of the mood the reader is in. The main interest of this tree for Auden was probably its name: folklore has it that Judas hanged himself on this kind of tree. The image of another tree, the one that Adam and Eve "hung" themselves on, so to speak, is evoked in the second-last line by the words "forbidden" and "knowledge." The praise that concludes the ode is magnified by this allusion, since Auden suggests the nature poetry of the medieval poets is, like the Tree of Life in Eden, untouchable.

"Natural Linguistics" is one kind of nature poem for which Auden is suited, as it deals with general categories and the ways that "Every created thing" has "of pronouncing its ownhood". The poem reads like

both a botanist's and a philologist's description of the evolution of language from stone to human being. Auden takes care, however, to avoid the usual emphasis on the idea of the superiority of human, spoken language, and he sets the tone with these lines:

basic and used by all, even the mineral tribes,
is the hieroglyphical koine of visual appearance
which, though it lacks the verb, is, when compared
with our own
heaviest lexicons, so much richer and subtler in shape-nouns,
color-adjectives and apt prepositions of place.

Shortly after this he writes, "motive, too, in the eyes of beasts is the language of gesture / (urban life has, alas, sadly impoverished ours)" This continues to the point where the apparent desire^{both} to curb the tendencies to pride in our own forms of communication and to scorn those of other creatures begins to dominate the poem. As soon as Auden begins to describe features unique to human languages, he shows how they can be used for ill. This is complemented by descriptions of the ways that animals make up for what they lack with qualities that compare favourably with corresponding human weaknesses.

In an indirect way Auden describes that part of man which is eternal, subject to judgement by a being yet higher than he, and capable of building "a second nature of tomb and temple" for which "lives must know the meaning of if." Man, in "Natural Linguistics," can "conceive of a WILL," make "subjunctive or negative statements," "sing . . . self-reproach or repentance," tell legends, translate, say novel things, and try "greedily . . . to publish / all the world into [his] picture at once" (this last point may also serve as a description of the poem). Animals have none of these abilities, but Auden's emphasis is on the simple

Science, Aesthetics, Ethics, may huff and puff but they
cannot extinguish your magic: you marvel
the commuter as you wondered the savage.

This stanza also brings "Pseudo-Questions" to mind in the sense that the cuckoo's "ethics" (as regards its "nesting habits") have no bearing on the way its song is reacted to, but, on the other hand, its "two-note act" is hardly a masterpiece that "Aesthetics" alone could account for.

This "magic" can only be borne witness to or recorded, as Auden does in his diary, where "year after year" he "scribbles," upon first hearing the cuckoo, "of a holy moment." One of the few other kinds of event he enters is "the death of friends." Perhaps Auden knows that he makes an association similar to one made in Japanese tradition, which links the cuckoo with the idea of eternity, one of its epithets being "bird of the other world."⁴⁸ One may also wonder, initially, whether Auden's selection of "idle questions" is concluded with "Will butter be cheaper?" merely for comic effect. Auden knew, however, that "According to German tradition, if the first cuckoo were heard in the north, the year would be disastrous, if in the south, it would be a good butter year" (Certain World, p. 91). The cuckoo seems present in myths concerning almost every aspect of human life, but, again, rational explanations are apparently useless beside the simple fact that the cuckoo has caused people to marvel at its powers throughout recorded history.

Auden attempts again to lessen the sense of a gap between man and certain parts of nature in the first verse paragraph of "The Aliens." He does this by continually describing plants and "hot-blooded Beasts" in human terms, thereby bringing these beings closer to man's level, and by

doing the reverse -- reminding man of all the attributes he shares with animal-kind. Auden has a light joke at the expense of Europeans in the opening lines, for "the interrupt" may be likened to the Atlantic Ocean: "Wide though the interrupt be that divides us, runners and counters / from the Old World of the Plants" His emphasis, however, is on the fact that we can "nod . . . [plants] as neighbours" just as "Old World" Europe and New World America can "nod" each other. Auden goes on to say that "we didn't need Darwin to tell us / horses and rabbits and mice are our cognates, the double-voiced song-birds / cousins, however removed" He goes even further in later lines, suggesting that animals have moved onto the "foreright" (a young branch, "shooting straight out" (OED)) to humanity. Auden seems to be aware of the doubtful character of this kind of thinking, but the assertions in the latter part of the following quotations show he does not believe it to be entirely fanciful:

They also, we cannot but fancy, are peering
 at a horizon as we do, aware of, however obscurely,
 more than they must be concerned with, and vaguely elated
 at being
 someone who's up and about: yes, even their humblest
 have, surely,
 nosed a few steps on the hazardous foreright to courage,
 utterance, joy and collateral love. That is why, in our
 folk-tales,
 toads and squirrels can talk, in our epics the great can
 be compared to
 lions or foxes or eagles.

This last line stops in mid-hexameter, and there is double the usual spacing between verse-paragraphs. Both breaks reinforce the image of "fracture" in the lines opening the second paragraph:

But betwen us and the Insects,
 namely nine-tenths of the living, there grins a prohibitive
 fracture

empathy cannot transgress: (What Saint made a friend of a roach
or
preached to an ant-hill?) Unrosed by a shame, unendorsed by a
sorrow,
blank to a fear of failure, they daunt alike the believer's
faith in a fatherly providence and the atheist's dogma of
purely
random events.

Auden obviously exaggerates, insisting empathy is impossible with all insects, and claiming to speak for mankind when he is primarily indulging a personal horror. To his credit, he does not strengthen his argument cheaply by naming only the most obnoxious insects. Three of the four named or alluded to are traditionally the most popular (or least repulsive). Hatred for roaches is understandable, but ants, butterflies (fresh "from the "cere-cloth / winged and mateable") and bees (from "towns where / sex is reserved for the Few") have not done poorly at all under human consideration. Butterflies have not done so much "havoc to any / unitive sense" to have prevented being used as images, for example, of man's death and resurrection, and the industry and orderliness of ant and bee have often been used as models for human life. The idea of the insect as "Civics Teacher," though, is something that bothered Auden as much as the insect itself, as this poem and "Bestiaries Are Out" in About the House amply testify. Here bees are considered "animate tool-kits / [who] perish from overwear," and in "Bestiaries Are Out" Auden writes:

Though some believe (some even plan
To do it) that from Urban Man,
By Advertising plus the aid
Of drugs, an insect might be made.

No. Who can learn to love his neighbor
 From neuters whose one love is labor,
 To rid his Government of knaves
 From commonwealths controlled by slaves?

To make insect ways understandable, according to Auden, or to
 see them in an analogous relationship to human life,

one is tempted to cook up a Gnostic
 myth of an earlier Fall, preceding by aeons the Reptiles:
 Adam, a crab-like creature who'd just wriggled out of a steamy
 ocean where he had failed at making a living and now lay
 moribund, choked, on a shore without song. Unto whom the Seducer,
 not our romantic Satan but a clever cartesian Archon,
 coaxingly thus: Not doing very well, are you, poor deathling,
no, and unlikely to do any better, thanks to the schemes of
We-Know-Whom. (He's a Precious but logic was never his forte.)
Freedom may manage in Heaven with Incorporeals, but for
ghosted extended matter the consequence is to be doomed to
err where an error is mortal. But trust me and live, for I do know
clearly what needs to be done. If I programme your ganglia for you,
you shall inherit the earth.

This is one of Auden's nastiest attacks on Gnosticism to date, as he
 suggests that the logical consequence of the belief in matter as evil,
 and in the superiority of the mind as man's only good element, is a
 desire for the automaton-like existence of the insect. One would have
 his ganglia programmed and gain perfect control over the weaknesses of
 "the flesh," or, more precisely, over all human weaknesses.

In the lines concluding "The Aliens" Auden pulls back from the
 lengthy offensive of the second verse paragraph, and he realizes, to use
 another line from "Bestiaries Are Out," "How anthropomorphic and absurd"
 his invention is:

Such a myth, we all know, is no answer.
 What they mean to themselves or to God is a meaningless question:
 they to us are quite simply what we must never become.

In one sense, the last line does not say very much, because it can safely

be assumed that Auden would never want us to become any kind of animal. It is less directed at insects, then, than at the state of being "the Seducer" would want us to accept, in which loss of freedom is the price that must be paid for a roach-like perfection, "Unrosed by a shame, unendorsed by a sorrow, / blank to a fear of failure" and, one may add, "blank" to a good deal more.

"Circe" deals with a seduction that is the mirror image of the kind described in "The Aliens." In "The Aliens" the "poor deathling," exhausted with the struggle for life, with the responsibility of freedom, and overly conscientious about all the failures to which he seems doomed, is tempted to sacrifice humanity and responsibility to gain perfect control over himself and his world. In "Circe," the "poor alien" is little more than vaguely dissatisfied with life, but is tempted nevertheless to give up on the attempt to control it. The Circe of this poem certainly does not appeal to wayfarers who have seen years of great hardship:

Her Telepathic-Station transmits thought-waves
the second-rate, the bored, the disappointed,
and any of us when tired or uneasy,
are tuned to receive.

So, though unlisted in atlas or phone-book,
Her Garden is easy to find. In no time
one reaches the gate over which is written
large: MAKE LOVE NOT WAR.

For a while this is the only sign of Circe, who decides to appear more fully only after the schmaltzy, drowsy atmosphere of her Garden has had a chance to sedate the victim:

. . . just as the pilgrim
is starting to wonder "Have I been hoaxed by
a myth?", he feels Her hand in his and hears Her
murmuring: At last!

With me, mistaught one, you shall learn the answers.
What is Conscience but a nattering fish-wife,
the Tree of Knowledge but the splintered main-mast
of the Ship of Fools?

Consent, you poor alien, to my arms where
sequence is conquered, division abolished:
soon, soon, in the perfect orgasm, you shall, pet,
be one with the All.

She does not brutalize Her victims (beast^s could bite or bolt), She simplifies them to flowers, sessile fatalists who don't mind and only can talk to themselves.

Circe is a personification of the "Self's" desire to be free of the thought, the conscience, the search for knowledge and for the order that are primarily concerns of the "Ego." The reverse is the case in the words of the "clever cartesian Archon" in "The Aliens," who tempts the "Ego" to desire complete control over the Self, and to inherit the earth. The temptation in "Circe" is for the "poor alien" to sacrifice humanity and responsibility by allowing the earth to inherit him, as it were, as he shall "be one with the All."

For an insect-alien like the bee, sex and other pleasures are reserved for the few. For societies in which responsibility has been abandoned by the flower-children, power and the freedom to "DO HARM / AS THOU WILT" is reserved for "a privileged Few." To complete a very close series of correspondences with "The Aliens," "Circe" concludes with a moralistic warning:

Dear little not-so-innocents, beware of
 Old Grandmother Spider: rump Her endearments.
 She's not quite as nice as She looks, nor you quite
 as tough as you think.

The crowning point of the warning is that "Circe" is an "alien" herself,

wishing others to become "sessile fatalists" (not swine, for they "could bite or bolt"), presumably for easier conquest in what may be termed her desire for inheritance of the earth. The choice of an old female spider as Circe's true form is also very likely intended to bring the black widow to mind, renowned for her propensity to devour mates. The implications are immediately obvious for the "marriage" of self and ego within each person. The suppression of either, as both "Circe" and "The Aliens" show, would lead to a loss of humanity and freedom, and the health of both "mates" depends upon the equipoise of their relationship.

"Doggerel by a Senior Citizen" at the beginning suggests that Auden himself is alienated and perhaps ripe for submission to yet another dualistic myth, this time in a historical context. This is a fallacy to which the old are especially prone, that the world in their youth was a golden age and that the present age is all wrong:

Our earth in 1969
Is not the planet I call mine,
The world, I mean, that gives me strength
To hold off chaos at arm's length.

My Eden landscapes and their climes
Are constructs from Edwardian times,
When bath-rooms took up lots of space,
And, before eating, one said Grace.

The automobile, the aeroplane,
Are useful gadgets, but profane:
The enginery of which I dream
Is moved by water or by steam.

Auden covers fairly familiar territory for much of the poem, rehearsing his dislike of "Liturgical reforms," "Manichaeian pornography," "The Anti-Novel," "Free Verse," "those Ph.D.'s . . . / Who dig the symbol and the myth", and "Permissiveness" in education. These may be aspects of the

modern world that are in the ascendant, and may with some legitimacy be termed "Our earth in 1969," but that is not to say that Auden's private realm of values is totally alien to other citizens, junior or senior. Auden knows this, and that he does not really feel alienated is also apparent from the light tone and the jog-trot rhythms of his quatrains.

Auden becomes a little more serious in the last three stanzas, making sure it is understood that he still considers himself an active citizen of the civilized world:

Though I suspect the term is crap,
 If there is a Generation Gap,
 Who is to blame? Those, old or young,
 Who will not learn their Mother-Tongue.

But Love, at least, is not a state
 Either en vogue or out-of-date,
 And I've true friends, I will allow,
 To talk and eat with here and now.

Me alienated? Bosh! It's just
 As a sworn citizen who must
 Skirmish with it that I feel
 Most at home with what is Real.

To know one's own language, or the "mother" of all idiolects and of generational and class dialects, makes possible "the pentecostal marvel" ("Ode to Terminus," CWW) of translation, and overcomes problems of changing taste so that "Sixty," for example, can "make sense to Sixteen-Plus" ("Prologue at Sixty," CWW). The aggressive stance of the last stanza is accentuated by the dropping of a syllable at the beginning of the last two lines so that they both begin and end with a strong stress. The point stressed in this stanza is that Auden is not about to succumb to the difficulties of age, but that as long as he is alive and capable, he will fulfill his "duty to the City," though as a member, apparently,

of the "loyal opposition" ("The Garrison").

"Old People's Home" deals with those who have lost or are close to losing the very ability to "Skirmish . . . / . . . with what is Real." The women in this home have been reduced to the status of beggars: "All are limitory, but each has her own / nuance of damage." The word "limitory" derives from the "limiter," a "friar licenced to beg within certain limits" (OED), but instead of healthy, religious freeloaders, Auden evokes the more common image of a group of beggars with different grades of physical and intellectual handicaps.

Auden's description of the different "nuance[s] of damage" reads like a classification of different levels in a spiritual inferno, its most striking feature being that the more competent are in deeper. "The elite," for example, are described as if they are children, being able to walk, "dress and decent themselves" and "read a book all through," and they are the unhappiest:

. . . perhaps their very
carnal freedom is their spirit's bane: intelligent
of what has happened and why, they are obnoxious
to a glum beyond tears.

The next group, or "the average majority" in their wheelchairs, at the worst have to "endure T.V." Then "the loners" are placed in the highest attainable level of the inferno, "muttering in Limbo," and finally, "the terminally incompetent" are seen as having "risen" to a state of purity, beyond happiness or unhappiness,

as improvident,
unspeakable, impeccable as the plants
they parody. (Plants may sweat profusely but never
sully themselves.)

Auden's apparent disgust with the nature of this home continually clashes with his compassion. This is partly revealed in the ambiguity of much of his diction. Two examples of this are the words "obnoxious" and "unspeakable," both of which carry abusive overtones along with their more precise meanings in the context of these lines. "Obnoxious" is used to describe the susceptibility of the more competent old people to suffering the deepest depressions, and "unspeakable" primarily means that "the terminally incompetent" are incapable of expressing themselves.

As he does throughout "Doggerel by a Senior Citizen," Auden contrasts aspects of the world in the past with the present, but this time there is little humour. The world's "Old Ones" used to have "an audience and secular station." They were, in effect, considered as citizens capable of making a contribution to family and society, but now they are "stowed out of conscience / as unpopular luggage." This overstates the case -- old people's homes cannot be that bad. Perhaps Auden exaggerates because of his own fear of receiving such treatment. Perhaps this fear has its foundation in his own awareness of what he tends to feel about the very old and their utter dependence on others. One also wonders how willing he is to restore "an audience and secular station" to the old when he considers his own "week-end visits" to a friend, who cannot be the same as she was "in the pomp and sumpture of her hey-day," as "a good work."

That he suspects himself of not being entirely free from his share of guilt in modern attitudes, even though he is himself a "senior citizen," makes the conclusion to the poem a little more than a rhetorical question:

. . . Am I cold to wish for a speedy
painless dormition, pray, as I know she prays,
that God or Nature will abrupt her earthly function?

The shock of hearing someone praying for another's death is, however, softened by many things, the chief one being that his friend clearly thinks that her time is done. The breaking off of one's "earthly function" (my emphasis) also suggests that death is not so complete as to break the continuation of that function which may be called "spiritual." This implication is strengthened by Auden's choice of the word "dormition," which evokes the old image of death as a kind of sleep, but with the difference that the word is traditionally associated with the "death . . . of the righteous" (OED) and the repose of one's soul until the judgement.

Auden, naturally, hopes for the same kind of death when his time comes, and the ending of "Old People's Home" is echoed by that of "Talking to Myself," which also keeps open the possibility of an after-life:

Time, we both know, will decay You, and already
I'm scared of our divorce: I've seen some horrid ones.
Remember: when Le Bon Dieu says to You Leave Him!
please, please, for His sake and mine, pay no attention
to my piteous Dont's, but bugger off quickly.

One of the ways of knowing when this message has come is when one begins to resemble something out of nature more than one resembles other human beings. It is not cold at all to wish for death before one begins to lead a plant-like existence, living being nothing more than a maintenance of life-support systems. This would be another instance of a comparison between man and a being from nature becoming more of an identity than an analogy, but the difference between the treatment of this idea in

"Old People's Home" and "Circe" (or "The Aliens") is that many of the old simply have no choice in the matter, whereas "flower-children" do.

Such considerations form the darker side of all the poems in the fourth and sixth sections, which generally deal with the fabric of analogies seen by man within nature, between man and nature and between different kinds of human nature. The "sunnier" side of the poems in these sections comes out when Auden, happily indulging an anthropomorphism which he sees as inevitable, but without exaggerating any claims to understand man or nature, uses these analogies to reconcile nature to man and to help us understand ourselves a little better. Auden also uses them simply to praise whatever is worthy, whether non-human, such as the cuckoo or a "jovial June," or human, such as the medieval poets.

7. The Top of the Vault

The crowning section of the vault structure of Epistle to a Godson is composed of "Shorts I," "The Ballad of Barnaby," and "Shorts II."⁴⁹ None of these titles refers to poems, strictly speaking, for even "The Ballad of Barnaby" is the libretto for music composed by pupils in the music department, headed by Chuck Turner, at a girls' school (Wykeham Rise) in Washington, Connecticut.⁵⁰ Perhaps the lightness of this section is meant to accord with its lofty position, but that is not to say that the three pieces are inconsequential or of minimal value. "The Ballad of Barnaby," as mentioned earlier, partially fulfills Auden's desire to write "legends / of ultimate eucatastrophe" ("Epistle to a Godson"), and Barnaby's vaulting in the "Virgin's" crypt (or vault) provides the model for the structure of Auden's volume. The "Shorts" themselves often

refer to other poems in the volume, and can be read as marginalia that throw additional light on the themes of those poems. Some of these "shorts" also have an aphoristic strength that puts them on a level, if the relative value of different forms can be ranked, with many of the poems in Epistle to a Godson. All of them are at the least very interesting. The problem with reviewing "shorts" like these, however, as discussed in the previous chapters, is that their quality resides precisely in their ability to stimulate further thought, making the content of any criticism largely a display of the critic's own ideas. I will restrict my commentary, therefore, to the way that Auden seems to have organized the "shorts" and to certain points of interest that several of them have by themselves or in regard to other poems in the volume.

"Shorts I" begins with four haiku and a tanka that show something of the human side of men usually considered only in terms of their professions or public images. Poet, philosopher, politician, theologian and engineer must each as a result endure some humorous diminishing of the great importance often attached to them, or of the awe in which they can be held. The effect of the third "short," for example, is largely due to the fact that Auden chooses three men renowned for their stern outlook on life: "Who can picture / Calvin, Pascal or Nietzsche, / as a pink chubby boy?"

The next six "shorts" deal in general with the theme of man and nature, and the first one may be seen as a comment on the origin of the attitudes that Auden attacks in "I Am Not a Camera": "The glass-lens / desanctified Sight: men believed / they had seen through Nature." Just

as Auden seems to exaggerate his case against the camera in that poem, or to indulge a prejudice not entirely well-founded, here he implicates the glass-lens for the desanctification that is entirely human in origin. The last "short" in this section, a single sapphic, brings "Stark Bewölkt" to mind:

Youth, like the Press, is excited when Nature
throws one of her tantrums, but Age approves Her
when She's courteous: earthquakes, floods, eruptions,
seem a bit vulgar.

"Age" comes across as the upholder of civil behaviour here, and "Youth" receives one of Auden's strongest insults in being likened to "the Press."

The next eight haiku are a miscellany of reflections upon human nature, and particularly upon the way the ego deals with information from the senses, which recalls poems such as "Heard and Seen" and "Smelt and Tasted." The four haiku after this all touch on moral issues, beginning with, "Oncers do no damage: / only those who could love / can really corrupt." This reverses the expected conclusion, which nevertheless remains as an implicit corollary: "only those who could love" can help us to become better than we are. The next haiku is also superficially cynical: "Only bad rhetoric / can improve this world: / to true Speech it is deaf." As far as language is concerned only "bad rhetoric" is transitive, capable of moving the crowd to action, whether individuals in it will or no, and this can be to the benefit or, as its implicit corollary, to the detriment of the world. "True Speech" is intransitive and is addressed to individuals, who act upon it, if at all, according to the

pleasure of their wills and not because they are caught up in the compelling movements of a mass of men stirred to action.

The last five "shorts" touch on the "big issues" -- the meaning of life and death, and aspects of God's guidance and judgement of our lives. The "shorts" may be considered marginalia on the history of a person's body and soul from birth to the day of judgement. Physiologically and sociologically speaking, man is "cosmic trivia," his "being is unnecessary," and at death his body disintegrates into "smaller, simpler" organisms. In a personal and spiritual sense, though, he is "essential," he is "meant to be," and he is responsible for thoughts and actions for which he may, or may not, accept the softly spoken guidance (and charges) of "God and the Accuser." The "Accuser" is "the Voice of Conscience," which Auden discusses in A Certain World:

Freud recognized that there was a profound difference between the Voice of Conscience, i.e., the Voice of the Holy Spirit, and the Voice of the Superego, but was too inclined, in my opinion, to identify the former with the Voice of Reason. The superego speaks loudly and either in imperatives or interjections -- "DO THIS! DON'T DO THAT! BRAVO! YOU SON OF A BITCH!" Conscience speaks softly and in the interrogative -- "Do you really think so? Is that really true?" (pp. 87-88)

Lastly, we are subject to judgement, something that Auden apparently believes to occur moment by moment in our daily lives and not merely on some one distant day.⁵¹ Perhaps the reason that Auden suspects that God does "judge / us by appearances" is simply that, for God, there would be no question of being misled by the difference between the inner man and the outward show, for He would know exactly how the two are related.

The last three haiku also serve as an introduction to "The Ballad of Barnaby," for Barnaby is first stricken with conscience, turns to God for help in "untying" his bonds to the "wicked world," and his tumbling comes to be judged as an earnest of pity as worthy as the activities of the other monks. Several of the eight shorts comprising the first section of "Shorts II" (all commenting on the business of writing) reflect back upon "The Ballad of Barnaby." The brethren, for example, who are impressed by Barnaby's tumbling in the crypt, are looking at actions that were originally learned because of Barnaby's "Greed" and "Vainglory" and are now performed from motivations that, at least partly, have something to do with "Fear" and "Guilt." The first couplet also applies to any artistic expression, and may be seen as an additional comment on the themes of "Pseudo-Questions" in that art may have a character that is completely different from that of its maker and of the society in which it is produced. Another couplet in this section, written in the form of a beatitude, is especially interesting in that Auden sees "metrical rules" as part of a discipline that has, for him, a religious character: "Blessed be all metrical rules that forbid automatic responses, / force us to have second thoughts, free from the fetters of Self." The basic metrical pattern which Auden follows throughout "Shorts II" is a hexameter couplet, the first line (usually one or two syllables longer) having a feminine ending and the second a masculine. The dactyl is the predominant metrical unit, but the second line often breaks the galloping rhythm with a spondee comprised of the third and fourth stresses. This pattern doubly embodies the idea of rules forcing "us to have second

thoughts," then, in that the couplet is freed "from the fetters of" the dactyl.

The last "short" of the first section provides, in brief, an overall summation of what poetic making should be:

Like it is among all wild men and repetitive creatures,
 eyed from a singular stand-point, is the Why of the Arts.
 Poet, employ your vocative talent to utter exactly
 what you were graced to behold: leave us to judge for ourselves.

The last line introduces the next section of nine couplets and two quatrains, which may be subtitled "Reading, Knowledge, and Criticism." Auden criticizes (or passes judgement on) other critics, thinkers and writers in these "shorts," which implies that he is breaking his own restriction on making judgements. There does not seem to be much room for an alternative judgement, for example, in the couplet: "Those who run to the apes to explain our behaviour are chuckle- / heads too dumb to know their arse from a hole-in-the-ground." Psychology bears the brunt of Auden's attacks in this section, which opens with an attempt to correct the language of "Psychological critics" ("symbols must not be confused with allegorical signs") and closes with an assessment of the psychologist's main limitation:

What we mean when we say that So-and-So's a good person,
 no psychologist can tell, for we certainly don't
 mean that He has no problems: all that is clear is that, when we
 say this, nobody says, shaking his head -- He is bad!

This is rather tortuously expressed but the idea is a valuable one, since psychology and its unquestioned value in helping people is often seen as a replacement for theology, or as a discipline that obviates the need to judge what is good and evil in human life. Psychology is only remotely

interested in man's spiritual state, since its main concerns are with his behavioural adjustment to society and his individual happiness. "He" is capitalized in this quatrain to emphasize the distinction (in one man) between the unique person, who has a Proper Name and is a doer of voluntary deeds, and the individual, "whose behaviour is involuntary and discloses, not a unique self, but either those natural deeds common to all men or those diagnosable complexes which the patient shares with other sufferers of the same kind" (F & A, p. 79).

The couplet following this quatrain, which reads like a partial abstract of "Insignificant Elephants" (CWW),⁵² cannot easily be grouped with any of the other "shorts." Its isolated position corresponds with its content: "Talent calls for display, some public space to perform in; / Virtue hilla itself, even from virtuous men." These lines are themselves hilled around, so to speak, by quatrains before and after, one concluding a section and the other beginning a series of three "shorts" touching on problems concerning human pluralities -- class barriers, justice and tyranny, and the duty of "Alienation from the Collective".

The last six "shorts" focus the same basic concern with civilization on the problems of the young. Auden plays the role of mentor, but with a tendency to taunt those he addresses:

Yes, a Society so obsessed with rabid consumption
 stinks, I entirely agree: but, student radicals, why,
 why protest in its own dehumanised language of Ad-Mass?
 If you would civil our land, first you should civil your speech.

It is highly ironic that Auden should sound like an "old-guard reactionary" during all the student movements in the late Sixties and early Seventies,

since he was considered one of the leaders of a similar movement in the late Twenties and during the Thirties, calling at one point for the "death of the old gang" ("1929," CP, p. 53). It should also be remembered, however, that Auden renounced this role by the end of that decade, and that very early on he denounced some of his own poetic language as dishonest rhetoric. Nor does he just speak as one might expect an old man to, for he clearly sympathizes with the need to oppose "the Collective" as well as with the calls for both the betterment of society and the maintenance of freedom. His antagonism is reserved for the form that the protests are taking, and implicit in the last couplet is the old warning that protest movements lose their validity if they have nothing better to replace the existing order with: "I'm for Freedom because I mistrust the Censor in office: / but, if I held the job, my! how severe I should be."

Auden may not have any illusions about the effect that his advice will have on the young, but in the magic of art a few words can be made to have a profound effect. Two plainly spoken warnings by ravens on a "gallows-tree" cause Barnaby in "The Ballad of Barnaby" to repent and devote his life to God. Before this time, "The finest tumbler of his day" had been living a life dedicated to, as it were, "rabid consumption":

His eyes were blue, his figure was trim,
He liked the girls and the girls liked him;
For years he lived a life of vice,
Drinking in taverns and throwing the dice.

Barnaby may be seen as a tumbler, then, in almost every sense -- a tumbler of women and dice; one who drinks, perhaps, out of tumblers; and

who behaves something like an "empty vessel" himself.⁵³ The names of his vaults take on new implications in the light of his social life, especially "the Vault of Champagne, / The Vault of Metz, and the Vault of Lorraine" ("Metze" is a German word, no longer current, for prostitute").

Barnaby's sudden conversion (or "leap of faith," perhaps) while "riding along / Between two cities" is not altogether unlike Paul's conversion on the road to Damascus, though Paul's vision was substantially different from Barnaby's:

. . . he saw what then was quite common to see,
Two ravens perched on a gallows-tree.

"Barnaby," the first raven began,
"Will one day be as this hanging man":
"Yes," said the other, "and we know well
That when that day comes he will go to Hell."

Then Barnaby's conscience smote him sore;
He repented of all he had done heretofore:
"Woe is me! I will forsake
This wicked world and penance make."

This image of the hanging-man and the birds on the "gallows-tree" is reminiscent of Christ on the cross between the two thieves. The irony of the allusion is that Barnaby, even as a Christian, will be "as this hanging man", for all Christians are commanded to take up their crosses in life. The main difference is that Hell is not the ultimate destination of such hanging men, and Barnaby's tenuous likeness to Christ is strengthened at the end by his immediate translation to heaven.

Barnaby joins a monastery and immediately begins to despair at his inferiority to the other monks, from the highest of them, an Abbot who "could logically define / The place of all creatures in the Scheme

Divine", to the lowest, "a brother from Picardy . . . who sung / The praise of Our Lady in the vulgar tongue." The parable of the talents, perhaps, and of the poor widow with only a single farthing to give the synagogue (Mark 12:41-44), are in the background of Barnaby's solution to his dilemma, since all he has to offer is one inconsiderable talent:

Down to the crypt at massing-time
 He crept like a man intent on crime:
 In a niche there above the altar stood
 A statue of Our Lady carved in wood.

"Blessed Virgin," he cried, "enthroned on high,
 Ignorant as a beast am I:
 Tumbling is all I have learnt to do;
 Mother-of-God, let me tumble for You."

With this inspiration Barnaby vaults "higher than ever before", and the new value of his acrobatics is also indicated by an interlude of "Ballet music" (a mere guitar accompanies his old act) coming just before he performs the four vaults that had earlier won him renown in the "wicked world." Barnaby's spiritual change is also indicated by the fact that he pays "his devoirs" to "Our Lady" in total privacy. In some ways this is a mark of superiority to the other talented and virtuous brethren, as the couplet for "Shorts II" indicates: "Talent calls for display, some public space to perform in: / Virtue hills itself, even from virtuous men."

Barnaby first gratifies the Virgin with his piety, and then he impresses one of the brothers who has spied on him. This brother is unsure about the value of what Barnaby is doing. He brings the Abbot to the next (and final) performance to see whether any action, proscriptive or otherwise, should be taken:

Next day behind a pillar they hid,
 And the Abbot marked all that Barnaby did.
 Watching him leap and vault and tumble,
 He thought, "This man is holy and humble."

The Abbot's assent is perhaps seconded by any Protestant readers, who may have been worried about Barnaby's seemingly exclusive worship of an icon of Mary, when they see that his last words include a reference to Jesus: "'Lady,' cried Barnaby, 'I beg of Thee / to intercede with Thy Son for me!'" Barnaby literally dies for his faith after giving "one more leap," but the issue of his soul's destination remains, momentarily, in doubt:

Then grinning demons, black as coal,
 Swarmed out of Hell to seize his soul:
 "In vain shall be his pious fuss,
 For every tumbler belongs to us."

(Ballet music)

But Our Lady and Her angels held them at bay,
 With shining swords they drove them away,
 And Barnaby's soul they bore aloft,⁵⁴
 Singing with voices sweet and soft.

The demons are, presumably, of the Gnostic persuasion, believing that such an earthly profession as tumbling is intrinsically evil. Barnaby's rescue is doubly consoling, then, in that it suggests that those without moral discipline, deep learning or an obviously spiritual vocation still have grounds for hope of salvation.

The idea of consolation is especially appropriate here since "Barnaby" means "son of consolation," a definition pointed out in the Biblical description of Barnabas' entry into the Church (Acts 4:36). This entry was, in fact, not entirely unlike Barnaby's into the monastery, for Barnabas gives up his old life (of which nothing, however, is known),

sells all his land and lays the money "at the apostles' feet" (Acts 4:37). As Barnabas became Paul's main colleague at the beginning of his ministry, so the two names are linked again in Epistle to a Godson, which has some interesting implications for its structure. Auden's epistle to Philip Spender is modelled, in part, on Paul's "Epistle to the Philippians," and in part Auden plays the role of Paul's beleaguered successor. Barnaby, too, while he may be as good as Barnabas, can hardly be said to have a similar stature -- that is, as far as a fictional character can be likened to a historical person. Auden writes, in "Epistle to a Godson," that his attempt to provide some written nourishment for the new generation should

finish
on a serio-comic note with legends
of ultimate eucatastrophe,
regeneration beyond the waters.

Just as Paul delegated authority to Barnabas, Auden delegates the fulfillment of this task to "The Ballad of Barnaby," the only poem that can really be said to fit all its requirements.

Though it is placed at exactly the half-way point, "The Ballad of Barnaby" finishes the volume if all the poems are read in conjunction with their companion poems, rather than consecutively. Thus "Talking to Myself" would be read after "Epistle to a Godson" and so on until "The Ballad of Barnaby" becomes the last piece to be put in place in the volume's vault structure. This is to focus on the idea of the vault as an arched chamber. It is pertinent in this regard that the poems most suffused with the ideas of old age and the imminence of death are at the base and top of the "sides" which are composed of the four sections

before and after the two "Shorts" and "The Ballad of Barnaby." "Epistle to a Godson" and "Doggereel by a Senior Citizen" both show Auden still energetically "skirmishing" with the world and its problems, but "Old People's Home" and "Talking to Myself," without being despairing, conclude with Auden looking ahead to the day of his dying and pleading for a quick, "painless dormition."

The rising and falling movement suggested here describes the second aspect of the vault structure. Within the consciousness that he is an old man not far from death, Auden performs a poetic version of Barnaby's tumbling within the crypt. Like the same four vaults performed before and after Barnaby's conversion, Auden organizes his poems into four sections before and four sections after the middle one, the first four being mirrored or complemented in some way by the last four. One difference is that there is not an overall qualitative difference between the first and second halves of the volume -- the first four sections, for example, are hardly analogous to the kind of tumbling Barnaby does while living "a life of vice." From the opening poem Auden proposes to write something that would provide nourishment for the young generation, who are about to take over responsibility "for the happiness / of the Universe." The arrangement of the poems is meant as a fulfillment of this proposal by focussing attention on individual questions for which the young may wish to have answers in their own progressions on "the Quest Perilous." One would not wish to suggest that Auden's only aim in writing is to ask and answer important questions, but some of the questions that are raised may be put as follows. How does one reconcile oneself to aging, sickness,

death, and to the world and all its problems? What is the nature of the relationship between body, mind and soul; between art and the world; and between nature and human nature? These, as it may have been recognized, refer briefly to each of the first four sections and the four that they are paired with. Auden certainly does not give complete answers, nor would he expect uncritical agreement with what is given,⁵⁵ but it would be fair to say, nevertheless, that he is successful in providing a goodly amount of intellectual and spiritual nourishment.

One concept that is more than amply dealt with throughout Epistle to a Godson is that of "turning about." "To turn about" is, to begin with, the meaning of the Latin verb, volvere, from which both meanings of the word "vault" used in this chapter are ultimately derived (OED). Poems in the first half of Epistle to a Godson are often "turned about" in some fashion by their companion poems in the second half, and the volume as a whole turns about with "The Ballad of Barnaby." Barnaby himself undergoes two radical changes -- conversion to Christianity after "a life of vice" and, immediately after dying, ascension to heaven. These two kinds of "eucatastrophe," or sudden turn for the good, are the keys to understanding why the volume is arranged as it is, and it is clear that spiritual "eucatastrophe" is the kind of revolution on which Auden thinks the upcoming generation should pin their hopes. Epistle to a Godson, then, resonates with the idea of Christian regeneration. Even death is made part of its celebratory mood of Carnival, which is indeed dominant despite occasional lapses. Something similar can be said about the quality of the poetry, which at times certainly does not reveal Auden

at his most skillful, but which is more than made up for by the "stunning / display of concinnity and elegance" in the structure of Epistle to a Godson as a whole.

ENDNOTES

¹Cochrane, p. 48.

²Arendt discusses this at length in The Human Condition, particularly in Chapter 7 ("The Private Realm: Property"), and its discussion of the importance of boundaries in Greek and Roman societies. Fn. 62 on page 63 (in which she mentions the Romans' reverence for "the boundary and its God, Terminus") is especially interesting here, as is the passage for chapter 9 ("The Public and the Private") on page 71: "The second outstanding non-private characteristic of privacy is that the four walls of one's private property offer the only reliable hiding place from the common public world, not only from everything that goes on in it but also from its very publicity, from being seen and being heard. A life spent entirely in public, in the presence of others, becomes, as we would say, shallow."

³Pike, p. 40.

⁴"Criticism in a Mass Society", in The Intent of the Critic, ed. Donald A. Stauffer (Princeton, 1941), p. 137. Quoted by Edward Callan, "The Development of W.H.Auden's Poetic Theory Since 1940," Twentieth Century Literature, 4;3 (October, 1958), 80.

⁵Cochrane, p. 342.

⁶Zechariah 2:4-5. The phrase "as towns without walls" in the King James version is changed to "as a city without walls" in at least one other translation Auden may have come into contact with, the "Oxford Study Edition" of The New English Bible (New York, 1976). The first edition appeared in 1961.

⁷Cf. Elder Edda, p. 17.

⁸"East Coker," Four Quartets (Eliot, pp. 177, 183).

⁹Auden actually uses the word "manage" as roughly synonymous with "care" in "Talking to Myself": ". . . the carnal territory / allotted to my manage"

¹⁰Dr. Johnson; quoted in Certain World, p. 418.

¹¹Cf. Clancy, p. 15. Auden's use of the strophe is limited to a retainment of the syllabic quantities (11-11-9-10) and the feminine endings.

¹²Cochrane, p. 469. Most of my paragraph paraphrases Cochrane, pp. 469, 471-474.

¹³Oxford Companion, p. 391.

¹⁴Green, p. 372.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 372.

¹⁶This corresponds with several passages in "Epistle to the Philippians," such as the following injunction: "Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things" (4:8).

¹⁷Tolkien places his own footnote here: "The Art is here in the story itself rather than in the telling; for the Author of the story was not the evangelists" (p. 71).

¹⁸Tolkien Reader, pp. 71-72. Auden also found the term "Secondary World" in this essay (p. 36).

¹⁹One may seem to be stretching for correspondences, but it is interesting to note that "Epistle to a Godson" has a clearly marked three-stanza introduction and a three-stanza conclusion, just as the volume opens and closes with groups of three poems.

²⁰Kline, p. 397.

²¹Ibid., p. 397.

²²Lewis Carroll, The Annotated Alice, intro. and notes by Martin Gardner (New York, 1960), p. 212. Henceforward this book will be cited as Alice. Denis Donoghue points out this connection (though he mistakes the Red Knight for the Red Queen) in "Good Grief," New York Review of Books, 20 (July 19, 1973), p. 18. Henceforward this review will be cited as Donoghue.

²³In "Shorts II" Auden tells "student radicals": "if you would civil our land, first you should civil your speech." The Red Queen continually gives advice such as, "Look up, speak nicely, and don't twiddle your thumbs all the time . . ." (Alice, p. 206), and, "Always tell the truth -- think before you speak -- and write it down afterwards" (p. 319).

²⁴Gardner, in Alice, p. 345n.

²⁵Dr. Oliver Sacks, to whom "Talking to Myself" is dedicated, writes of Auden's inordinate dependence on good, personal physicians, making it seem as if knowledge of their availability was as important to his health as their expertise (cf. Tribute, pp. 192-129).

²⁶Arendt, pp. 7-8.

²⁷The following passage is interesting in two ways, showing that Auden linked poems from the first and last three-poem sections of Epistle to a Godson as well as showing what kind of response he got in a public reading: "His control of the audience is phenomenal: no rounds of applause within his allotted fifteen minutes; no encore; no poems written before 1960. He reads his intricately constructed later works with a disciplined but pedantic respect for their metre He read . . . two characteristically speculative elegies for doctor friends, and on the following evening, the marvellous sequence, 'Talking to Dogs,' 'Talking to Mice' and 'Talking to Myself.'" The Financial Times (12 July, 1971); quoted by Osborne, pp. 295-296.

²⁸Donoghue comments on the use of "obumbated": "At first I suspected a misprint for 'obumbrated', a word well represented in the great OED, meaning 'overshadowed'. Perhaps it is a misprint, like Yeats's 'soldier'; unless Mr. Auden wanted to touch the word with 'abate' as an even darker shadow falling upon the first. In any case, the verb stands for the formal acknowledgement of grief, and its archaic air takes some of the harm out of the occasion by observing the decencies with a particular mark of attention, a Latin mark more plangent than the Saxon version which has survived" (p. 18).

²⁹Cf., for example, "Prologue at Sixty" (CWW): ". . . my day turned out torturers / who read Rilke in their rest periods."

³⁰Donoghue gives another interesting analysis of Auden's choice of words: "'librate' (is used) instead of 'oscillate', so to librate between a glum and a frolic . . . is presumably to give the movement a moony touch, the libration of the moon being the only sense in which the word is still recalled" (p. 17).

³¹William Empson, Collected Poems (London, 1962), pp. 62-63 (first published in 1938).

³²"Alice in Wonderland: The Child as Swain," in Some Versions of Pastoral (London, 1935).

³³In 1965 Auden wrote the following passage in a review entitled "As It Seemed to Us" (The New Yorker, 3 April): "In Mr. Robert Graves' historical novel Wife to Milton, the future Mrs. Milton's brother, after reading Comus for the first time, remarks, 'This smacks to me of Cambridge, where they tune their viol strings always a little sharp.' An acute observation, I think, and a fair one, since it permits the retort 'At Oxford they always play a little flat'" (Quoted in F & A, p. 509).

³⁴Mendelson, in CP (p. 540), reduces the poem's status by placing it in a collection of epigraphs and other short poems that he entitles "Shorts I," not to be confused with Auden's "Shorts I" in EG. See my fn. 49.

³⁵John Bunyan (New York, 1964), p. 23.

³⁶Christopher and His Kind (New York, 1977), p. 57.

³⁷Only one of several meanings provided by the OED for all of these words has been chosen.

³⁸Osborne, p. 300.

³⁹Aphorisms, p. 378.

⁴⁰Descent, p. 195.

⁴¹Mendelson places "Anthem" (CP, p. 257) in the poems of 1939-1947, saying that "it derives from an early draft of 'The Age of Anxiety,' and was written probably around 1945" (CP, p. 13).

⁴²p. 327. From "A Worcestershire Lad," a review of The Letters of A.E. Housman, ed. Henry Maas, The New Yorker, 19 February, 1972.

⁴³The Collected Poems of A.E. Housman (London, 1974), pp. 150-151. These stanzas begin poems "XIV" and "XV" of Additional Poems, and are meant to be read in succession.

⁴⁴Cf., for example, the chapters entitled "The Virgin & the Dynamo" and "The Poet & the City" in DH.

⁴⁵In DH, p. 83, Auden writes: "Occasionally the Public embodies itself in a crowd and so becomes visible -- in the crowd, for example, which collects to watch the wrecking gang demolish the old family mansion, fascinated by yet another proof that physical force is the Prince of this world against whom no love of the heart shall prevail."

⁴⁶In DH, p. 432, Auden writes, "My duty towards God is to be happy; my duty towards my neighbour is to try my best to give him pleasure and alleviate his pain. No human being can make another one happy."

⁴⁷In "Posthumous Letter to Gilbert White" (TYF), Auden writes:

I'm apt to fancy
myself as a lover of Nature,
but have no right to, really. How many
birds and plants can I spot? At most two dozen.

⁴⁸Henderson, p. 6.

⁴⁹In CP, Mendelson joins "Shorts I" and "Shorts II" from this volume, and entitles his hybrid "Shorts II" (p. 639). Mendelson reserves the title "Shorts I" (p. 539) for his own arbitrary selection of epigraphs and what he apparently considers slight poems collected in volumes from 1960 to 1972. "To Goethe: A Complaint" and "Contra Blake," for example, are collected in Mendelson's "Shorts I."

⁵⁰Osborne, p. 290.

⁵¹Auden once quoted Kafka's aphorism on this subject: "Only our concept of time makes it possible to speak of the Day of Judgement by that name; in reality it is a summary court in perpetual session" (Aphorisms, p. 85).

⁵²In this poem, Auden attempts to explain why saints are so elusive:

Nor would a snapshot reveal a halo: they hide
their incandescence like tasty moths who mimic
unpalatable cousins. (CP, p. 607)

⁵³"The Ballad of Barnaby" is based on Anatole France's "Our Lady's Juggler," but Auden makes a number of substantial changes. The Barnaby of France's story leads a pure and devout life, and joins the monastery because he desires to live even more devoutly. "Our Lady's Juggler" is collected in Mother of Pearl, trans. Frederic Chapman (London, 1925), pp. 81-93.

⁵⁴Cf. ibid., pp. 91-93. France has the Prior and two elders about to rush in on Barnaby, suspecting him of insanity, when the virgin steps down and wipes Barnaby's brow. The Prior exclaims, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." The elders say "Amen," and the story ends. There is no mention of demons, and Barnaby does not die. All of Auden's variations give the tale greater dramatic flair and give more emphasis to the theme of eucatastrophe as it applies to, especially, conversion and translation to heaven.

⁵⁵What Auden writes of a critic's thought may be applied to his poetry's themes: "A Critic shows superior insight if the questions he raises are fresh and important, however much one may disagree with his answers to them" (DH, p. 9).

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION: "LAST THINKS" IN THANK YOU, FOG

Auden's fears of having to undergo a protracted second childhood, his talent continually diminishing, an old body suffering from a lingering illness, and ending "Petulant, weak-sphinctered, / In a cheap hotel,"¹ were none of them to be realized. He had to endure about a year of signs of both the imminence of death and the exhaustion of poetic energy. From the beginning of his stay in Oxford in October, 1972, having decided to winter there instead of New York, he was frequently lonely and tired, and the tiredness stayed with him when he moved back to Kirchstetten in the spring of 1973. He knew that he had said just about everything he could,² wrote a few last poems, including several in which he clearly composes himself for dying, and then had the good fortune of suddenly and quickly "accomplishing his corpse" ("Prologue at Sixty," CWW) in a respectable hotel³ on September 29, 1973.

Auden's tiredness is reflected in several ways in Thank You, Fog. He looks upon his periods of rest with relish in several poems, including the title poem and "Lullaby," while other poems read as if they are produced by an exhausted man. One thinks of the flatness of "A Contrast" and "Posthumous Letter to Gilbert White," both pleasant, "talky" poems but containing few of the features that enliven other poems written in this manner -- the word-play, the occasional, startling insights, the high spirits.

The usual problems in criticizing a posthumous collection, in which one is left wondering whether any of the poems would have been omitted later or further revised, do not have much import as regards Thank You, Fog. Mendelson writes that Auden

had already gathered the poems in this book, together with its title and dedication. Had he lived, he would presumably have added sufficient poems to bring the book to about twice its present length before publishing it.⁴

The poems that are collected, however, would most likely not have been substantially revised. Nine of the first seventeen poems had already been published in magazines,⁵ the "Two Don Quixote Lyrics" had been given final form by 1964, and The Entertainment of the Senses had been completed by September, 1973, for performance "as an interpolation for James Shirley's masque Cupid and Death (1653), which took place "in London, at the Queen Elizabeth Hall, on February 3, 1974" (Note, pp. vii-viii).

To Mendelson's speculation that the volume would have doubled in length may be added the idea that Auden would again have organized the poems into an overall structure. This represents the only obstacle in criticizing some of the weaker pieces, for Auden habitually places poems, good or bad, in contexts which strongly affect the way they are read and which, at the least, minimize their weaknesses. The structure Auden seemed to have in mind was another one of "those the-latter-half-is-the-mirror-of-the-first-half things."⁶ There are five very distinct pairings in which poems share a similar form and deal with complementary themes: "Ode to the Diencephalon" and "A Contrast"; "Progress?" and

"The Question"; "Address to the Beasts" and "Archaeology"; "Aubade" and "Nocturne"; and "Thank You, Fog" and "A Lullaby." I will look at these in more detail shortly, but attention will be given first to poems not linked with another, or not as obviously as those just mentioned.

The first nine "shorts" of "Shorts" deal with man's ways of looking at the world around him, and with comparisons between man and nature. The first is an example of the former: "Pascal should have been soothed, not scared by his infinite spaces: / God made the All so immense, stellar collisions are rare." The last is an example of the latter:

Beasts, Birds, Fish, Flowers do what
the Season insists They must,
but Man schedules the Days on
which He may do what he should.

This quatrain also provides a link to the next section of five haiku, which deal with the kinds of things man should or must do: "Bound to ourselves for life, / we must learn how to / put up with each other." The third and fourth haiku hark back to Dante's idea of love as the essential energy of the universe, the first one being a variation on the idea of love that errs because of "too little vigor" (cf. Aphorisms, p. 83): "Man must either fall in love with Someone or Something, / or else fall ill"). Auden disagrees with Dante's notion of "excessive love" in the next haiku, suggesting that love appearing as such is a variation of "perverted love."⁷ The two shorts after this section, a haiku and a quatrain, deal with the subject of poetry, and the last four shorts make a number of criticisms of collective man and his policies: "Met individually, most men appear friendly and gentle, / but, collectively,

Man commonly acts like a cad."

"A Curse" is a high-spirited flyting of all the "progeny" of Rudolf Diesel, those "Nimble technicians" whose

wit works nightly wonders,
has landed men on the Moon,
replaced brains by computers,
and can smithy a "smart" bomb.

Worst of all, however, is the fact that they have never managed to replace the "grim" internal combustion engine with "an odorless and noiseless / staid little electric brougham."

"A Curse" is completely contrasted by "A Thanksgiving," and there is a possibility, however remote, that Auden would have paired these two poems if only on the basis that the latter illustrates a complete reversal of form and subject, from cursing to thanking, and from technicians to writers. Auden lists all the writers to whom he feels chiefly indebted for the value of his poetry at various stages in his career. It is interesting that the only three writers known primarily for their prose and not their fabrications of secondary worlds on the stage or in verse (Kierkegaard, Charles Williams, C.S. Lewis) were responsible for guiding him "back to belief." The poem is the briefest survey of a career, and its main value for Auden seems to have been as a vehicle for the sheer joy of "reeling off"⁸ the names of those he wishes to thank.

"No, Plato, No" covers familiar territory in fairly prosaic terms: Auden "can't imagine" enjoying life as "a disincarnate Spirit," though he can conceive that his

Flesh
is praying for "Him" to die,
so setting Her free to become
irresponsible Matter.

This conception is given a much different turn in The Entertainment of the Senses, where the senses, which may be thought of in the "antimasque" as embodiments of the desire to become "irresponsible Matter," recognize that their entertainment depends upon the existence of their human master -- the spirit or ego. They beckon him to indulge them while he is still alive, they remind him of the grave at the end of every verse paragraph, and they try to convince him to forget all religious thoughts leaning toward an attempt to subordinate them to his deeper needs.

"Sight," for example, concludes with these lines:

Cupid, called blind,
 You will find
 Is only short-sighted
 And likes life well-lighted,
 Preferring to know
 At just whom he is aiming his bow:
 Candles that splutter
 And very soon gutter
 Remind him of Plato's cave
 And the blindness of the grave.

One may think of such an attitude in terms of the "fictions" and the "dogma / Of positive truth" Auden suspects his body of "feeding" him in "You" (AH). The senses' constant refrain is

Mild und leise
 You'd be wiser
 Not to be defenceless:
 Nor walls nor fences
 Can guard your senses --
 Why not just be senseless?

Their last refrain, however, is uncharacteristically civil, and indeed, sensible:

Though our views be reprehensible
 To you and indefensible,
 Please admit they're comprehensible

And, naturally, sensible.
 Good-bye!
 When you get a little older
 You'll discover like Isolde:
 "We must love one another and die!"

The most startling aspect of the last line is that Auden and Kallman associate Isolde's Manichean-leaning belief that passionate love would enable her to transcend matter and time, her soul merging with the eternal Word, with Auden's own most famous, and by him much-regretted, line: "We must love one another or die" ("September 1, 1939"). The "single-minded" senses are here deemed as capable as any creature to supply the correction, one that Auden himself made at one point before eliminating the poem from the canon.⁹ A further complication in the senses' speech, however, is that the love they have "in mind" is likely of a purely physical variety, and so Auden, and perhaps Kallman, still do not necessarily give assent to the last line. Death, in other words, is final for the senses -- they do not seem capable of spending much "thought" on or accepting the ideas of either a more profound kind of love or an afterlife. The "moral" of all they say is, in the Chamberlain's summation, "Be with-it, with-it, with-it till you're dead." It is unfortunate that the volume should have to conclude on this sour note, especially since it echoes the much happier triple repetition in the title poem, "Thank You, Thank You, Thank You, Fog." Mendelson had little choice in placing The Entertainment of the Senses at the end, however, since it is the only piece in the volume not definitely intended for inclusion.

"Death" himself makes only a mute appearance at the end of the antimasque, but he is given three rhyme-royales in "Recitative by Death," the second of "Two Don Quixote Lyrics," which are fragments preserved from Auden and Kallman's unfinished, unused "libretto for Man of La Mancha" (Note, p. vii). Death makes a few cutting remarks on mankind's "remarkable / Progress," but reminds people that he still is "and always will be Cosmocrat." There is little that is extraordinary in the following stanzas, Death making the familiar warnings that he will strike at any time and at all people regardless of race, religion and so forth. Don Quixote's description of an arcadia in the opening quatrains of the first lyric, "The Golden Age," also contains little out of the ordinary, though it should be taken into account that Auden and Kallman's scope for invention was limited by a number of factors. The words had to be subordinate to the music, a mass audience had to be entertained, and the collaborators had to remain faithful to Cervantes' original. It is not difficult to see, however, why Auden, particularly, would have a lasting liking for these lines, for he was "an arcadian" himself and a long-standing admirer of Don Quixote. After the section of two-stress lines describing the coming of the "Cold and old," dispiriting "Enchanters," one can easily imagine Auden fully enjoying himself by bellowing out the final quatrain as if it were his own:

It shall not be! Enchanters, flee! I challenge you to battle me!
 Your powers I with scorn defy, your spells shall never rattle me.
 Don Quixote de la Mancha is coming to attend to you,
 To smash you into smithereens and put a final end to you.

Auden deals with a different set of transitions from one age to another in "Unpredictable But Providential," a poem that he may have

linked with "Two Don Quixote Lyrics" since it also ends with a reference to the enchanter, so to speak, of Art and Science with their "rival Myths of Being." Auden begins by describing the "first real Event, the first genuine Accident" when human history began:

. . . that Once when, once a tiny
corner of the cosmos had turned indulgent enough
to give it a sporting chance, some Original Substance,
immortal and self-sufficient, knowing only the blind
collision experience, had the sheer audacity
to become irritable, a Self requiring a World,
A Not-Self outside Itself from which to renew Itself. . . .

Auden has again allowed himself the freedom to reinterpret one aspect of the Genesis account of creation along naturalistic lines (as he did, for example, in the epigraph to "In and Out" and in "You" (AH)). Again, however, he does not deny the import of the key event in Eden, or the mystery of that second transition from animate innocence to the new being, which involved both a fall from grace and the beginning of a relationship completely different from those which other living creatures have with God:

Genetics
may explain shape, size and posture, but not why one physique
should be gifted to cogitate about cogitation,
divorcing Form from Matter, and fated to co-habit
on uneasy terms with its Image, dreading a double death,
a wisher, a maker of asymmetrical objects,
a linguist who is never at home in Nature's grammar.

The conclusion of "Unpredictable but Providential" is a re-working of the conclusion of "Ode to Terminus," where Auden writes

that scientists, to be truthful,

must remind us to take all they say as a
tall story, that abhorred in the Heav'ns are all
self-proclaimed poets who, to wow an
audience, utter some resonant lie.

One difference is that the evenhandedness in these lines gives way to a statement of preference for a point of view that leans toward pantheism, which views "all objects, beings and events" as sacred (DH, p. 460), and which opposes the mechanistic dualism of the Cartesian view:

Science, like Art, is fun, a playing with truths, and no game
should ever pretend to slay the heavy-lidded riddle,
What is the Good Life?

Common Sense warns me of course to buy
neither but, when I compare their rival Myths of Being,
bewigged Descartes looks more outré than the painted wizard.

. A pair of "heavy-lidded" questions form the base for two poems that were definitely intended by Auden for comparison, "Progress?" and "The Question." At first impression the title of the former seems to be superfluous, for man's advancement beyond plant and animal is usually simply assumed. Auden questions this "progress" from several angles. Anxiety, for example, from a natural point of view, is certainly little improvement upon a Plant's "contentment," and as far as concrete knowledge is concerned, the ability to "picture the Absent / and Non-Existent" is not much superior to the Beast's ability to "tell Here from There / and Now from Not-Yet." Man's ability to picture the "Non-Existent" may be something which leads to many of his problems, imaginatively manufacturing fears, worries and enemies. The ability to picture "the Absent," however, may lead to man's greatest good, because it may help him to an understanding of God, the "Lex Abscondita" ("New Year Letter," CP, p. 175) who created the world but is not in it or in any of its creatures. It appears, then, that the use of the word "progress" to describe man in relation to the rest of creation (though one can only speculate here, since Auden avoids developing the poem beyond asking the

question) is dependent on what he does with his unique faculties. He may, in other words, fall even "lower" than non-human lives by denying his relationship with the God he cannot see, and he may go immeasurably beyond them through faith.

In "The Question" Auden tackles another aspect of the nature of divinity. Auden's worries about the doctrine of the virgin birth are not stated outright, but the ideas implicit in the first two haiku are that it is, on the one hand, a natural human weakness to believe people can be "born of a virgin," and that, on the other hand, "pregnant Virgins" can actually exist as mere irregularities of nature. Therefore, even if it were true of Mary, it is not in itself such a remarkable fact. The last haiku shows that Auden shares the believer's view insofar as Christ's assumption of divinity points to the involvement, beyond man's comprehension, of some greater Agent in Mary's pregnancy: "But the Question remains: / from where did Christ get / that extra chromosome?" It is difficult to help thinking, however, that some imp in Auden got the better of his conscience in these lines, for even the attempt to surrender to a dogma he had difficulties with results in something a little too flippant for the nature of his subject.

The consideration of forces that check our thought and behaviour is the link between another "mirrored" pair of poems, "Ode to the Diencephalon" and "A Contrast." In the former Auden wonders at how "uncouth" or ignorant one part of the brain can be after so many "millennia" of existence. The diencephalon is responsible for causing the body to react in certain ways during anxiety-causing or fearful

situations, but the impulse to bolt or cringe, or the onset of "gooseflesh, the palpitations, or the squitters," do little to help man. If it had managed to learn anything from that "compulsive liar," "the cortical I", about the meaning of "fig-leaves / or fire or ploughshares or vines or policemen," it would be of much greater value. This list is a metonymical survey of situations in which man has denied, or still denies, the commands of Authority, divine or temporal. One thinks, in turn, of the stories of Eden, Prometheus, the Israelites commanded to beat "swords into ploughshares" (Isaiah 2:4), and *Isaiah's warnings about unheeded vineyards (Isaiah 5) or Christ's command to abide in the true vine (John 15:1-6)*. Our modern fear of having to deal with the police puts a comic period on this list. Auden concludes his affectionately abusive "ode" by speculating on the potential value of an organ that,

whenever the trumpet cries men to battle,
 . . . would flash to their muscles the urgent order
ACUTE LUMBAGO!

"A Contrast" (like "Ode to the Diencephalon" composed of four sapphics) describes two aspects of the Superego appointed to Auden's "Personal City" by "Nature and Parents," and which are far more effective than the hapless diencephalon. His "Censor" "bans from recall any painful image", but his "Public Prosecutor" is not quite so amiable. Auden responds to a list of its "venomous" interrogations about the Future with a cliché ("Well, well, I / must grin and bear it"), though there does not seem to be much else he could have said.

Auden sets up the familiar contrast between nature and history in "Address to the Beasts" and "Archaeology," and throughout the twenty-three haiku of both he explores what man can learn about himself by

focussing on either subject. Much of "Address to the Beasts" contains ideas that have been dealt with before: Auden praises the beasts, discusses their limitations and best qualities, shows at every turn how they differ from man, and includes a number of descriptions which show that man does not fare as well as he thinks he might in the comparison:

Instinct is commonly said
to rule you: I would call it
Common Sense.

If you cannot engender
a genius like Mozart,
neither can you

plague the earth
with brilliant sillies like Hegel
or clever nasties like Hobbes.

Auden concludes with a very interesting "run" of three haiku, showing that not only does man have a consciousness or a spirit unlike anything possessed by the beasts, but also that he is willing to accept the pain involved in that consciousness rather than revert to primal innocence:

Distinct now,
in the end we shall join you
(how soon all corpses look alike),

but you exhibit no signs
of knowing that you are sentenced.
Now, could that be why

we upstarts are often
jealous of your innocence,
but never envious?

"Archaeology" deals, again, with the familiar notion that man can learn so many facts about his past, but that knowledge as to their significance is mostly a matter of guesswork:

From murals and statues
we get a glimpse of what
the Old Ones bowed down to,

but cannot conceit
in what situations they blushed
or shrugged their shoulders.

Poets have learned us their myths,
but just how did They take them?
That's a stumper.

This poem also ends with a group of three haiku, though this time they are separated from the preceding and labelled as a "Coda":

From Archaeology
one moral, at least, may be drawn,
to wit, that all

our school text-books lie.
What they call History
is nothing to vaunt of,

being made, as it is,
by the criminal in us:
goodness is timeless.

That "History" is made only "by the criminal in us" is far too harsh a judgement, unless Auden is thinking exclusively of the kind of history that records the various kinds of struggles for fame, power and glory, on the battlefield, in the political arena, and the like. It may also be true that "goodness is timeless," but the fact remains that it manifests itself in specific deeds on specific dates, just as the incarnation of Christ may be likened, to use Charles Williams' terms, to a co-inherence of time and eternity, or to a reconciliation of "the natural world with the world of the kingdom of heaven, sensuality with substance."¹⁰

Auden himself takes a kinder view of history in "Aubade," in which he outlines the complexity of man's consciousness of himself, of the world around him, and of his position in time:

. . . as wrote Augustine,
 I know that I am and will,
 I am willing and knowing,
 I will to be and to know,
 facing in four directions,
 outwards and inwards in Space,
 observing and reflecting,
 backwards and forwards through Time,
 recalling and forecasting.

The second stanza expands on the subjective and objective ways that man can view what is outside himself, and the third stanza describes the inner consciousness in more detail. An objective view of oneself is impossible -- every part of the inner man is accorded a "Personal Pronoun," and Auden describes this life as he would a peaceful domestic scene, where the ego "converses quietly" with the self.

The last stanza deals with the most difficult aspects of man's knowledge and will, or of knowing what his moral and spiritual responsibilities are and then acting on them:

But Time, the domain of Deeds,
 calls for a complex Grammar
 with many Moods and Tenses,
 and prime the Imperative.
 We are free to choose our paths
 but choose We must, no matter
 where they lead, and the tales We
 tell of the Past must be true.
 Human Time is a City
 where each inhabitant has
 a political duty
 nobody else can perform,
 made cogent by her Motto:
Listen, Mortals, Lest Ye Die.

The last line echoes God's command concerning the Tree of Life in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2:17; 3:3), but with the difference here that all modern Adams and Eves are "Mortals," already subject to death. The fallen man's dread is of "a double death" ("Unpredictable but Providential"),

realizing that failure to heed the Word of God will result in a condemnation of soul as well as of body. The last line of "Aubade" also alludes to the line, "We must love one another or die", and the new formulation accounts for the complexity of the Christian attitude toward love and death. Though Auden does not specify what exactly mortals must listen to, it can safely be said that he had in mind the two "greatest commandments," to love God and to love one's neighbour as oneself (Matthew 22:37-40). Our main "political duty" is, simply, to love one another, whatever unique form that may take, but its sanction as a duty derives ultimately from God's love for the world, which man is commanded to emulate.

"Nocturne" mirrors "Aubade," as suggested initially by their titles and forms. Both are composed of four stanzas of seven-syllable lines, though "Nocturne" has two more lines (sixteen) per stanza than "Aubade." In the first two stanzas of "Nocturne" Auden considers a variety of the night habits of animals and man, and the third stanza is devoted to praise for the queen of the night, the Moon, who "takes her dander through the darkness". Strangely enough, the least applicable meaning for "dander" is "ruffled anger," though the moon has reason enough to be angry since she is seen by "lenses" as "a ruined world / lying in its own rubbish," which is actually a jaundiced elaboration of the main meaning of "dander" in this context ("calcined cinder . . . piece of slag," OED). Another entirely possible meaning for the word is simply "stroll," or "saunter" (OED), which would be an appropriately anthropomorphic description of the movement of an object that is

still to the naked eye
 the Icon of all mothers,
 for never shall second thoughts
 succumb our first-hand feelings,
 our only redeeming charm,
 our childish drive to wonder:
 spaced about the firmament,
 planets and constellations
 still officiously declare
 the glory of God, though known
 to be uninfluential.

One irony of the reference to "second thoughts" is that "Nocturne" is something of a second thought itself in that Auden, in an earlier "Nocturne" (1951, CP, p. 446), writes apologetically of his heart's inclination to adore the moon as "Mother, Virgin, Muse." In that poem the second thoughts of his "tougher mind" almost get the better of him, and he feels compelled to justify at length his "first-hand feelings." In the new poem, however, there are no apologies, and Auden revels in the way that our version of the world is affected by "our childish drive to wonder."

The final stanza takes this idea one stage further, showing how great the value of our vision of Nature and its Innocence can be:

How else shall mannerless minds
 in ignorance imagine
 the Mansion of Gentle joy
 it is our lot to look for,
 where else weak wills find comfort
 to dare the Dangerous Quest?

This stanza, then, complements the final stanza of "Aubade," in which the imperatives of undertaking the Quest and of accepting our duties to others are affirmed, and which, now given a substantial idea of the good to be attained, are not seen to be quite so daunting.

Auden thanks a thick British fog in the title poem for making a

Wiltshire cottage at Christmas-time take on a character somewhat analogous to that of "the Mansion of Gentle Joy":

. . . how delighted I am
 that You've been lured to visit
 Wiltshire's witching countryside
 for a whole week at Christmas,
 that no one can scurry where
 my cosmos is contracted
 to an ancient manor-house
 and four Selves, joined in friendship,
 Jimmy, Tania, Sonia, Me,¹¹

The enchantments of joy and love belonging to his "glad circle" are soon to be dispelled, however, by the return to "the world of work and money," and Auden jumps from the disappointment in that fact to a diatribe against the world as it is forced on consciousness by the "vomiting" of the press. Implicit in these lines is a recognition of the irony that the sun is powerful enough to lessen the cosiness of his vacation, but that it is completely powerless to do something truly worthwhile, such as dismantling "the global gloom / cast by the Daily Papers". Auden concludes the poem with lines that reveal the depth of the emotion felt on an occasion that, till now, has appeared to be little more than a pleasant gathering:

our earth's a sorry spot, but
 for this special interim,
 so restful yet so festive,
 Thank You, Thank You, Thank You, Fog.

This last line is very uncharacteristic of Auden in that it is so simple, almost maudlin, but perhaps the compulsion to shout such unadorned thanksgivings for a little rest, enjoyment and company is an indication of the extent of the personal gloom Auden often had to fight off during his last few years.

Auden's "cosmos is contracted" to his bedroom by the arrival of "mantling darkness" in "Lullaby," a poem that takes "Thank You, Fog" one step further in that Auden looks forward to his rest after "the world of work and money" and its "din" has subsided. While settling in to enjoy the "cosy micro-climate" of his bed, it is clear that Auden is also looking forward to his final rest:

Let your last thinks all be thanks:
 praise your parents who gave you
 a Super-Ego of strength
 that saves you so much bother,
 digit friends and dear them all,
 then pay fair attribution
 to your age, to having been
 born when you were. In boyhood
 you were permitted to meet
 beautiful old contraptions,
 soon to be banished from earth,
 saddle-tank loks, beam-engines
 and over-shot waterwheels.
 Yes, love, you have been lucky:
Sing, Big Baby, sing lullay.

This "Lullaby" is also a deliberate reminder of an earlier poem called "Lullaby," which begins with the stanza:

Lay your sleeping head, my love,
 Human on my faithless arm;
 Time and fevers burn away
 Individual beauty from
 Thoughtful children, and the grave
 Proves the child ephemeral:
 But in my arms till break of day
 Let the living creature lie,
 Mortal, guilty, but to me
 The entirely beautiful. (1937, CP, p. 131)

Written to a young lover, the earlier "Lullaby" is now given a comic turn by a narcissistic, old "Baby" whose former capacity for such intense passion has given way, at last, to a mild satisfaction with himself:

The old Greeks got it all wrong:
 Narcissus is an oldie,
 tamed by time, released at last
 from lust for other bodies,
 rational and reconciled.
 For many years you envied
 the hirsute, the he-man type.
 No longer: now you fondle
 your almost feminine flesh
 with mettled satisfaction,
 imagining that you are
 sinless and all-sufficient,
 snug in the den of yourself,
Madonna and Bambino:
Sing, Big Baby, sing lullay.

This final correlation between an earlier and later poem also suggests that Auden thought that Thank You, Fog, along with all its other re-workings of familiar themes as well as its explicit contradiction of attitudes in earlier poems, would be his final volume, reflecting upon his career and upon the directions that his thought had taken.

The deliberateness that marks so much of Auden's work and his personal life -- his love of form, his observation of strict routine -- is also to some extent manifested in the progress of his career after his return to the Christian faith in 1940. This return was made clear in The Double Man (1941), and the first poetry published after this, For the Time Being, was based on the story of Christmas. For the Time Being was also the title given the volume (1944) which includes The Sea and the Mirror. In the latter Auden works out an aesthetics in accordance with his new belief, attempting, in part, to define the relationship between words and the Word. In The Age of Anxiety (1947), four characters struggle in a search for meaning and fail, though in various ways all have been brought to the kind of dead-end where, perhaps, a turn to

Christianity would be the only way out. After establishing his thematic foundation throughout the Forties,¹² Auden bases most of his subsequent, more obviously religious poetry on an order of events generally defined by the New Testament. The events of Easter are dealt with in "Horae Canonicae" (The Shield of Achilles, 1955); Pentecost and the establishment of both the House and City of God form a substantial part of the direction in which the themes and structures of About the House and City Without Walls take the reader; and Epistle to a Godson can in many ways be considered a modern and very reticent version of one of the apostle Paul's epistles, the connection being most obvious between the key, title poem, and Paul's "Epistle to the Philippians." If the correlation were to be complete, Thank You, Fog would resemble "Revelation," but Auden opts, as far as it can be told from an incomplete volume, for a simpler farewell. There is no raging "against the dying of the light,"¹³ no casting of "a cold eye / On life, on death,"¹⁴ but a praise-giving and life-loving acceptance of the world as well as a calm acceptance of what Auden knew would shortly happen.

The following short is the last poem that Auden wrote:

He still loves life
 but 0 0 0 0 how he wishes
 the good Lord would take him. (cf. Note, p. viii)

Waiting for "Le Bon Dieu" to command the divorce of body and soul, there is now no thought of attempting to stay the inevitable with any "piteous Dont's" ("Talking to Myself", EG), and Auden's death was as quick and apparently painless as he could have hoped. An interesting aspect of its date (September 29, 1973) is that it came thirty-three years after his conversion was made known to the world, which came, in turn, during

the thirty-third year of his life. It seems fitting that a poet so interested in ritual, order and structure should have his life so neatly divided, and one is tempted to echo Stephen Spender's joke, in this different context, that Auden's "wise unconscious self chose a good day for dying"15

On a less fanciful note, however, it should be remembered that the purpose of all the strictures which Auden placed upon both his poetry and his life were guided by a desire to make words, action and belief ("A Thanksgiving") correspond with his understanding of the Word of God. At the time he was being "guided . . . back to belief" Auden wrote:

In the deserts of the heart
Let the healing fountain start,
In the prison of his days
Teach the free man how to praise.

("In Memory of W.B. Yeats", CP p. 198)

These much-praised lines (the latter two chosen for his epitaph in Westminster Abbey) resulted at last in the often wise and delightful poetry of his last four volumes. Much of it is peculiar, and difficult, but it is rarely without value for those willing "better to enjoy life or better to endure it", as well as for those seeking ways through which they, too, may learn to praise life and its Giver.

FOOTNOTES

¹"The Geography of the House" (AH). Osborne also records a few of Auden's comments made late in 1972 about dying: ". . . he said that his heart was perfectly sound but that what he feared was a lingering and debilitating illness. 'When life is becoming a burden you should let go. The nicest way, I think, would be a heart attack, it's cheap and it's quick'" (p. 303).

²Auden once entertained the old idea that "artists don't die before they have done the work they can do, are meant to do." A few comments later he admits such thinking may be "pure superstition, absolute nonsense," but in his case it seems to contain more than the usual element of truth. He has not been entirely free from the charge of repeating himself in the past, as few poets are, but in this volume he seems on the verge of exhausting the variations on his many themes. See Polly Platt, "W.H. Auden" (Interview), The American Scholar, 36 (1967), p. 268.

³The Altenburgerhof in Vienna was "an inexpensive establishment" (Osborne, p. 306), but not exactly "cheap."

⁴Cf. Mendelson's prefatory note to TYF, p. vii. Henceforward this will be cited as Note.

⁵Publisher's information, p. iv.

⁶In Robert Craft, Stravinsky (London, 1972), quoted by Osborne, p. 282. Auden refers to a "medieval anthem . . . promised to Willie Walton when I was in my cups", which sounds as if he had "The Twelve" (CWW) in mind, though it hardly fits the "mirror" description. Auden's offhand manner in speaking of the "mirror structure" is an indication of his familiarity with its use.

⁷These are terms used by the Schoolmaster in "Address for a Prize-Day," The Orators (in English Auden, p. 62), and derive from Canto 17 of Dante's Purgatory.

⁸From "Lakes" (CP, p. 431): "Just reeling off their names is ever so comfy."

⁹Osborne, pp. 194-195.

¹⁰Descent, p. 235.

¹¹Auden refers to James and Tania Stern, in whose house he was staying, and the widow of George Orwell, Sonia. Cf. Humphrey Carpenter, W.H. Auden: A Biography (London, 1981), pp. 444-445.

¹²Spears writes that Auden progresses through these longer works "in a manner that seems, retrospectively, almost programmatic" (p. 241).

¹³Dylan Thomas, "Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night," The Poems (London, 1971), p. 207.

¹⁴"Under Ben Bulben," Yeats, p. 401. Auden disliked Yeats' epitaph, saying that the horseman of its last line, "Horseman, pass by!", "is a stage prop; the passer-by is much more likely to be a motorist" (DH, p. 353).

¹⁵"Valediction," given "on 27 October 1973 at Auden's memorial service in Christ Church," in Tribute, p. 248.

APPENDIX A

"In and Out"

16. Whitsunday in Kirchstetten

- | | |
|----------------------|--|
| 1. A Change of Air | 15. Ascension Day, 1964 |
| 2. You | 14. After Reading a Child's Guide to Modern Physics |
| 3. Et in Arcadia Ego | 13. Bestiaries are Out |
| 4. Hammerfest | 12. Lost |
| 5. Iceland Revisited | 11. At the Party |
| 6. On the Circuit | 10. The Maker |
-
- | | |
|------------------------------------|------------------------|
| 7. Four Occasional Poems | |
| I A Toast | IV Parabolic Ballad |
| II A Short Ode to a Philologist | III The Complaint Book |
| III Elegy for J.F.K. | II Volcanoes |
| IV Lines for Elizabeth Mayer | I The Romantic |
9. Four Transliterations
8. Symmetries and Asymmetries

Note: my subtitles for these sections are as follows:

- a) Poems 1 to 6: An Affirmation of Images.
- b) Titles 7, 8 and 9: The Turning Point.
- c) Poems 10 to 15: A Negative Way.
- d) "Whitsunday in Kirchstetten": The Descent of the Dove.

APPENDIX B

City Without Walls

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1. City Without Walls | People Without and Within Walls |
| 2. Five Occasional Poems. (a) Joseph Weinheber (b) Epithalamium (c) Eulogy (d) Elegy (e) A Mosaic for Marianne Moore | |
| 3. The Horatians | |
| 4. Profile | |
| 5. Since | A Private Peace |
| 6. Amor Loci | |
| 7. Metaphor | |
| 8. Bird-Language | |
| 9. Two Songs (a) Song of the Ogre (b) Song of the Devil | Song and Tyranny |
| 10. Forty Years On | |
| 11. Marginalia | |
| 12. Eight Songs from <u>Mother Courage</u> (a) Mother Courage's Song (b) Song of the Goodwife and the Invaders (c) Song of Fraternization (d) Song of Unconditional Surrender (e) Song of the Soldier Before the Inn (f) Song of the Rose (g) Lullaby (h) Song of the Trials of Great Souls | |
| 13. In Due Season | Time and Tyranny |
| 14. Rois Fairéants | |
| 15. Partition | |
| 16. August 1968 | |
| 17. Fairground | Potential Regeneration |
| 18. River Profile | |
| 19. Insignificant Elephants | |
| 20. Ode to Terminus | |
| * * * * | |
| 21. Four Commissioned Texts (a) Runner (b) The Twelve (c) Moralities (d) A Reminder | Denouement: New Visions of the City |
| 22. Prologue at Sixty | |

Note: the subtitles outside the brackets on the right are mine. Auden also does not show, in his table of contents page, that the poems are grouped in this way. Nevertheless, he did arrange his poems according to the structure roughly suggested here -- a structure rather more complex than that briefly described in my text.

APPENDIX C

Epistle to a Godson

- | | | | |
|-----|----------------------------------|-------------------------------|-----|
| | | 17. The Ballad of Barnaby. | |
| (5) | 16. Shorts I | 18. Shorts II | |
| | 15. Doggerel by a Senior Citizen | 19. Old People's Home | |
| (4) | 14. The Aliens | 20. Circe | |
| | 13. Natural Linguistics | 21. Short Ode to the Cuckoo | (6) |
| | 12. Stark bewölkt | 22. Ode to the Medieval Poets | |
| | 11. Pseudo-Questions | 23. An Encounter | |
| (3) | 10. The Garrison | 24. A Shock | |
| | 9. Moon Landing | 25. Anthem | (7) |
| | 8. A Bad Night | 26. United Nations Hymn | |
| | 7. I Am Not a Camera | 27. To Goethe: A Complaint | |
| (2) | 6. Heard and Seen | 28. Contra Blake | |
| | 5. Smelt and Tasted | 29. A Toast | (8) |
| | 4. A New Year Greeting | 30. Loneliness | |
| | 3. Lines to Dr. Walter Birk | 31. Talking to Dogs | |
| (1) | 2. The Art of Healing | 32. Talking to Mice | (9) |
| | 1. Epistle to a Godson | 33. Talking to Myself | |

Note: my descriptive phrases for these paired sections and the central group of three poems are as follows:

- a) Sections (1) and (9): Managing Life and Death
- b) Sections (2) and (8): Nature and Human Nature
- c) Sections (3) and (7): Art and the World
- d) Sections (4) and (6): Body, Mind and Soul
- e) Section (5): The Top of the Vault

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