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THE CONVERSATIONAL POETRY OF W. H. AUDEN.

The University of Oklahoma, Ph.D., 1975
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THE UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA

GRADUATE COLLEGE

THE CONVERSATIONAL POETRY OF W. H. AUDEN

A DISSERTATION

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

BY

PERRY D. OLDHAM, JR.

Norman, Oklahoma

1975

THE CONVERSATIONAL POETRY OF W. H. AUDEN

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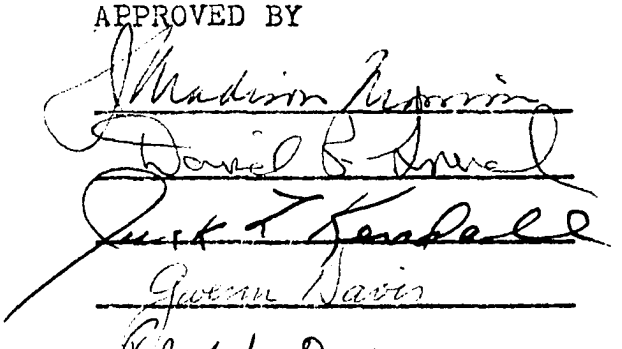

DISSERTATION COMMITTEE

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DISSERTATION

THE CONVERSATIONAL POETRY OF W. H. AUDEN

This study aims to explore some implications of the "conversational" element in Auden's poetry. Chapter One proposes that the discursive tradition within which Auden writes has roots in Horace, and that it can be distinguished from other colloquial traditions, such as the Romantic conversation piece. Chapter Two suggests social, philosophical and aesthetic "reasons" for Auden's adoption of a conversational style in the thirties. Chapter Three discusses influences exerted upon the style by various poets whom Auden considers in his own criticism and poetry; and Chapter Four treats Auden's relationship to those poets one might consider as central to the English tradition of conversational poetry: Pope and Byron, and by extension, Horace. Chapter Five presents a reading of Auden's poetry, from Poems (1933) to Epistle to a Godson (1972), and it focuses upon the conversational element: noting where it appears and what characteristic functions it plays in each period. The view to emerge from the discussion is, I think, that Auden is primarily a poet in the tradition of genial discourse, and that his ancestors in the English poetic tradition are primarily Pope and Byron.

Chapter One

A Conversational Tradition

> Poetry is related to the sermon and you have your penchant for preaching, but it is more closely related to conversation and you, my dear, if any, are a born gossip.
>
> Louis MacNeice, "Letter to W. H. Auden"

Everyone has agreed that W. H. Auden wrote conversational poetry. As early as 1939, Ronald Bottrall saw Auden as "le Byron de nos jours," his "best work based, richly and valuably, on the rhythms of colloquial speech." Richard Hoggart, in the first book-length study of the poet (1951), observes that "Auden's most characteristic manner is the conversational." The same year, Stephen Spender announced that, "So [with Nones] the Conversation Piece becomes Auden's idiom." Marianne Moore has defined the middle, or conversational, style as "the circumspectly audacious," and asserts that Auden "is possessed of it"; and Edmund Wilson has remarked of the Collected Poetry that Auden "amuses us, converses with us, does his best to give us good advice." The English critic, G. S. Fraser, has written of Auden's promise, at one time, "of being our best poet in a conversational style (that is, our best poet with an adult social sense) since the Byron of 'Don Juan' or perhaps even since Pope"; and A. Alvarez has made the point that, of all contemporary poets, Auden "would

feel most at home in the age of Dryden, the age of informed, satiric and slightly gossipy occasional verse." In his influential study of Auden (1963), Monroe Spears discusses the poet's perfection, in the late thirties, of "the colloquial or middle style as a flexible instrument for rational discourse and statement that can be public without falsity or loss of integrity," and of the dominance, in the late verse, of the colloquial style, involving "the kind of low-keyed, informal, often amusing poem that . . . depends on an attractive and viable persona." Of the mature verse, John Blair has said that the poet "is much attracted to an easy conversational tone and flexible rhythm which, in the fixed forms, constitute a tour de force"; and Justin Replogle has marked Auden's tendency in the late poetry to speak in either of two distinct poetic voices, "one created by dominant metrical, the other by dominant speech, rhythm." George Bahlke has recently characterized the tone of much of the thirties poetry as being "simultaneously meditative and casual, lofty and colloquial," and has mentioned "the pervasively personal style" of a late volume. Finally, John Fuller has referred to "the relaxed conversationalism which seems to have been the chief stylistic influence that America provided."[1]

However, although many critics have noted in passing Auden's fondness for the conversational mode, no one has done much in the way of exploring, in an organized manner, the

implications arising from that fact. John Blair briefly has offered several reasons to account for the change in Auden's poetry, during the early thirties, from a condensed obscurity to a relaxed conversationalism: his desire to reach a proletarian audience; his new interest in writing libretti; his developing anti-Romantic bias, which found expression, on the one hand, in a taste for lucid clarity; and his discovery of light verse.[2] Herbert Greenberg has proposed that this stylistic shift had its origins in a change of philosophy; i.e., that in the very early poems, the poet was concerned with private remedies for illness, with self gratification through eros, through one's "freeing" oneself from repression. The point of view favored the unconscious over the conscious, and as a result, the poetry was "obscure." Later, Auden rejected such ideas, choosing instead to suggest that the social order is responsible for personal neuroses, and that the artist's job is therefore to work toward changing that social order.[3] The result, as Greenberg explains, is that, "though obscure private references are not entirely banished, his poetry now moves into the public world of current events."[4] Frederick Buell, considering Auden in relation to his cultural milieu, also has emphasized the importance, during this period, of the poet's social commitment to the development of his style.[5]

A few critics have suggested various poetic influences upon the development of Auden's middle style (in this essay,

"conversational" and "middle," used to designate a type of style, will be employed interchangeably). Hoggart has submitted that contributors to the manner include Langland, Skelton, some of the Middle English poets, Spenser, Dryden, Byron, Hopkins, Whitman, D. H. Lawrence, Wilfred Owen, and T. S. Eliot.[6] Replogle cites Yeats as a major influence and also lists "Dryden, Horace, Marianne Moore, and the tradition of English and Latin Augustan poetry."[7] Spears, on the other hand, mentions Hardy, Thomas, Frost, Yeats, Swift, Dryden, Pope and Marianne Moore as influences upon the style.[8] None of these critics, however, has gone deeply into the matter of Auden's relationship to these, or other possible, poetic influences upon his poetry.

To my knowledge, Spears is the only writer thus far to have written at all extensively upon the evolution of Auden's conversational style from the early to the late poetry. He observes that in Poems, 1933, the mode is used mainly for satiric purposes; that during the late thirties, Auden perfected the style as a medium for rational discourse and statement; that during the early forties, a new middle style emerged--"colloquial, but humorously inflated"; and that during the fifties a noticeable warmth, a Horatian serenity, becomes increasingly apparent in the verse.[9] While immensely helpful, however, Spears' discussion of the style's development is brief and necessarily subordinate to the comprehensive scope of his book. Further, the last collection which he

considers is Homage to Clio (1960), which leaves untouched the final three volumes, from the "Austrian" period--About the House (1966), City Without Walls (1969), and Epistle to a Godson (1972).

Therefore, the intention of this study will be to explore, in something of an "organized" manner, such issues as those raised in the above paragraphs. Chapter Two will consider possible reasons for Auden's adoption of a conversational style in the thirties; Chapter Three will focus on Auden's writings about other poets who can be regarded as having influenced his use of the style. Chapter Four will address the matter of Auden's relation to those poets whom one might regard as central to the English tradition of conversational poetry; and Chapter Five will present a reading of Auden's poetry, including the final three volumes, and it will focus upon the conversational element: noting where it appears and what characteristic functions it plays in each period. The view to emerge from the discussion will be, I think, that Auden is very much a poet in the line of genial discourse. That his ancestors in the English poetic tradition were primarily Pope and Byron, and that his achievement will at last be judged against theirs.

First, however, a few observations on the nature of conversational poetry. In On the Character of the Orator, XXI, Cicero characterizes a "good speaker" as "one who could

speak with adequate acuteness and perspicacity before an ordinary audience from the point of view of what may be called the average intelligence."[10] This "good speaker," whose mode of expression might be described as a "plain" style, is differentiated from a "real orator," who "could add a charm and glamour of magnificence to the theme of his choice, and held within the compass of his own mind and memory all the springs of knowledge on all subjects which had any bearing on oratory."

These two categories correspond roughly to what Quintilian terms the "plain" and the "grand" styles.[11] The former is best suited to instruction, and its crucial quality is "acumen"; it is the style in which "we shall state our facts and advance our proofs" (p. 485). The grand style, in contrast, is best adapted for "moving" an audience, and its main requirement is "force." To these categories, however, Quintilian adds a third, the "intermediate or florid" style, whose purpose is to "charm" or "conciliate" an audience; its necessary quality is gentleness, and it makes frequent use of metaphors and other figures of speech. It has "alluring digressions" and pleasing reflections, and it is in precise rhythm; "its flow . . . [is] gentle, like that of a river whose waters are clear, but overshadowed by the green banks on either side" (p. 485).

George Ridenour has asserted that the "plain" style, according to the criteria of both Cicero and Quintilian

in these passages, can be used to designate the style of Horace's sermones ("conversation pieces"), as well as of Byron's Don Juan.[12] (One would suggest, however, that while this assertion is partly true, it is over-simplified--as Quintilian contends, "eloquence cannot be confined even to these three forms of style. For just as the third style is intermediate between the grand and the plain style, so each of these three are separated by interspaces which are occupied by intermediate styles compounded of the two which lie on either side" [pp. 487,89]. Horace's conversation pieces, as well as Dryden's prologues, Pope's verse essays, and Byron's comic epic, employ a lucid style. Yet, the tone of voice frequently involves an intimacy, a grace, a "gentleness," which makes these works seem as open to classification as examples of the "intermediate," as of the "plain" style.)[13]

Horace, whose satires and epistles are classics of the conversational style, places his own work in the line of Cicero's "plain" style (Quintilian lived a century after Horace). In the fourth Satire of Book I, he states that he is no "poet"--i.e., one who "has talent, inspired genius and a grand and lofty style."[14] Instead, like Cicero's "good speaker," he writes "in language more appropriate to conversation." Overly modest, he asserts that his poetry is like comedy in that "neither in the words nor in the subject matter is there any inspiration or force, and, except for the fact that it is written in fixed meter, it is mere prose" (one assumes that Horace refers in this statement to the sermones, not to the odes).

Hence, the Roman master of conversational verse emphasizes primarily the prosaic aspect of his style, its essential contrast with the "high" or "grand" style.

In the tenth Satire Horace seems to anticipate Quintilian's "intermediate" style in some ways as he discusses attributes of beautiful poetry (and presumedly, he includes his own poems in the category of pulchra poemata), which should be smooth and terse, "that the sense may flow on, unimpeded by words that burden the ears to weariness" (p. 37). Further, Horace emphasizes that, like the ebb and flow of conversation, itself, "beautiful poetry" should encompass "a varying style, now grave, now gay, at one time oratorical, at another poetic, at a third witty like that of a man who holds his hands and means more than he says."

Thus one might see Horace's conversational verse, with its twin intentions of instruction and delight,[15] as lying somewhere between the plain and intermediate styles, as defined by Quintilian: "instruction" implies the plain style; while "delight"--which depends somewhat on "charm," gentleness, figures of speech, "alluring digressions," and pleasing reflections--suggests more the intermediate. In terms of subject matter, it is a mean style--appropriate to comedy and common poetry--as opposed to either a low style (pastoral, eclogue) or a high style (hymn, "heroic report," tragedy).[16]

In the nineteenth century, William Hazlitt denoted the "familiar" style in terms reflecting Cicero's and Quintilian's

description of the "plain" style, as "an unvarnished medium to convey ideas."[17] Befitting a mode intended for instruction (and one assumes, for delight as well: as Horace points out, "the man who mingles the useful with the sweet carries the day by charming his reader and at the same time instructing him"),[18] it employs "the best word in common use," rejecting on the one hand "all unmeaning pomp," and on the other "all low, cant phrases, and loose, unconnected, slipshod allusions." It is neither stage declamation nor "vulgar dialect"; instead, it follows "a middle course" (p. 242). It is writing which, in using "the true idiom of the language," becomes such "as any one would speak in common conversation, who had a thorough command and choice of words, or who could discourse with ease, force, and perspicuity, setting aside all pedantic and oratorical flourishes" (p. 242). Thus in defining a type of middle style, Hazlitt places his emphasis upon steering a middle course, upon using the diction of educated speakers, upon careful precision rather than comic exaggeration or rhetorical flourish.

Auden discusses a kind of poetry which he calls "light verse" in the "Introduction" to The Oxford Book of Light Verse, which he edited in 1938.[19] A poet, he says, produces light verse when his "interests and perceptions" are much the same as those of his audience, when "that audience is a fairly general one," when the poet is not "conscious of himself as an unusual person," and when his language is "straightforward

and close to ordinary speech" (p. viii). Further, Auden characterizes three kinds of light poetry: (1) oral poetry, intended to be "spoken or sung before an audience"; (2) "poetry intended to be read, but having for its subject-matter the everyday social life of its period or the experiences of the poet as an ordinary human being"; and (3) nonsense poetry (p. ix).

Our particular concern lies with the second of these kinds. One is struck by Auden's emphasis upon the "ordinary" in his description: the maker of light verse uses language which is "straightforward" (cf. Quintilian's adjective, "plain") and "close to ordinary speech"; and he is concerned with everyday social life, with the poet's experiences "as an ordinary human being." (Earlier Auden says that the means of literature is "language--the medium of ordinary social intercourse" [p. vii]). Auden evidently is referring to that kind of verse designated by Cicero as "plain," used by Horace under the designation, sermones, characterized by Hazlitt as "familiar."

Echoing Horace, Auden says that the artist "wants to tell the truth [i.e., "instruct"], and he wants to amuse his friends ["delight"]" (p. iii). However, in order that poets may feel "in sufficient intimacy with their audience to be able to forget themselves and their singing robes" (p. x), they must regard themselves as essentially no different from their readers--they must share common "interests and perceptions."

During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in England, social and philosophical turmoil made difficult the artist's identification with his audience, for "the more unstable a society, and the more detached from it the artist, the clearer he can see, but the harder it is to convey it to others" (p. xi). The Restoration, however, signaled the return of a more stable society and way of thinking. The artist was placed in a relatively secure social position, under the patronage arrangement, and his social status rose. He saw that his aristocratic readers had much in common with himself--education, interests, and "good taste"--and he began to write "light verse." Auden designates Dryden's "Essay on the Dramatic Poetry of the Last Age" as a landmark in the development of light verse in England, for it "ascribes the superiority in correctness of language of the new dramatists to their greater opportunities of contact with genteel society" (p. xii). One result of this new accessibility to "genteel society" which artists found themselves enjoying and of their "settled and valued place in society" was that "not only minor poets, but the greatest, like Dryden and Pope, were able to express themselves in an easy manner, to use the speaking voice, and to use as their properties the images of their everyday, i.e. social, life."

Hence Auden emphasizes the social idea of "genuine community," which he concludes is necessary to the creation of true light verse. Like Cicero, Horace, Quintilian, and Hazlitt, as well, he notes that this kind of expression relies

on a "middle" range of diction, the language in which an educated speaker addresses his peers. Auden also stresses the idea of the average, the ordinary: startling flourishes and efforts to "move" the reader in a grand way find little place in this poetry. As light verse is a medium of conveying ideas as well as of entertaining the artist's friends, it implies a mixed tone, one that resembles conversation in its ability to modulate from logically-based discourse to pleasing digression and back again.

The year after Auden's light verse anthology appeared, Ronald Bottrall wrote an article in which he developed his own criteria for calling verse "conversational": essentially, it should manifest a "normal word order, and the rhythms of everyday speech."[20] Thinking more in terms of large narratives than of Horatian epistles, Bottral views "colloquial" poets as those who, in dramatic eras (e.g., the Renaissance), might have written drama. They "use a large canvas, tell a story, and write vivid dialogue" (p. 211). Suggesting that this tradition runs from Boccaccio to Chaucer to Dryden and Pope to Byron and finally to Kipling and Auden, Bottrall asserts that Byron, in Don Juan, made use of the heritage of "aristocratic colloquial speech" which had come "from the Restoration down to Chesterfield and Sheridan" (p. 214). Byron's "precision of statement," as well as his "powerful use of the rhythms of colloquial speech" are noted, and Bottrall concludes that Don Juan is written in the language Byron "spoke to his friends and equals."

Richard Hoggart, in his book on Auden, suggests that the conversational style involves "the manipulation of speech rhythms to produce a distinct tone of voice in the verse" and further that this tone "may be racy, persuasive, cool, dramatic, easy, unfussed and unhurried, but is always there."[21] This observation seems entirely felicitous, focusing as it does, upon the element of "tone." One suggests that it will not do to specify a certain level of diction as a strict criterion in defining conversational verse, as Hazlitt would seem to suggest. Byron and Auden, for example, both delight in mixing "high" words (nearly always, in this context, for mock-heroic effect), "common" words, and slang, achieving thereby a humorous, often sly effect--which, of course, is that of entertaining speech. Pope and Dryden also achieve this "sly" effect, but often do so through use of vulgarisms, especially in their mock-heroic works (one thinks of such candid poems as MacFlecknoe and The Dunciad).

One concludes that conversational verse involves a distinctly personal tone of voice, functioning in a poem which proceeds conversationally from topic to topic, from mood to mood (the poem will be primarily of a discursive or didactic nature, but it will avoid the appearance of having been systematically organized). The unstrained, colloquial rhythms and word order are closely related to the personal tone of voice; i.e., to speak "personally" means to speak casually and naturally; florid, involved rhythms and syntax,

by their very nature, would seem to involve a heightened tone.

One way to clarify the nature of this kind of verse is to differentiate it from another tradition that superficially resembles it--Romantic conversation poems, such as Coleridge's "The Eolian Harp," "Reflections on Having Left a Place of Retirement," "This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison," "Frost at Midnight," "To William Wordsworth," "Fears in Solitude," and "The Nightingale"; and Wordsworth's "Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey," and in some ways, the larger works, The Prelude and The Excursion.[22] Coleridge had a "conversational" genre in mind when he entitled "The Nightingale" "A Conversation Piece"; when he termed "Reflections on Having Left a Place of Retirement" "A Poem which affects not to be Poetry" and added the tag, Sermoni propriora ("better suited to talk"), Horace's description of his Satires and Epistles; and when he remarked of "Fears in Solitude," "N.B. The above is perhaps not Poetry,--but rather a sort of middle thing between Poetry and Oratory--sermoni propriora.--Some parts are, I am conscious, too tame even for animated prose."[23]

These poems, however, can be distinguished from the conversational poems of Pope and Byron. In the first place, whereas the latter involve a rhyming tradition: heroic couplets in the cases of Dryden and Pope and ottava rima in Byron; the Coleridgean poems are composed in the Miltonic blank verse tradition of Thomson's The Seasons, Akenside's The Pleasures of the Imagination, Blair's The Grave, Young's Night Thoughts,

but modified somewhat by the informal grace of Horace's Epistles and Satires (Cowper's The Task might be taken as a direct antecedent, in this sense). "Frost at Midnight," for example, affects a Miltonic measure, but "lowered from Milton by Coleridge's characteristic softness, euphony, and flow."[24]

> For I was reared
> In the great city, pent 'mid cloisters dim,
> And saw nought lovely but the sky and stars.
> But thou, my babe! shalt wander like a breeze
> By lakes and sandy shores, beneath the crags
> Of ancient mountain, and beneath the clouds,
> Which image in their bulk both lakes and shores
> And mountain crags . . . .[25]

One notices the elevated rhythms and frequently Latinate word order ("cloisters dim") normally associated with blank verse, as opposed to the light, aphoristic brilliance of a typical passage from a conversational poem by Pope:

> In Men we various Ruling Passions find,
> In Women, two almost divide the Kind,
> Those only fix'd, they first or last obey:
> The Love of Pleasure, and the Love of Sway.[26]

In contrast to the largely uninterrupted flow of blank verse in "Frost at Midnight" (even the exclamation in line four of the passage from that poem barely breaks the movement), one finds in Pope's couplets a complex playing back and forth of rhythm: in the first line there are no stops; in the second, there is a marked caesura in the middle of the second foot; in the third a caesura between the second and third feet; in the fourth, a small break exactly in the middle of the line.

In spite of Wordsworth's professions to the contrary in the Preface to Lyrical Ballads, the diction in Romantic

conversation poems tends to be "higher," more artificial than in those poems of the other tradition (Auden pertinently has observed that, "While stating that he [Wordsworth] intended to write in the language really used by men . . . whenever he tries to do so he is not completely successful, while in his best work, the Odes and The Prelude, his diction is poetic, and far removed from the spoken word . . . . When he objects to eighteenth-century diction as 'artificial,' what he really means is artificial for his particular purpose. The diction of the Immortality Ode would be as artificial for Pope's purposes as Pope's was for Wordsworth's").[27] The point has been made that Dryden's and Pope's ideal, as well as that of Byron and, as we shall see, of Auden, is the language which educated speakers employ in addressing their peers. When Byron says,

> Didst ever see a Gondola? For fear
> You should not, I'll describe it you exactly:
> 'Tis a long cover'd boat that's common here
> Carved at the prow, built lightly, but compactly,
> Row'd by two rowers, each call'd 'Gondolier,'
> It glides along the water looking blackly.
> Just like a coffin clapt in a canoe,
> Where none can make out what you say or do.[28]

one assumes that he is using words and phrases which approximate those he normally used in conversation ("For fear you should not"; "Row'd by two rowers, each call'd 'Gondolier'"; "a coffin clapt in a canoe").

In contrast, such lines as the following illuminate Charles Lamb's facetious translation of Coleridge's sermoni propriora as "properer for a sermon":

> Yet even this, this cold beneficience
> Praise, praise it, O my Soul! oft as thou scann'st
> The sluggard Pity's vision-weaving tribe!
> Who sigh for Wretchedness, yet shun the Wretched,
> Nursing in some delicious solitude
> Their slothful loves and dainty sympathies!
> I therefore go, and join head, heart, and hand,
> Active and firm, to fight the bloodless fight,
> Of Science, Freedom, and the Truth in Christ.[29]

This passage, although admittedly extreme, serves to illustrate the Romantic tendency to assume an elevated tone of voice and thereby to use grand, rhetorical terms--something which Byron does in the "Romantic" poems, such as Childe Harold and Manfred, but not in his ottava rima verse. Of these lines, Richard Fogle remarks, "the thought contained in them indeed is serious and crucial; but the style, with its artful Miltonic inversions, its abstract pseudo-personifications, its elaborate arrangement, is utterly inappropriate."[30]

One might observe of the Romantic conversation poems that they are essentially meditative and introspective, while those of the Popean tradition are witty and outgoing. As Fogle notes, the former "are predominantly poems of internal experience."[31] The speaker normally is a private person in unvarnished surroundings: either those of nature, or of a homely room (e.g., "Frost at Midnight"); the poem consists of the speaker's personal reflections, his broodings on a topic suggested by his surroundings. Thus the speaker of "The Eolian Harp" compares his wandering thoughts with the wind harp, played by the breeze:

> And thus, my Love! as on the midway slope
> Of yonder hill I stretch my limbs at noon,
> Whilst through my half-clos'd eye-lids I behold
> The sunbeams dance, like diamonds, on the main,
> And tranquil muse upon tranquility;
> Full many a thought uncall'd and undetain'd,
> And many idle flitting phantasies,
> Traverse my indolent and passive brain,
> As wild and various as the random gales
> That swell and flutter on this subject Lute![32]

It is noteworthy that in these "conversation" poems, the poet actually is talking to himself. For example, "The Eolian Harp" opens with the address, "My pensive Sara!" which is appropriate to the poem's occasion: the poet's honeymoon. However, the focus soon shifts to the work's primary concern: the dialictic which occurs within the poet between his imaginative, intellectually venturesome self, and his orthodox, conjugal self.[33] In other words, the "conversation" is internal, making the poem essentially a soliloquy, or meditation.

In contrast, the Popean conversational poems often seem actually to be aimed at a recipient, who is specified. For example, Pope's "Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot," one feels, actually is addressed to that person, and is intended to evoke a response from him on issues in which they both were vitally interested (one wonders how interested Sara Coleridge was--no Dorothy Wordsworth was she--in the dual sides of her husband's nature). Even in the case of a poem like Don Juan, addressed generally to "the reader," that reader has the feeling that the poet is talking directly to him, via the printed page.

Likewise the themes of the Romantic poems tend to be of a philosophical nature (Fogle points out, "they have one overarching theme, the Romantic vision of unity and life, and one aspiration, for . . . peace")[34] and to stress the values of individualism and solitude. Hence Wordsworth's "Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey" involves the speaker's relation to Nature, the revitalization which he experiences from coming in contact with it:

> And now, with gleams of half-extinguished thought
> With many recognitions dim and faint,
> And somewhat of a sad perplexity,
> The picture of the mind revives again:
> While here I stand, not only with the sense
> Of present pleasure, but with pleasing thoughts
> That in this moment there is life and food
> For future years.[35]

Society here is viewed as devitalizing and repressive: the poet speaks of his bleak hours "in lonely rooms, and 'mid the din / Of towns and cities," and of "the sad, still music of humanity." In contrast, the Popean tradition is gregarious: its themes, as well as its values, are social and ethical. Dryden's dramatic prologues and epilogues often imply a sense of unbuttoned good fellowship: the speakers (actors and actresses) address the audience as friends, and everyone seems part of a worldly, knowing, critical club; Pope's Horatian epistles, on one level, are poetic <u>romans à clef</u>, and on another level, are preeminently concerned with the promulgation of valid ethical values. Even the "rebellious" Byron is concerned in "Beppo" and in <u>Don Juan</u> with man's

efforts to live harmoniously in society; and his great travesty, The Vision of Judgement, arose from his outrage at what he regarded as the unethical behavior of Robert Southey in writing an encomium at the death of George the Third.

Although both forms involve an intimate tone, there again is a noticeable difference between them. The intimacy of a Romantic conversation poem tends to be that of mind to mind--one might justifiably call this poetry "Platonic." Its emotions are, as Fogle says, "gentle, quietistic, delicately modulated."[36] In contrast, the intimacy of the Popean conversational poem is that of one person, comfortable by the fire, to another, who is a good friend--tête à tête. Stephen Spender perfectly evokes this kind of speaker in his image of Auden, "on his sixtieth birthday":

> Forty years later, now, benevolent
> In carpet slippers, you still make devices,
> Sitting at table, playing patience,
> Grumpily fitting our lives to your game . . . .[37]

Finally, one might distinguish between these two kinds of poetry by realizing that, as "Romantic" poetry, Coleridge's and Wordsworth's "conversation" poems implicitly favor "reason" over "understanding" (in Coleridge's sense of those terms). The aim of these two poets is to transcend the "everyday," the quotidian round of tasks and conversations, with a "higher" state of consciousness:

> . . . that serene and blessed mood,
> In which the affections gently lead us on,--
> Until, the breath of this corporeal frame
> And even the motion of our human blood
> Almost suspended, we are laid asleep
> In body, and become a living soul:
> While with an eye made quiet with the power
> Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,
> We see into the life of things.[38]

The conversational poetry of Dryden, Pope, Byron, Auden, on the other hand, has a wholly different intention. Instead of attempting to transcend the world and its inhabitants, it makes of them its concern. Auden brilliantly implies the difference between these two traditions in his book, The Enchafèd Flood,[39] in which he defines the Romantic hero as one whose overwhelming desire is to leave the City, to salvage what he can of himself from the chaos of modern civilization. In contrast, the effort of the good man throughout the latter half of the seventeenth and the first half of the eighteenth centuries was "to found a new Good City on the basis of sound reason, common sense, and good taste" (p. 47). Further, the heroic figure of the middle twentieth century, as Auden sees him, "is not the nomad wanderer through the desert or over the ocean, but the less exciting figure of the builder, who renews the ruined walls of the city" (p. 150). Hence, whereas "the Romantic reaction, naturally, was to stress imagination and vision; i.e., the less conscious side of artistic creation, the uniqueness of the poet's individual experience, and the symbolic rather than the decorative or descriptive value of images" (p. 58), the tendency of the

Popean tradition, including Auden, is to stress an "unconscious directed by reason,"[40] the shared nature of the poet's social experience, and the pleasing effect of verbal polish and wit. In the words of Meyer Abrams, Romantic poetry, including the conversation poems, essentially is "expressive" in nature: its intention is to serve the artist as a medium for self-expression. The Popean tradition, on the other hand, is oriented both toward outward reality (making it "mimetic" in nature) and toward its audience: it intends to serve as a medium for teaching, and hence is described by Abrams as "didactic."[41] The one tradition might be viewed as constituting a "closed" circuit: the image of Narcissus in a reflecting pool; whereas the other is an "open" circuit, involving the poet's dialogue with the rest of society.

As the colloquial tradition running from Horace, through Dryden, Pope, Byron and Auden, is generally smooth and polished, involving a casual, graceful "middle" style, so there seems to be a "harsh" colloquial tradition, which includes such poets as Donne, Browning, Hopkins, and Hardy. This tradition, which stresses strong, vivid language and imagery, abrupt rhythms, paradox and surprise, in the cases of Donne, Browning, and Hopkins; and frequent, rough-hewn awkwardness in the case of Hardy; is distinctive in tone and general ambiance, and is of a fundamentally different kind than the Horatian tradition. As such, it will not constitute a subject for consideration in this study.

Likewise, the genre in which we are interested can be distinguished from the American colloquial tradition, which flows from Whitman and Emily Dickinson through William Carlos Williams to much of what is most vital in contemporary American poetry: the Black Mountain group, including Charles Olson, Robert Duncan, and Robert Creeley; the "San Francisco Renaissance," involving Jack Spicer and Lawrence Ferlinghetti, among others; the "Beat" poets--Allen Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac, Gregory Corso, and Gary Snyder; and the "New York" poets, including Frank O'Hara, John Ashbery, and Kenneth Koch. The tradition to which Auden belongs is a prosodically regular English tradition. The American tradition, for the most part, involves free verse--and it is "colloquial" in an American sense, being based on American diction and speech rhythms. The difference between it and the English conversational tradition is, very simply, the difference between New York and London, between the green English countryside of Surrey and the arid brown hills of California.

FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER I

[1]Ronald Bottrall, "Byron and the Colloquial Tradition in English Poetry," Criterion, XVIII (1939), rpt. in M. H. Abrams, ed., English Romantic Poets: Modern Essays in Criticism (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1960), p. 225; Richard Hoggart, Auden: An Introductory Essay (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1951), p. 50; Stephen Spender, "Seriously Unserious. A Review of Nones, by W. H. Auden," Poetry (Chicago), LXXVIII (September 1951), 353; Marianne Moore, "W. H. Auden," from Predilections (New York: The Viking Press, Inc., 1955); Edmund Wilson, "W. H. Auden in America," The New Statesman and Nation, LI (June 9, 1956); G. S. Fraser, "The Career of W. H. Auden," from Vision and Rhetoric: Studies in Modern Poetry (London: Faber and Faber, Ltd., 1959), the articles by Moore, Wilson, and Fraser rpt. in Monroe K. Spears, ed., Auden: A Collection of Critical Essays, Twentieth Century Views (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1964), pp. 40, 59, and 92, respectively; A. Alvarez, Stewards of Excellence (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958), p. 102; Monroe K. Spears, The Poetry of W. H. Auden: The Disenchanted Island (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1963), pp. 150 and 310;

John G. Blair, The Poetic Art of W. H. Auden (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1965), p. 150; Justin Replogle, Auden's Poetry (Seattle: Univ. of Washington Press, 1969), p. 186; George W. Bahlke, The Later Auden: From 'New Year Letter' to 'About the House' (New York: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1970), pp. 16 and 175; John Fuller, A Reader's Guide to W. H. Auden (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1970), p. 166.

[2]Blair, pp. 22-24.

[3]As Auden wrote in The Poet's Tongue (1935): "Poetry is not concerned with telling people what to do, but with extending our knowledge of good and evil, perhaps making the necessity of action more urgent and its nature more clear, but only leading us to make a rational and moral choice." Quoted in Dennis Davison, W. H. Auden (London: Evans Bros., Ltd., 1970), p. 44.

[4]Herbert Greenberg, Quest for the Necessary: W. H. Auden and the Dilemma of Divided Consciousness (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1968), p. 60.

[5]Frederick Buell, W. H. Auden as a Social Poet (Ithica, N. Y.: Cornell Univ. Press, 1973), p. 6.

[6]Hoggart, p. 52.

[7]Replogle, p. 122.

[8]Spears, pp. 24, 151, and 329.

[9]*Ibid.*, pp. 35, 150, 197, and 310.

[10]Cicero, *On the Character of the Orator*, trans. E. N. P. Moor, in Moses Hadas, ed., *The Basic Works of Cicero* (New York: The Modern Library, 1951), p. 201.

[11]Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*, Volume Four, trans. H. E. Butler, The Loeb Classical Library (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1922), p. 483. Subsequent quotations from the work will be from this edition.

[12]George M. Ridenour, *The Style of Don Juan* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1960), pp. 9-10.

[13]A more detailed discussion of Horace, Pope and Byron appears in Chapter Four, below.

[14]Horace, *Conversation Pieces (Satires)*, trans. Hubert Wetmore Wells, in Casper J. Kraemer, Jr., ed., *The Complete Works of Horace* (New York: Modern Library, 1936), p. 18. Subsequent quotes from Satires IV and X, Book One, will be from this edition.

[15]Horace, *The Art of Poetry*, trans. Edward Henry Blakeney, in *The Complete Works of Horace*, p. 408: "The poet's aim is either to profit or to please, or to blend in one the delightful and the useful."

[16]See Brian Vickers, *Classical Rhetoric in English Poetry*

(New York: St. Martin's Press, 1970), pp. 74-76, for a discussion of correspondence between styles and genres.

[17]William Hazlitt, "On Familiar Style," in P. P. Howe, ed., The Complete Works of William Hazlitt: Volume 8 (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, Ltd., 1931), p. 246. Subsequent references to the essay will be from this edition.

[18]Horace, The Art of Poetry, p. 408.

[19]W. H. Auden, "Introduction," The Oxford Book of Light Verse (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1938), pp. vii-xx. Subsequent references from the "Introduction" will be from this edition.

[20]Bottrall, p. 222.

[21]Hoggart, p. 50.

[22]To these poems of Coleridge, George Maclean Harper adds "Dejection: An Ode" ("Coleridge's Conversation Poems," Quarterly Review, CCXLIV [1925], 284-98). My inclination, however, would be to agree with D. G. James, in The Romantic Comedy ([London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1948], p. 160), that "Dejection: An Ode" should not be classified thus, as it is an irregular Pindaric ode, and thus is a little too grand for the essentially more humble and limited nature of the Romantic conversation poem--although my inclusion of Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey" might seem to belie this criterion. Ultimately,

I believe, the form might be limited to efforts in blank verse, as my discussion in the text will indicate.

[23]These observations are made in Richard H. Fogle, "Coleridge's Conversation Poems," Tulane Studies in English, V (1955), 103.

[24]Ibid., p. 107.

[25]Samuel Coleridge, "Frost at Midnight," in Ernest Hartley Coleridge, ed., Coleridge: Poetical Works (1912; rpt. London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1969), p. 242.

[26]Alexander Pope, "Of the Characters of Women: An Epistle To a Lady," in F. W. Bateson, ed., The Twickenham Edition of the Poems of Alexander Pope: Volume III ii: Epistles To Several Person (Moral Essays) (London: Methuen and Co., Ltd., 1951), p. 65.

[27]Auden, p. xiv.

[28]George Gordon, Lord Byron, "Beppo," in Byron: Poetical Works (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1904), p. 626.

[29]Coleridge, "On Having Left a Place of Retirement," in the edition designated in note 24, pp. 105-06.

[30]Fogle, p. 104.

[31]Ibid., p. 107.

[32]Coleridge, pp. 101-02.

[33]See Harold Bloom, The Visionary Company: A Reading of English Romantic Poetry (1961; revised ed. Ithica, N. Y.: Cornell Univ. Press, 1971), pp. 200-02, for a lucid discussion of the poem.

[34]Fogle, p. 107.

[35]William Wordsworth, "Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey, On Revisiting the Banks of the Wye During a Tour. July 13, 1798," in E. de Selincourt, ed., The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1952), p. 261.

[36]Fogle, p. 106.

[37]Stephen Spender, "To W. H. Auden On His Sixtieth Birthday," in The Generous Days (London: Faber and Faber, 1971), p. 31.

[38]Wordsworth, "Tintern Abbey," p. 260.

[39]W. H. Auden, The Enchafèd Flood: or the Romantic Iconography of the Sea (New York: Vintage Books, 1950).

[40]Greenberg, p. 72.

[41]Meyer H. Abrams, The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition (New York: Norton, 1953), pp. 3-29.

Chapter Two

The Development of a Conversational Style

> Gain altitude, Auden, then let the base beware!
> Migrate, chaste my kestrel, you need a change of air!
> C. Day Lewis

Christopher Isherwood reports in Lions and Shadows that among "Weston's" [Auden's] early poetic influences were Thomas Hardy and Edward Thomas,[1] and that his tastes later changed from Hardy and Thomas to T. S. Eliot: "Eliot was now the master."[2] Isherwood writes, concerning Auden's incorporation of this influence, that he substituted scientific, medical and psycho-analytic allusions for Eliot's cultural ones, "seeking thereby to produce what he himself described as a 'clinical' effect. To be 'clinically minded' was, he said, the first duty of a poet. Love wasn't exciting, or romantic or even disgusting; it was funny. The poet must handle it and similar themes with a wry, bitter smile and a pair of rubber surgical gloves. Poetry must be classic, clinical and austere."[3]

Isherwood's account agrees with Stephen Spender's resumé of Auden's views during the period when the poet was at Oxford. Among characteristic pronouncements Spender notes the following:

> A poet must have no opinions, no decided views which he seeks to put across in his poetry. Above all, poetry must in no way be concerned with politics.

> Politics [sic] are just lackeys and public servants whom we should ignore.
> The subject of a poem is only a peg on which to hang the poetry.
> A poet must be clinical, dispassionate about life. The poet feels much less strongly about things than do other people.
> Poems should not have titles.
> Never use exclamation marks, and avoid abstractions.[4]

Within the framework of these views, Auden conceived the poems in his first book, Poems, privately printed by Spender in 1928. Most of these verses were reprinted by Faber in the 1930 volume, Poems, which also contained "Paid on Both Sides: A Charade"; and they were again reprinted in the second edition of 1933.[5] Typified by "From the very first coming down" (CSP, "The Letter"), "Taller to-day, we remember similar evenings" ("Taller Today"), "Control of the passes was, he saw, the key" ("The Secret Agent"), and "Who stands, the crux left of the watershed" ("The Watershed"), these works are obscure, elliptical, and very lovely. John Ashbery and Kenneth Koch agree that they constitute Auden's best, his most beautiful, poetry.[6] They contrast noticeably with poem number two, from Look, Stranger! (1936):

> Out on the lawn I lie in bed,
> Vega conspicuous overhead
> In the windless nights of June;
> Forests of green have done complete
> The day's activity; my feet
> Point to the rising moon.
>
> Lucky, this point in time and space
> Is chosen as my working place;
> Where the sexy airs of summer,
> The bathing hours and the bare arms,
> The leisured drives through a land of farms
> Are good to the newcomer.
>
> (LS, p. 13; CSP, p. 69: "A Summer Night")

One finds in this poem a new lucidity, an unexpectedly relaxed grace, a pleasing conversational effect that one had not been aware of in the earlier poems. It is typical of several poems in the volume, including the ballad, "O what is that sound which so thrills the ear" (CSP, "O What is that Sound"), the typically Audenesque lyric, "May with its light behaving" ("May"), and the melancholy "Casino." One wonders what lies behind the shift from the enigmatic, terse, obscure style of the earlier poems to the low-keyed, casual, engaging style of these poems from the 1936 volume. Our concern in the remainder of this chapter will be to seek answers to this question.

Frederick Buell points out that one reason for lessened obscurity and ambiguity in the new volume was "Auden's growing commitment to writing coherent, polemical social verse based on a synthesis of the ideas of Marx and Freud."[7] At Oxford Auden had written for a small group of friends, "The Colleagues" (sometimes called "The Gang"),[8] consisting of himself, Christopher Isherwood (who was at Cambridge), Day Lewis, Rex Warner, Stephen Spender, and Edward Upward. All six were familiar with the private mythological world, "Mortmere," which Auden, Isherwood, and Upward had created, and which one critic has used as a key to elucidate much of the obscurity in Auden's early poems, with their "spies, shooting, deserted mines, and so on."[9]

By 1936, however, this private coterie had become significantly involved in the new left-wing movement. Isherwood, Upward, Spender and Day Lewis became at one time or another associated with the English Communist Party. Day Lewis's comment concerning these days helps one to understand their intentions: "There was generosity as well as absurdity in this, for my friends and I did at least make some attempt to imagine the conditions we did not share. . . and we were prepared to help destroy a system that perpetuated itself by such hideous human wastage, even though our own pleasant way of life would be destroyed in the process."[10] Auden, himself, never joined the Party. Even "A Communist to Others," his contribution to Michael Roberts' heavily political anthology New Country (1933), was, as Spender suggests, "an exercise in entering into a point of view not his own."[11] Auden's own later evaluation of his political interests in this period is revealing: "Looking back, it seems to me that the interest in Marx taken by myself and my friends . . . was more psychological than political; we were interested in Marx in the same way that we were interested in Freud, as a technique of unmasking middle class ideologies, not with the intention of repudiating our class, but with the hope of becoming better bourgeois . . . ."[12]

Further, Auden could not accept the theory that political expediency ever justified lying. He wrote in 1955 of his shock at the Communist methods used in Spain

during this period: "Nobody I know who went to Spain during the Civil War who was not a dyed-in-the-wool Stalinist came back with his illusions intact."[13] Spears sums up the matter: "Auden clearly never believed that political values were ultimate, transcending moral and religious ones."[14]

Nevertheless, in spite of his differences with doctrinaire Party politics, Auden as well as the others of his circle, became significantly involved in left-wing activity for social change. Now, instead of expressing what Buell calls "the schoolboy rebelliousness of the Mortmere world,"[15] instead of writing for an intimate audience of friends in a language of private references and jokes, Auden and the others began trying to extend their audience. And, as Spears observes, this "awareness of being a spokesman for, or at least in relation to, a considerable audience"[16] was profoundly important to the development of Auden's style during this period.

Auden realized that for a poet to reach a "considerable"--ideally a proletarian--audience, he would have to write in a relatively simple, lucid style. Moving easily from politics to poetry, he remarks in 1939, "The social virtues of a real democracy are brotherhood and intelligence, and the parallel linguistic virtues are strength and clarity."[17] Auden admitted his own inability to write this kind of poetry in its pure form: "Personally, the kind of poetry

I should like to write but can't is 'the thoughts of a wise man in the speech of the common people.'"[18] Nevertheless, as John G. Blair has written, Auden made certain definite attempts during this period to write to a relatively unsophisticated, proletarian audience, and the result in his poetry was "a startling change toward transparency in meaning and conventional rimed stanzas in form."[19]

This shift of interests from the private world of Mortmere to the world of outward social and political realities is perfectly summed up by Auden in Poem XXX of Look, Stranger!, "August for the people and their favorite islands" (p. 63), which was written as a birthday tribute for Christopher Isherwood.[20] The poet remembers himself and Isherwood "nine years ago, upon that southern island / Where the wild Tennyson became a fossil." (John Fuller notes Isherwood's description in Lions and Shadows [pp. 188-89] of Auden's visit in 1926 to the Isle of Wight, which corresponds to the account in the poem.)[21] Then, "half-boys," they lived an economically-privileged existence ("behind us only / The stuccoed suburb and the expensive school"), and enjoyed the mutual fantasy of "the spies' career, / Prizing the glasses and the old felt hat." (Isherwood mentions Auden's wearing an old felt hat on his arrival.) They detect the sinister on all sides:

> . . . this one coughed
> And it was gasworks coke, and that one laughed
> And it was snow in bedrooms; many wore wigs,
> The coastguard signalled messages of love,
> The enemy were sighted from the norman tower.

However, he concludes, "all the secrets we discovered were / Extraordinary and false." Equally false is their perception, five years later, of love as an easy healer, whose "one fearless kiss would cure / The million fevers." As a follower of Homer Lane, through his disciple John Layard, Auden, during the period of his trip to Germany in 1928-29, agreed with Lane that diseases result from "disobedience to the inner law of our own nature."[22] Health resulted from one's following the directives of one's unconscious, which would heal the split between "ego" and "self";[23] the resolution of this split, in turn, automatically would result in self-fulfillment, "issuing in love."[24] Love was the answer to the problems of the world: "Was there a dragon who had closed the works / While the starved city fed it with the Jews? / Then love would tame it with his trainer's look."

This vision, however, is now perceived as a "flabby fancy," as an entirely inadequate defense against the very hard realities of Europe in the middle thirties.

> For now the moulding images of growth
> That made our interest and us, are gone.
> Louder to-day the wireless roars
> Its warning and its lies, and it's impossible
> Among the well-shaped cosily to flit,
> Or longer to desire about our lives
> The beautiful loneliness of the banks, or find
> The stoves and resignations of the frozen plains.

Scandal is "praying with her sharp knees up," Virtue stands weeping, "Slim Truth" is "dismissed without a character,"

and "gaga Falsehood" is highly recommended." The "wondering eloquence" of Love is "debased / To a collector's slang," Beauty "scratches miserably for food," Honour is "self-sacrificed for Calculation," and Justice is "exiled till Saint Geoffrey's Day."

The poet's reaction "in this hour of crisis and dismay" is to urge Isherwood to use his "strict and adult pen" to "make action urgent and its nature clear," as well as to "reveal / The squalid shadow of academy and garden." The emphasis seems to be upon the twin concepts, "action" and "clarity" (one recalls that the "linguistic virtues" of a "real democracy" are "strength and clarity"). The times are not right for private dreams and ruminations; instead one needs "to resist / The expanding fear, the savaging disaster." The poem's closing stanza beautifully captures a sense of foreboding, mixed perhaps with a certain exhilaration at the perception of history's inevitable rush:

> This then is my birthday wish for you, as now
> From the narrow window of my fourth floor room
> I smoke into the night, and watch reflections
> Stretch in the harbour. In the houses
> The little pianos are closed, and a clock strikes.
> And all sway forward on the dangerous flood
> Of history, that never sleeps or dies,
> And, held one moment, burns the hand.

Approached from a slightly different angle, this lucid tendency in Auden's style can be related to his growing concern for public, rather than private, remedies for

illness. As stated earlier, Auden's thinking in these areas during the late twenties was influenced by Homer Lane and John Layard, whose ideas were quite similar to those of D. H. Lawrence with regard to the negative results of repression and the necessity for one's becoming liberated from repression. ("I met a chap called Layard and he fed / New doctrines into my receptive head. / Part came from Lane, and part from D. H. Lawrence," Auden wrote in Letter to Lord Byron.)[25] And as Justin Replogle observes, Lawrence's artistic works did not impress Auden so much as his theoretical writings, Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious and Fantasia of the Unconscious.[26] In essence, what Auden absorbed from all three writers were the convictions that most illness is psychosomatic in nature ("The Pure-in-Heart is never ill," LLB, p. 74), and that in modern western culture, intellect has become dominant at the expense of instinct. The result of this dominance by the mind is a culture oriented toward death ("sun-dead" as Lawrence called it). The "cure" lies within the individual. He must restore lost power, even sovereignty, to the instinct, and thus regain harmony within his psyche. He must free the "impounded instincts, especially those most severely curbed, the sexual instincts, and live once more from solar plexus and lumbar ganglion as well as from the head."[27]

In his poetry of that time, Auden writes of warfare, feuds, the "enemy." It has been suggested that these conflicts

symbolize psychological conflicts between "ego" and "self" (or "ego" and "id," in Freudian terms).[28] Taken in this sense, the point of view, as well as the focus, is personal, enigmatic, shadowy, as any attempts to represent these levels of mental activity must necessarily be, in one way or another. For example, "Control of the passes was, he saw, the key" (P, p. 26; CSP, p. 22; "The Secret Agent") concerns a conflict between a "trained spy" and an unnamed "they," who "would shoot, of course," for control of "the passes," which constitute "the key / To this new district." In a relentlessly allegorial reading, John Fuller interprets the situation to be "one of unconsummated love,"[29] in which the spy represents "the individual's emotional urge to make contact with another human being," and "they," who obstruct his efforts and end by shooting him, represent "the conscious will, the Censor, which represses the individual's emotional desires." The last line and a half, "They would shoot, of course, / Parting easily two that were never joined," taken partially from the Old English poem, "Wulf and Eadwacer" ("þaet mon eaþe toslitеð þaette naefre gesomnad waes"),[30] thus is taken by Fuller to synthesize the poem's concern for a divided psyche.

In the years following his German trip, however, Auden became convinced of the futility of one's attempts to cure one's "illness" in such a private way, because he now saw that society demanded that the individual be

"ill." In a review of Dr. Maranon's The Evolution of Sex,[31] Auden asks "What is the use of trying to remove complexes from individuals when the society into which they go demands that they should have them?" He suggests that "big business" discourages meaningful personal relationships "because human relations are bad for trade. Vitality would not keep its eye on the conveyer belt; neutors [sic] are cheaper and easier to handle." With these newly-acquired attitudes, Auden concluded that, instead of trying to cure one's personal neurosis, one must instead work to change the social order responsible for that neurosis.

A poet can work toward this end by writing poetry which will be readily accessible and attractive to a broad audience, theoretically including workers with minimal educations as well as intellectuals with carefully-developed reasoning powers and sensibilities. This philosophy is reflected in Auden's poetry by a lessening of stylistic difficulty and private subject matter, in favor of clarity and a wider range of subjects which includes current events.[32] In Look, Stranger! a poem like "Easily, my dear, you move, easily your head" (p. 50; CSP, p. 80; "A Bride in the 30's"), Auden mentions Beatrix Potter and includes the poetic equivalent of a newsreel in one striking stanza:

> Ten thousand of the desperate marching by
> Five feet, six feet, seven feet high:
> Hitler and Mussolini in their wooing poses,
> Churchill acknowledging the voters' greeting,
> Roosevelt at the microphone, van der Lubbe laughing,
> And our first meeting.

Further, in this poem Auden implies that one's following of irrational impulses (in this case, those of love) is possibly dangerous, that it can lead to fascism (Hitler, one remembers, became Chancellor in 1933):

> . . . what I hear and wish I did not;
> The voice of love saying lightly, brightly--
> 'Be Lubbe, Be Hitler, but be my good
> Daily, nightly'.
>
> The power that corrupts, that power to excess
> The beautiful quite naturally possess:
> To them the fathers and the children turn:
> And all who long for their destruction,
> The arrogant and self-insulted, wait
> The looked instruction.

As Herbert Greenberg notes, Auden's ideal, with regard to the relative functioning of reason and the unconscious, is now "The unconscious directed by reason."[33] In place of the earlier suggestiveness and ambiguity, which are "symptomatic" (a favorite Auden term) of the artist's concern for a "liberated" unconsciousness, there is now greater sharpness, incisiveness and lucidity, indicative of a creative intellect, exercising greater control over the creative unconscious than before. In sum, where Auden formerly had favored control by the irrational, his ideal now is an unconscious "directed by reason," and these concerns are reflected in the style of his poems.

It might be useful to consider this shift in Auden's attitude more directly from the point of view of his aesthetics. This chapter began by noting Auden's early theories in favor of "clinical poetry," summed up in the statement,

"Poetry must be classic, clinical and austere." Wyndham Lewis reportedly said of Auden, after a visit from him in the early thirties, "He is all ice and wooden-faced acrobatics."[34] Lewis's personal impression of Auden is similar to that which the reader gets from many of the early poems: they have hard, brilliant surfaces; they are lovely; but they seem impenetrable, like shiny, lacquered Chinese boxes. Indeed, the well-known obscurity of these poems might be regarded as constituting a strategy toward avoiding an openly emotional, grandly rhetorical style. Richard Hoggart has described this poetry as "the verse of a young man prepared to experiment widely with forms and manners of expression, but particularly suspicious of lushness, and anxious to evolve a hard, cerebral style."[35]

Paradoxically, the themes of the early poems often involve attitudes that we tend to think of as Romantic. John Bayley calls the lugubrious "Get there if you can" (P, p. 39) a "Yeatsian" poem, in that Auden "shares with Yeats an enjoyment of . . . [a disastrous] situation and of the possibilities of making it stylish."[36]

> On the sopping esplanade or from our dingy
> lodgings we
> Stare out dully at the rain which falls for
> miles into the sea.

Bayley says of these lines that, "Staring out dully at the rain evokes at once all the rich futility of nostalgic

reflection."[37] He then relates this poem to the Romantic poetic tradition of making dramatic, if futile, gestures "in moments of crisis, disaster, or impending fear": the tradition of Don Juan's silence in hell, admired by Baudelaire ("Mais le calme héros, courbé sur sa rapière, / Regardait le sillage et ne daignait rien voir.").[38] In other words the poem, as Bayley reads it, involves the persona's revelling in a disastrous situation, without trying to better that situation, but instead simply savoring the aesthetic pleasures to be derived therefrom. This, Bayley asserts, is a "Romantic" reaction, even an adolescent one: "Auden's variation upon this theme is to make this gesture frankly adolescent [some critics might argue that the tradition is in any case an adolescent one] . . . ."[39]

Further, the underlying theme of Auden's poetry during this early period--the whole idea of working to liberate the instinct from the bonds imposed by intellect--is directly within the English Romantic tradition of Blake and Lawrence (as well as being in the psychological tradition of Freud and Homer Lane). Blake's "Energy is the only life, and is from the body; and Reason is the bound or outward circumference of Energy" (The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, "The Voice of the Devil"); Lawrence's "Nothing that comes from the deep, passional soul is bad, or can be bad" ("Forward" to Women In Love); these and similar Romantic statements (i.e.,

"Romantic" in the sense of placing instinct over intellect, emotion over reason, heart over head) were part of the climate of thought in which Auden functioned in the late twenties.

The result of Auden's embracing an "impersonal," "clinical" poetic theory and implicitly Romantic themes was a noticeable tension in the poetry, an unresolved quality which some readers find intriguing and others troubling. Justin Replogle, who calls these two tendencies in Auden's work "poetic" and "anti-poetic," is among the latter. Referring to those poems anterior to Look, Stranger!, he comments that, "never completely comfortable either as Poet or Antipoet, Auden kept getting too pretentious as Poet and too farcical as Antipoet, and seldom joined the two in a single poem without the threat of mutual self-destruction."[40]

Whether or not one likes Auden's early poems, one notices the changes which became evident in the poetry after his Berlin visit. As noted previously, Auden seems to have been profoundly impressed by the rise of fascism. As "Easily, my dear, you move, easily your head," implies, he became suspicious of according dominance within the psyche to the irrational ("The power that corrupts, that power to excess / The beautiful quite naturally possess"). He appears to have perceived the Nazi appeal to "das Blut" as bloody handwriting on the wall. While Pound, Yeats, and Eliot moved in differing degrees to the right, Auden and his "group" moved

to the left. (Stephen Spender recently remarked that Yeats and Eliot--that generation--identified "civilization" with Europe, and they thought that "civilization" was dying. Auden and his generation, in contrast, agreed with the diagnosis, but differed in their reactions to the disease. Eliot thought that "civilization" was coming to an end; John Cornford thought that capitalism was coming to an end.)[41]

What emerge from these experiences and from these years in some finally inexplicable way, in terms of the poetry, are a growing number of poems written in what Replogle calls a "middle style."[42] Auden, as always, refuses to adopt a rhetorical tone of voice ("whenever a modern poet raises his voice he sounds phony").[43] Yet he is concerned in several of the poems to express feelings of love and sorrow, as well as to contemplate the ominous political events of the day. His problem, as Replogle notes, is "to discover how high the Poet should go. At what heights can serious intentions safely be combined with sober tone?" His solution, consciously or unconsciously, is to seek reconciliation by moving inward from the extremes. As he moves "toward the more informal relaxed styles of meditative verse," the two opposing tendencies in his verse occasionally "fuse momentarily in a middle style, where their very antagonism itself becomes a kind of unity." And Replogle's evaluation of these poems in a "middle style" is that they tend to be superior poetically to the earlier poems, because in them

the "Poet" and the "Anti-Poet" achieve a kind of reconciliation, instead of working at cross purposes.

Another way of stating the same point is to note that, in the earlier verse, Auden's technique and theory had been "anti-Romantic," while his themes had tended toward the Romantic. This situation sometimes resulted in uncertainty of tone, and it undoubtedly accounts for some of the "strangeness," the enigmatic quality of the writing which certain readers find so appealing and others find merely frustrating. In Look, Stranger! Auden's intentions, as well as his technique and theory, become largely anti-Romantic. He has abandoned as misguided the attempt to make instinct dominate intellect, he has turned away from the Mortmere fantasies because he now regards them as immature. He is now concerned to deal with contemporary issues, as well as with personal experiences, in a graceful yet deflationary, "middle" style.

An entirely different approach to the matter of Auden's adoption of a "middle" style was recently suggested by Stephen Spender, who remarked that Auden's teaching at Larchfield Academy in Scotland and at The Downs School, near Malvern, from 1930 to 1935 may have contributed to the "loosening-up" of Auden's style. Spender noted that Auden was naturally didactic and that he found pleasure in teaching; further, that he enjoyed the comrade-relationships which he shared with the boys. This appealing atmosphere

seems to have exerted a marked effect upon his sensibility, orienting it away from the "clinical" formalism of the early poems and toward the more genial, relaxed, conversational style of the poems which followed.[44] The relaxation, the peacefulness of these years, although overshadowed by dark political and social developments beyond the gates, is evident in a poem like "Out on the lawn I lie in bed":

> Lucky, this point in time and space
> Is chosen as my working place;
> Where the sexy airs of summer,
> The bathing hours and the bare arms,
> The leisured drives through a land of farms,
> Are good to the newcomer.
> (LS, p. 13; CSP, p. 69: "A Summer Night")

The whimsical mixing of levels of diction ("leisured drives through a land of farms" and "the sexy airs of summer"), the graceful rhythmic movement, the casual alliteration: all combine to evoke a sense of contentedness and serenity. A stanza like the following particularly justifies Spender's observation in 1953 that the poem "has a Midsummer Night's Dream quality which he never achieved before or since."[45]

> Equal with colleagues in a ring
> I sit on each calm evening
> Enchanted as the flowers
> The opening light draws out of hiding
> From leaves with all its dove-like pleading
> Its logic and its powers.

Spender said in addition that, while teaching in Scotland, Auden read Burns, who also wrote conversational poetry, and that this reading seems to have had its effect

upon the poet.[46] "A certain Scottishness" is evident is Auden's use of the Habbie, or "Burns," stanza in poem XIV, "Brothers, who when the sirens roar" (originally, "A Communist to Others"), from Look, Stranger! (p. 34). Referring to the upper-class enemy of the worker, the poem's persona delivers a speech reminiscent of Burns:

> Ah, what a little squirt is there
> When of your aren't-I-charming air
> You stand denuded.
> Behind your subtle sense of humour
> You hide the boss's simple stuma,
> Among the foes which we enumer
> You are included.

The sassy, provocative stance assumed by the persona, the inclusion of slang in his castigation, the flowing colloquial lilt of the lines, as well as the stanza form, itself: all suggest the influence of Burns.

Finally, Auden seems to have been influenced by "light verse," which he defined in 1938 as "poetry . . . having for its subject-matter the everyday social life of its period or the experiences of the poet as an ordinary human being."[47] Auden writes that a poet produces light verse--poetry which communicates in a natural, unstrained manner to its readers, and which is grounded in social values--when his "interests and perceptions" are much the same as those of his audience, when "that audience is a fairly general one," when the poet is not "conscious of himself as an unusual person," and when his language is "straightforward and close to ordinary speech." One can easily see how poetry of this kind appealed to

Auden in the middle thirties. Its traditional popularity, its relative accessibility to a general audience would commend itself to Auden, who was interested in writing social verse, and thus in extending his audience from a coterie to a wide range of readers.

Especially attractive with regard to this intention is the song, for as Spears has noted, "only verse intended to be sung is truly popular."[48] And indeed, Spears considers that Auden's "songs are his most distinctive accomplishment and his most popular; in them he achieves the rapport with a large audience and the quality of lightness that he strives for with varying success in his other works."[49] The songs from the plays are good examples of Auden's use of the popular song form. The cabaret scene in Act Three of The Dog Beneath the Skin (1935) contains the hilariously satiric "romance," "Rhondda Moon," sung by Madame Bubbi:

> I come with a message to the farmers and the cities;
> I've a simple slogan, it's just: Love British!
> British Romance, British joys,
> British chorus girls and chorus boys.
>
> The Sahara makes hearts go pit-a-pat,
> Glamorganshire can do better than that!
> Wherever you go, be it east or west,
> Remember British Love is quite the best.
>
> People sing songs about Tennessee
> But foreign men won't do for me.
> I don't want a dago, I don't want a Greek,
> I've got what I want and that's a British Sheik.[50]

The satiric clout, the popular accessibility of this lyric are obvious.

Other instances of Auden's use of the popular song include the cabaret songs, all parodies of popular song forms, for Miss Hedli Anderson included in Another Time (1940); "Refugee Blues" (1939), in which the poet makes serious use of the blues form; "Miss Gee" and "Victor" (both 1937), gruesome parodies of Tin Pan Alley ballads; and the lovely, well-known ballads, "O what is that sound which so thrills the ear" (1934) and "As I walked out one evening" (1938)--although the last of these, with its enormous sophistication, might be seen as an extension, rather than a use of the form.[51]

One also suspects that Auden was attracted to light verse in the process of modifying his ideas about the unconscious and its relation to the conscious. By the middle thirties, Auden, preferring an "unconscious directed by reason," might well have responded to poetry in which the shadowy, the wonderful, the irrational, are kept in check by a sense of order and reason. His comment in the "Introduction" of the light verse anthology concerning Romantic poetry, whose makers turn "away from the life of their time to the contemplation of their own emotions and the creation of imaginary worlds" is revealing: "When the subject-matter of poetry ceases to be the social life of man, it tends to dispense with the social uses of language, grammar, and word-order, a tendency which Mallarmé carried to its logical conclusion" (p. xv). Thus by implication, he

suggests that when the subject-matter of poetry is the social life of man, it will include "the social uses of language, grammar, and word-order." We have noted that his own preoccupations during this period were increasingly social in nature, and therefore, following his own analysis, he would tend to write in a somewhat lucid, formally conventional, "middle" style. This generally is the style of the poems in the anthology of light verse, and as we have observed earlier in this chapter, it is the style to which Auden began to turn with the publication of Look, Stranger! and of which he continued to make use throughout the remainder of his poetic career.

Likewise, the tone of light verse will tend to be "simple, clear, and gay" (p. xx). This may be related to the poet's conception of himself: as Auden says, the writer of light verse, addressing an audience whose interests and perceptions he shares, "will not be conscious of himself as an unusual person, and his language will be straightforward and close to ordinary speech" (p. viii). Like Dryden and Pope, he is "able to express . . . [himself] in an easy manner, to use the speaking-voice, and to use as . . . [his] properties the images of . . . [his] everyday, i.e. social, life" (p. xii).

Auden contrasts this kind of poetry with that of Wordsworth, in whose best work, contradictory to his poetic theories, the "diction is poetic, and far removed from the spoken word." This "artifice"--i.e., lack of

conversational naturalness--in Romantic poetry, can be related to the Romantic poet's view of himself: "Instead of the poet regarding himself as an entertainer, he becomes the prophet, 'the unacknowledged legislator of the world', or the Dandy who sits in the café, 'proud that he is less base than the passers-by, saying to himself as he contemplates the smoke of his cigar: "What does it matter to me what becomes of my perceptions?'" (pp. xv-xvi). Auden then qualifies the impression that he feels he may have made: he says that he has not intended "to condemn the Romantic poets," but simply "to explain why they wrote the kind of poetry they did, why their best work is personal, intense, often difficult, and generally rather gloomy" (p. xvi).

The adjectives "personal, intense, often difficult, and generally rather gloomy" in fact constitute an accurate description of Auden's own early poetry, which, as we previously have noted, involves attitudes associated with Romanticism. I think it no accident that his verse of the mid-thirties and afterwards can be described using many of the same terms that he associates with "light verse": poetry intended to amuse the poet's friends; poetry which involves an "easy manner" and a "speaking voice"--that is "simple, clear, and gay"; poetry whose language is "straightforward and close to ordinary speech"; poetry written by one "not conscious of himself as an unusual person."

Paradoxically, however, the attribute which Auden stresses most emphatically--that light verse can be produced only by a poet living in a society whose interests and perceptions he shares--is one which Auden never managed to attain for himself.[52] As he writes in the "Introduction" to the anthology, "The problem for the modern poet, as for every one else to-day, is how to find or form a genuine community, in which each has his valued place and can feel at home" (p. xix). This search for a just community is one which preoccupied Auden throughout his life. The title poem of one of his last collections of verse, City Without Walls (1969), a sardonic vision of the modern city as hell, testifies to his not having found this good place. Strangely enough however, Auden produced "light" verse, according to his own definition, without enjoying the benefits of this community.

Philosophically, the unpretentiousness implicit in the speaking voice of light verse must have appealed to Auden during the middle thirties, after he had rejected Romanticism in his own thinking and writing. As the poet writes in a later poem, "We Too Had Known Golden Hours," from Nones (1951), he has known transcendent moments "When body and soul were in tune," while he has felt genuine poetic inspiration ("Had felt the intrusive glory / Which tears reserve apart"); nevertheless he refrains from expressing these feelings "in the grand old manner" because language has been "debased" by modern political and commercial usage:

All words like Peace and Love,
All sane affirmative speech,
Had been soiled, profaned, debased
To a horrid mechanical screech.
No civil style survived
That pandaemonium
But the wry, the sotto-voce,
Ironic and monochrome.[53]

Hence the wit, moderation and unpretentiousness of light verse must, I think, have exerted an influence upon Auden in the middle thirties and afterwards. It, after all, indicated a way to reach a wide poetic audience, something at which Auden aimed in those days of heightened social responsiveness. By virtue of its being social and conversational, it implicitly favored reason over the unconscious, and this emphasis was congenial to Auden's own new theories about the conscious and the unconscious. Finally, light verse was naturally anti-Romantic and rhetorically uninflated; in a word, tending to be "conversational." And this was the position with which Auden chose to identify himself not only in the middle thirties but until the end of his poetic career.

FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER II

[1]Christopher Isherwood, Lions and Shadows (Norfolk, Conn.: New Directions, 1947), p. 185.

[2]Ibid., p. 191.

[3]Ibid., pp. 191-92.

[4]Stephen Spender, "W. H. Auden and His Poetry," Atlantic Monthly (July, 1953), p. 74.

[5]I shall use the American edition of Poems (New York: Random House, 1934). As several of these poems, as well as many of those from Look, Stranger! (London: Faber and Faber, Ltd., 1936), are omitted from the accessible Collected Shorter Poems (New York: Random House, 1964), and as those which are included in that collection frequently have undergone extensive revision by the poet, my references in this chapter, unless otherwise noted, will be from the earlier editions (designated, respectively, as P and LS). However, page references to those poems included in the Collected Shorter Poems (CSP), as well as their titles, which were added by Auden after their original publication, will be included.

[6]Noted from conversations with the poets at the University of Oklahoma on March 11, 1974 and June 11, 1974, respectively. Ashbery expressed particular fondness for Paid on Both Sides, whereas Koch said that his favorite Auden poem is "It was Easter as I walked in the public garden" ("1929" in the Collected Shorter Poems).

[7]Frederick Buell, W. H. Auden as a Social Poet (Ithica, N. Y.: Cornell Univ. Press, 1973), p. 6.

[8]Spender, p. 74.

[9]See Justin Replogle, Auden's Poetry (Seattle: Univ. of Washington Press, 1969), pp. 18-26.

[10]Cecil Day Lewis, The Buried Day (London: Chatto and Windus, 1960), p. 210.

[11]Stephen Spender, World Within World (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1951), p. 225.

[12]W. H. Auden, "Authority in America," The Griffin, March 1955. Cited in Monroe Spears, The Poetry of W. H. Auden: The Disenchanted Island (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1963), p. 86.

[13]Ibid., p. 86.

[14]Ibid., p. 86.

[15]Buell, p. 6.

[16]Spears, p. 89.

[17]W. H. Auden, "The Public vs. the Late Mr. William Butler Yeats," Partisan Review (Spring 1939), p. 51.

[18]"Poets, Poetry, and Taste," The Highway, XXIX (December 1936), 44. Cited in John G. Blair, The Poetic Art of W. H. Auden (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1965), pp. 22-23.

[19]Blair, p. 22. Blair makes the point that the audience Auden did succeed in reaching "in the late 1930's was that of the educated middle class with left-wing or revolutionary sympathies."

[20]The poem originally appeared in New Verse, 17(Oct./Nov. 1935), 7, as "To a Writer on His Birthday."

[21]John Fuller, A Reader's Guide to W. H. Auden (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1970), pp. 256-57.

[22]Herbert Greenberg, Quest for the Necessary: W. H. Auden and the Dilemma of Divided Consciousness (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1968), p. 20.

[23]I am using these terms in the sense that Greenberg uses them in his excellent discussion of the theories of Lane, pp. 19-23.

[24]Ibid., p. 22.

[25]W. H. Auden, Letter to Lord Byron, in Collected Longer Poems (New York: Random House, 1969), p. 74.

[26]Replogle, p. 9. My discussion of this topic is indebted to Replogle.

[27]Ibid., p. 9.

[28]Replogle, relating the "psychological dialectic" to the "ready-made dialectical world of Mortmere," notes that "Auden simply added the superego to the pet peeves, obnoxious schoolboys, eccentric masters, dying saga heroes, and intellectual anathema that made up the 'enemy' in the Auden-Isherwood private world. The id went to the good side, where it joined a gallant band of Auden's personal friends, approved ideas, psychological healers, and a few right-thinking intellectuals and special eccentrics" (p. 19); Greenberg, referring to man's search for psychological health, observes that "there are two moods in conflict during this period [i.e., 1928-33] and . . . hidden dependencies . . . are increasingly the subject matter of this conflict. On the one hand, there is a vision of 'new men making another love,' an insistence upon health, an indifference to those unable to adapt and fated to die--and all this put forward with a certain bravado, with a detachment suggesting the stance of the liberated man in harmony with his instincts . . . . On the other hand, there is an awareness that the hero's pose is a sham, that it is easier to rail against

repressed desires than to seek the freedom one preaches" (p. 39): one can justifiably associate this "liberated man" with a well-developed id, and the repressed "hero" with a dominant ego.

[29]Fuller, p. 34.

[30]This point is made in Fuller, p. 34.

[31]W. H. Auden, rev. of The Evolution of Sex, by Dr. Maranon [no first name], and The Biological Tragedy of Women, by Anton Nemilov, Criterion, XII (Jan. 1933), 288-89.

[32]My discussion of this point is indebted to Greenberg, p. 60.

[33]Greenberg, p. 72.

[34]Quoted in Richard Hoggart, Auden: An Introductory Essay (New Yaven: Yale Univ. Press, 1951), p. 30.

[35]Ibid., p. 19.

[36]John Bayley, "W. H. Auden," from The Romantic Survival: A Study in Poetic Evolution (London: Constable and Co., Ltd., 1959), rpt. in Monroe K. Spears, ed., Auden: A Collection of Critical Essays, Twentieth Century Views (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1964), p. 61.

[37]Ibid., p. 61.

[38]Ibid., p. 61.

[39]*Ibid.*, p. 62.

[40]Replogle, p. 117.

[41]Noted from a discussion with Mr. Spender at the University of Oklahoma, December 11, 1973.

[42]Replogle, p. 117. My discussion of this point is indebted to Replogle.

[43]W. H. Auden, "The Poet and the City," *The Massachusetts Review* (Spring 1962), pp. 449-74, rpt. in W. H. Auden, *The Dyer's Hand and Other Essays* (1962; rpt. New York: Vintage, 1968), p. 84.

[44]These remarks were noted from a conversation with Mr. Spender in Norman, Oklahoma, December 12, 1973. Similar information appears in his 1953 article, "W. H. Auden and His Poetry" (cited in note 4): "Schoolmastering proved a great success, and perhaps the years in the early 1930s when he was first at Helensburgh in Scotland, and later near Malvern in England, teaching at preparatory schools were the happiest of his life. At all events they produced his most harmonious poems" (p. 76).

[45]Spender, Auden and his Poetry," p. 76.

[46]From the same conversation mentioned in note 44. A related observation again appears in Spender's earlier article:

"Auden's poems when he is in Helensburgh acquire a certain Scottishness (owing something, incidentally, to Burns) and in Malvern they have a lush West of England quality" (p. 76).

[47]W. H. Auden, "Introduction," The Oxford Book of Light Verse (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1938), p. viii. Subsequent references will be from this edition.

[48]Spears, p. 106. Spears points out that both of Auden's anthologies of the period, The Poet's Tongue (with John Garrett, 1935) and The Oxford Anthology of Light Verse (1938), greatly de-emphasize "conventional" poetry in favor of "verse intended to be sung (carols, ballads, sea shanties, nursery rhymes, blues, spirituals, singing games, riddles, counting-out rhymes, and songs of all kinds)" (p. 106).

[49]Ibid., p. 105.

[50]W. H. Auden and Christopher Isherwood, "The Dog Beneath the Skin," Two Great Plays by W. H. Auden and Christopher Isherwood (1935; rpt. New York: Vintage Books, 1962), p. 79.

[51]My discussion of this point is indebted to Spears' book, pp. 107-13.

[52]Referring to Auden's assertion in the "Introduction" that a poet is unlikely to write light verse when "his interests and perceptions are not readily acceptable to society, or his audience is a highly specialized one," Joseph Warren Beach

comments that "this . . . is a very apt description of Auden and his group in their relation to the general reading public; and Auden clearly felt the need to come into closer touch with this audience" (The Making of the Auden Canon [Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1957], p. 100).

[53]W. H. Auden, CSP, p. 318. C.f. his statement in "The Poet and the City" (The Dyer's Hand, p. 84) that "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." Another expression of Auden's distaste for inflated rhetoric is in his "Reply" to criticism of his poem, "A Change of Air" (from About the House) in The Kenyon Review, XXVI (Winter 1964), 204-08: "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" (p. 207). This statement is also discussed by Fuller in A Reader's Guide to W. H. Auden, p. 234.

Chapter Three

Traditional Influences

> We've given up the Georgian poets, teaching
> dance bands how to croon,
> Bicycling in coloured goggles underneath a
> pallid moon.
>
> Gavin Ewart (1933)

Monroe Spears notes that in 1949 Auden was reading Horace, as well as Marianne Moore, Valéry, and other French poets.[1] Unlike Miss Moore, about whom Auden wrote several prose essays, Horace is not the subject of any of Auden's prose writings. However, as I find his influence upon the tradition of conversational poetry to have been seminal, and his influence upon Auden's poetry, especially that of 1948 and afterwards, clearly significant, I would like to start by noting the implicit influence of Horace in a few of Auden's post-war poems. Thereafter, I will take up poets who are considered by Auden in his critical writings, and who may be regarded as having influenced his conversational style.

In 1948 Auden began spending his springs and summers on the Tyrrhenian island of Ischia. After the difficult and philosophical long poems of the forties--New Year Letter, For the Time Being, The Sea and the Mirror, and The Age of Anxiety--works in which the poet, living mostly in New York and being influenced by Kierkegaard and Niebuhr among

others, explores the existential predicament,[2] the poems of this "Mediterranean" period noticeably relax, become more genial and secular in their concerns. Instead of dealing with religious themes, Auden in this period prefers to focus "on the themes of Nature and history, language and truth, friendship and landscape."[3] As in the middle thirties, although with different ideas, he turns to the problems of man in society: "What it means to be human, and to be a person, is now the principal focus of Auden's interests."[4] It seems appropriate, therefore, that the influence of Horace, that most genial and "civilized" of Roman poets, should be prominent in the poems of this period.

The Roman is alive in "Ode to Gaea," from The Shield of Achilles (1955; CSP, p. 251), where a fine balance is maintained between a relaxed and personal tone and an impersonal, philosophical substance. Like Horace in the Sixth Satire of the Second Book, Hoc erat in votis,[5] Auden maintains an air of relaxed elegance; at the same time, however, he addresses his remarks to the world. Although he never ascends a platform, even a small one, he in fact often reads us a lesson. Thus he recommends casually but firmly, in the face of an indifferent earth and of certain societies' wrenched notions of morality, that "manners, maybe, will stand us in better stead, / . . . than a kantian [sic] conscience." Another instance of Horatian influence in The Shield of Achilles can be found in "Lakes" (CSP, p. 260), one of the Bucolics. In that poem the speaker

expresses his affection for a family-sized lake, which "allows an average father, walking slowly, / To circumvent it in an afternoon"; anything larger, "like Michigan or Baikal," is an "'estranging sea'" (a phrase, as Fuller points out, borrowed, by way of Arnold's "To Marguerite," from Horace's third Ode of Book One).[6] Accompanying this implicitly Horatian preference for a moderately-sized body of water is the thoroughly civilized idea that a "lacustrine atmosphere" encourages good manners:

> Lake-folk require no fiend to keep them on their toes;
> They leave aggression to ill-bred romantics
> Who duel with their shadows over blasted heaths:
> A month in a lacustrine atmosphere
> Would find the fluvial rivals waltzing not exchanging
> The rhyming insults of their great-great-uncles.

The allusions to Horace in the foregoing poems have been more implicit than explicit. In "The Horatians" (City Without Walls, 1969, p. 26), Auden writes a poem to the Roman poet, as well as to those who share his temperament--a group, one guesses, which would include within its perimeters Auden, himself.[7] The speaker notes that Flaccus and his "kin" are better-suited by nature for the realm of the "Whodunit" than that of Grand Opera, because he "can / believe in one of . . . [them] solving / a murder which has the professionals baffled, / thanks to . . . [their] knowledge of local topography." Auden, one recalls, was an enthusiast of opera, as well as of detective stories.[8] In addition, his taste for landscape is displayed throughout his poetry, a fact that illuminates the

statement, "In our world all of you share / a love for some particular / place and stretch of country."

The poet notes the distaste of Horatians for "crowds, traffic-noises, / bluestockings and millionaires"; instead, their preferences are for "small dinner parties, small rooms, and the tone of voice that suits them." Auden himself, as "Lakes" suggests, likes contained spaces; and the tone of voice that suits "small dinner parties, small rooms" is, of course, conversational.

He comments on the modest artistic achievements which those of this nature tend to produce:

> Some of you have written poems, usually
> short ones, and some kept diaries, seldom published
> till after your deaths, but most
> make no memorable impact
>
> except on your friends and dogs.

This lack of passion does not endear these artists to "Enthusiastic / Youth." Their emminently reasonable self-control (one remembers that in the thirties Auden's goal in terms of the psyche, became an "unconscious directed by reason") makes them appear cold: they "cannot be found on / barricades, and never shoot / either . . . [themselves] or . . . [their] lovers."

The speaker, in supposed words of Horace, concludes with a description of Horatian poetry which might serve as a succinct, but precise, description of Auden's own verse after his conversion to Christianity in the forties:

> . . . We can only
> do what it seems to us we were made for, look at
> this world with a happy eye
> but from a sober perspective.

Hence by writing of Horatian poetry in terms which seem largely applicable to his own verse, Auden in this poem seems to sum up his view of his poetic relationship to Horace. Both share a love of place and a talent for evoking a local topography; both prefer intimate settings and events to cities, crowds and public events; both share modest worldly ambitions ("your most worldly wish / a genteel sufficiency of / land or lolly"); both prefer to maintain a civilized reign over their more destructive instincts; and both share a vision which, though appreciative of life's pleasures and times of happiness, is ultimately "sober."

Another poet, quite different in many ways from Horace, but like him exerting influence on Auden's poetry, is John Skelton. In a 1932 review of an edition of Skelton's poems,[9] Auden notes that "tempo" is "an important factor in verse," and accordingly, he stresses the importance of one's understanding the nature of "rapid verse" when reading Skelton, who is "perhaps the quickest of all the English poets." One should recognize, he emphasizes, that while the smallest unit in slow-moving verse, like that of Milton, is normally the line or the half line, in very rapid verse the smallest unit is the whole paragraph. Auden thus answers the charge

that Skelton was an "over-garrulous writer who did not know where to stop" by concluding that, "read in this sort of way . . . the final effect [of Skelton's verse] is generally of a well-proportioned whole."

Auden's poem, "Between attention and attention" (1933)[10] displays, as Spears says, "a kind of controlled tumbling rhythm that suggests Skelton";[11]

> Between attention and attention,
> The first and last decision,
> Is mortal distraction
> Of earth and air,
> Further and nearer,
> The vague wants
> Of days and nights,
> And personal error:
> And the fatigued face,
> Taking the strain
> Of the horizontal force
> And the vertical thrust,
> Makes random answer
> To the crucial test;
> The uncertain flesh,
> Scraping back chair
> For the wrong train,
> Falling in slush
> Before a friend's friends
> Or shaking hands
> With a snub-nosed winner.

One senses the quick movement of this "paragraph," which flows unceasing from first word to last. Two semicolons may seem to indicate pauses; the "And" after the first marking, however, and the loose rhyme between "test" and "flesh" in the second case, provide a counterbalancing thrust which makes the stops necessarily entailed by the punctuation only momentary. Auden's notion, which he found inherent in Skelton's poetry, of the verse "paragraph" as constituting the smallest unit in "rapid verse"

holds true, as well, in this poem: the stanza must be considered as "a single apprehensible whole. If you try to analyze this whole into smaller parts the effect is destroyed."

In the same review, Auden comments on the inherently popular appeal of poems in which an alliterative technique is used: "Skelton found an alliterative medium which had already proved its suitability for flyting, and which, depending, unlike the antithetical couplet and like swearing, on the emotiveness of certain words rather than on intellectual wit, was capable of reaching a wider and more unlettered audience." Particularly interesting in this statement are the associations drawn between alliteration and a naturally uninhibited, spoken level of expression: "unlike the antithetical couplet and like swearing"--especially when one considers the enormous use to which Auden has put alliteration in his poetry. Perhaps even in the early, heavily alliterative, pre-1930 poems, Auden was moving, although unconsciously, toward a "natural" and <u>spoken</u>, rather than "clinical" and intellectual, <u>written</u> poetry.

Finally in this review Auden observes in passing that Skelton "uses a language as direct as that of Burns"; and Stephen Spender, as we have noted, has emphasized the significant effect of Burns upon Auden's conversational style.

In an article written about Skelton three years later, in 1935,[12] Auden observes that "The natural unit of speech rhythm seems to be one of four accents, dividing into two

half verses of two accents," and he suggests that attempts to write natural conversation in verse will tend to fall into this pattern. (This meter, of course, is that of Anglo-Saxon poetry, as well as of skeltonics.) "Skelton," Auden notes, "is said to have the natural ease of speech rhythm." Further, the skeltonic is said to constitute "the meter of many nursery rhymes . . . or extemporized verse . . . and study of the Woolworth song books will show its attraction to writers of jazz lyrics." One remembers that in the thirties Auden was writing "jazz lyrics" like the group of cabaret songs for Hedli Anderson in Another Time; and his interest in "extemporized verse" is demonstrated by poems like the "little donnish experiment in objective narrative," the "Letter to William Coldstream, Esq."[13] ("And before the band had finished a pot pourri from Wagner / We'd scrapped Significant Form, and voted for Subject, / Hence really this letter"), as well as by light verse and by conversational poetry in general, which implicitly involves something of an off-the-cuff impression.

Auden asserts that Skelton has a greater "extempore quality" and "is less 'would be,' to use a happy phrase of D. H. Lawrence," than any other English poet. The result of Skelton's characteristic style is a great deal of poetry that is "quite unmemorable"; nevertheless, "it is never false, and the lucky shots seem unique."

Skelton's influence on Auden is very noticeable in a poem like the fourth ode from The Orators (1932),[14]

Walk through her cities, walk with a pal
Through the streets between the power-house and
green canal
And see what they're at--our proletariat.
O my, what peeps
At disheartened sweeps--
Fitters and moulders,
Wielders and welders,
Dyers and bakers
And boiler-tube makers,
Poofs and ponces,
All of them dunces.
Those over thirty,
Ugly and dirty,
What are they doing
Except just stewing?
(pp. 97-09)

The loose doggerel quality of the lines suggest Skelton, as do, more specifically, the short, two-stress lines, the rough, jogging rhythms, the harsh sounds, the seemingly haphazard rhymes, which are internal as well as end-rhymes, but apparently with no strict pattern. Skelton also is evident in the poem's accumulation of specific details (one thinks, in comparison, of the enormous piling up of details in a poem like "The Tunning of Elinour Rumming") and in its humor, especially that of "Wielders and welders, / Dyers and bakers / And boiler-tube makers," with its nursery rhyme echo. Finally, the poem is more "spoken" than "written": it is more fun read aloud than on paper.

In Part One of New Year Letter Auden, contemplating the influence of poetic tradition upon the living poet, imagines a "summary tribunal" which consists of "those whom he admires the most," and against the standard of whose work he must compare his own poetic output.[15] As his judges Auden first

chooses Dante, then Blake and Rimbaud. Dante, who used the Tuscan dialect for his masterpiece, whose Latin treatise on language and metrics, De Vulgari Eloquentia, urged the literary use of the vernacular language, who brought "His passion, senses, will and thought" to the "supernatural" and who was "led / Through the three kingdoms of the dead" by Amor Rationalis, seems an appropriate choice as Auden's presiding judge. Likewise, the "choleric enthusiast," Blake, an early vers librist and enemy of rigid poetic rhetoric, and Rimbaud, "Who strangled an old rhetoric" and whom "guilt demands," seem aptly chosen as kinds of poetic adversaries whose poetry involves elements which Auden admires.

Also present in the court, but not included as judges, are six others: "conscious Catullus," who like Dante, Blake, and Rimbaud, is associated with exerting a vernacular influence upon poetry ("Catullus who made all / His gutter-language musical"); "Black Tennyson," who wrote dramatic monologues and who, like the early Auden is known for "an articulate despair"; "Trim, dualistic Baudelaire," who wrote prose poems and who was "Poet of cities, harbours, whores, / Acedia, gaslight and remorse"; Hardy, who made use of the Dorset dialict in his writings, and whose sometimes rough poetry "gave much joy / To one unsocial English Boy"; Rilke, who like Tennyson, articulated despair--"The Santa Claus of loneliness"; and, perhaps most interesting of all for our purposes, Dryden, "The master of the middle style."

Near the end of the Letter, Auden includes an allusion to Dryden which matches in weary irony the final chorus of the latter's Secular Masque:

> But wishes are not horses, this
> Annus is not mirabilis;
> Day breaks upon the world we know
> Of war and wastefulness and woe . . . .

Indeed, John Blair asserts that New Year Letter is "virtually rational discourse in verse after the manner of Dryden,"[16] while Spears calls it "the great monument of the middle style."[17]

Auden includes four poems by Dryden in his 1938 anthology of light verse: "Song of Venus," "Prologue to Aureng-Zebe," "MacFlecknoe," and "Prologue to Love Triumphant"; and in his "Introduction" he briefly discusses the effect in terms of poetry of the "return both to a more settled society and to a more secure position for the artist under aristocratic patronage" which took place during the Restoration.[18] One result was a rise in social status for the artist, and "greater opportunities of contact with genteel society." Auden asserts that when Dryden, in his "Essay on the Dramatic Poetry of the Last Age" attributes "the superiority in correctness of language" to this new mixing of the artist in "genteel" society, then "he is stating something which had great consequences for English poetry." For, with a secure and honored place in society, Restoration as well as Augustan poets "were able to express themselves in an easy manner, to use the speaking voice, and to use

as their properties the images of their everyday, i.e. social, life." Auden, of course, is speaking of light verse, which we have associated with conversational poetry, and this statement would seem to pin down the style's modern genesis to the Restoration, and to Dryden, in particular.

The style certainly had flourished previously; in Horatian verse, most prominantly. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, however, with their social, philosophical and religious turmoil, what Auden calls "difficult" poetry appears--that of Shakespeare, Donne and Milton, for example. Milton went so far as "to make a myth out of his personal experience, and to invent a language of his own remote from the spoken word" (p. xi). With the poetry of Dryden and Pope, in contrast, poetry again makes use of the spoken language. Its aims tend to be modest; the verse of these poets "has its limits, because the society of which they were a part was a limited part of the community, the leisured class." Nevertheless, "within these limits, certain that the aim of poetry was to please, and certain of whom they had to please," these poets wrote with "freedom and intelligence."

There are several examples in Auden's poetry in which he writes either pastiche of Dryden or at the very least composes obviously under his influence. Spears suggests that the opening chorus of "Advent" (the first section of For the Time Being) seems to have been modeled on the final chorus of the Secular Masque (the lines are in iambic trimeter,

with one anapest to each line). Auden's chorus, however, "has a very different effect, suggesting plodding weariness and monotony":[19]

> Huge crowds mumble--'Alas,
> Our angers do not increase,
> Love is not what she used to be;'
> Portly Caesar yawns--'I know;'
> He falls asleep on his throne,
> They shuffle off through the snow:
> Darkness and snow descend.[20]

The "Anthem for St. Cecilia's Day" (1941; CSP, p. 173) is in the tradition of the St. Cecilia's Day ode, a tradition which includes Dryden's famous "Alexander's Feast," as well as his "A Song for St. Cecilia's Day, 1687." Like those poems, the "Anthem" includes virtuoso handling of sounds in order to evoke the suggestive power which music holds over the listener. Directly related to the more conversational poems of Dryden is the occasional poem, "Metalogue to The Magic Flute" (1956; CSP, p. 276), which Fuller characterizes as "an elegant pastiche of Dryden."[21] In heroic couplets and intended "To be spoken by the singer playing the role of Sarastro," the poem involves a perfect blend of wry humor at the inelegant quality of modern life ("It makes a servantless New Yorker sore / To think sheer Genius had to stand before / A mere Archbishop with uncovered head: / But Mozart never had to make his bed") and sincerely-paid compliment to the genius of Mozart:

> How seemly, then, to celebrate the birth
> Of one who did no harm to our poor earth,
> Created masterpieces by the dozen,

Indulged in toilet humour with his cousin,
And had a pauper's funeral in the rain,
The like of whom we shall not see again.

Like the prologues of Dryden, this poem, perhaps regarded best as a theater piece, sparkles with the polish and wit of the speaker: "I come to praise but not to sell Mozart"; "Writ in that era of barbaric dark / 'Twixt Modern Mom and Bronze-Age Matriarch"; "It soothes the Frank, it stimulates the Greek: / Genius surpasses all things, even Chic." The archaic diction (mixed for humorous effect with contemporary slang); the italicizing of names; the elaborate wit, including puns, understatement, double-entendre; the thoroughly graceful brilliance of the poem suggest Dryden and a neo-classical ideal, as does the poem's final couplet: "In all hearts, as in our finale, may Reason & Love be crowned, assume their rightful sway."[22] And of course these qualities tend rightfully to be associated with light verse, as defined by Auden in his "Introduction" to the light verse anthology.

Spears draws an interesting set of comparisons between Dryden and Auden. In the first place both wrote a great deal of occasional verse, which one might conceive as having arisen from the conception that both held of the poet as one writing to other men like himself on topics which they would be likely to find both amusing and instructive, as one whose function frequently is to commemorate special or memorable occasions (as the "Metalogue to The

Magic Flute" was "composed in commemoration of the Mozart Bicentenary, 1956"). Also like Dryden, Auden has been accused of fickleness in matters of religion and politics, and like Dryden he has "outmoded such reproaches by the tenacity and obvious sincerity of his convictions." Third, both poets developed their poetic craft conscientiously, but employed their talents "prodigally and hence unevenly," which leaves them open to charges by some critics of "insufficient respect" for their art.[23] On the other hand, critics are unanimous in their recognition of Auden's "superb virtuosity in all the techniques of poetry," and with regard to this opinion he again resembles Dryden. Further, both poets made use of widely varied forms: writing for music, writing in collaboration with other artists, and devoting a significant amount of time to translation. Finally, both are known as major critics, as well as major poets, Auden having at least four major critical collections in print at the present time: The Enchafèd Flood: or the Romantic Iconography of the Sea (1950); The Dyer's Hand and other essays (1962); Secondary Worlds (1968); and the posthumous Forewards and Afterwards (1974).[24]

We have noted that in New Year Letter Auden includes Dante as the chief judge in his poet's court. In the same year as that in which the Letter was published, Auden again indicated his high regard for Dante by naming him as one of the three poets who had exerted the greatest influence

on his work, the other two being Langland and Pope.[25] Langland is of course a master of alliterative verse, and we have noted that Auden, in his review of an edition of Skelton's poems, implies a relationship between alliteration and uninhibited, spoken expression. Further, Auden, who makes significant use of allegorical methods in his poetry (The Age of Anxiety perhaps stands out as the most elaborate example of this), presumably was impressed by Langland the allegorist, as well as by Langland the moral, didactic poet.[26]

In an article written in 1937, Auden emphasizes the social nature of Pope's verse, as well as of Augustan poetry in general.[27] Three characteristics of this poetry, he says, are an air of well-being, gusto, and social grace.[28] As in the "Introduction" to the light verse anthology, he stresses that the social access to polite circles enjoyed by Restoration and Augustan poets resulted in the diction and style of their verse becoming "conversational." In short, the influences favoring a conversational style were "a classical education and the company of gentlemen."[29] Finally, focusing upon the meticulous craftsmanship and the social nature of Pope's poetry, he notes that that poet's interests were three: "himself and what other people thought of him, his art, and the manners and characters of society."[30]

In an essay written more than thirty years later, "A Civilized Voice,"[31] Auden again addresses the subject of Pope, and one finds that his basic attitudes toward the

Augustan remain unchanged. Again basing his observations on the 1938 introduction to the light verse volume, Auden observes that the early eighteenth century "was one of the few historical periods in which one could with accuracy speak of an educated élite who, whether as writers or as readers, shared the same artistic tastes and general ideas about Nature, Man, and Society--a period, therefore, when 'originality' and 'alienation' were not regarded as hallmarks of genius."[32] In Chapter Two we discussed Auden's insistence that true "light verse" can only be written in such a time, when the poet and his audience share common "interests and perceptions."

And indeed, Auden subsequently suggests that Pope, rather than Wordsworth, writes a truly natural speech: ". . . if Wordsworth had Pope in mind as the enemy when he advised poets to write 'in the language really used by men' he was singularly in error. Should one compare Pope at his best with any of the Romantics, including Wordsworth, at their best, it is Pope who writes as men normally speak to each other and the latter who go in for 'poetic' language."[33] In addition, Auden observes that Pope's attitude toward his art and his audience is a modest one: "How admirable . . . that, while wholly dedicated to the vocation of the poet, he never became an aesthete--never, that is, regarded his vocation as superior to all others."[34]

What emerges from these two articles is an implicit view of Pope as an ideal poet of light verse--or, if you will,

maker of conversational poetry--according to Auden's own criteria. His "interests and perceptions" are much the same as those of his audience, his audience is "a fairly general one," he is not "conscious of himself as an unusual person," and his language is "straightforward and close to ordinary speech."[35] The poetry is exquisitely crafted and one thinks of it often as shimmering like gems strewn across the surface of a well-constructed table. Its aim is prodesse et delectare, to teach and to please, ends which Auden tended more and more to adopt for his own poetry after 1940, and his sincere appreciation of Pope, whom he links appropriately in this context with Horace, is indicated in his statement that "poetry does not allow us to escape from life, but it does grant us a brief respite from our immediate problems, refreshment for tired spirits and relaxation for tense nerves. As I get older and the times get gloomier and more difficult, it is to poets like Horace and Pope that I find myself more and more turning for the kind of refreshment I require."[36]

In turning from the eighteenth to the nineteenth centuries, one finds that Auden's poetic sympathies tend to lie with those continuators of a basically discursive, conversational tradition in which intellect directs intuition, rather than with the arch-Romantic innovators such as Wordsworth, Coleridge and Shelley, in whose poetry intuition often outweighs intellect. John Blair observes that "Auden's studious

avoidance of the Romantics is understandable since he is fond of developing his own views in explicit rejection of their ideas."[37] Indeed, Blair continues, Auden "recognizes" only three of the Romantics: Burns, Byron, and Blake; and "he chooses to imitate their satiric or light verse rather than their more serious poems."

In "Writing," an essay in The Dyer's Hand,[38] Auden compiles contrasting lists of writers. One list is implicitly "anti-Romantic," while the other is "Romantic"; and Burns is opposed to Shelley (as Marvell is to Donne, Jane Austen to Dickens, Turgenev to Dostoievski, Valéry to Gide, and so on). In an essay on Kipling, Auden, referring to Eliot's differentiation between "verse" and "poetry" ("What fundamentally distinguishes . . . 'verse' from 'poetry' is the subordination of musical interest"), asserts that "there are more verse or ballad writers and fewer poets, I think, than Mr. Eliot seems to imply."[39] He then compiles a brief list of "versifiers," including "Ben Jonson . . . who wrote out a prose draft which he then versified, Dunbar, Butler's Hudibras, most of Burns, Byron's Don Juan, etc." Auden clearly is concerned here with a poetic tradition that is anti-Romantic and non-"organic"; and hence, the implication is that he values Burns for qualities other than those with which we associate the Romantic poetry of Wordsworth or Coleridge.

And in fact, the Burns that Auden liked and was influenced by in the thirties was the writer of "light verse." Auden

includes seven pieces by Burns in his anthology of light verse, including ballads ("I once was a Maid" and "The Kirk's Alarm") and conversational monologues ("The Poet's Welcome to his love-begotten Daughter" and "Holy Willie's Prayer"), written in Scots dialect. In the "Introduction" Auden refers to Burns and Byron as "two writers of Light Verse who were also major poets."[40] By virtue of his having been a peasant "from a Scottish parish which, whatever its faults of hypocrisy and petty religious tyranny, was a genuine community where the popular tradition in poetry had never been lost," Burns was enabled "to write directly and easily about all aspects of life, the most serious as well as the most trivial." And further, "he is the last poet of whom this can be said." Thus Burns, like Pope, is understood by Auden to have enjoyed a situation in which he shared the "interests and perceptions" of his community. Both felt at home within these communities; both basically supported the values inherent to them; and both made use of the spoken language of their particular social class in their poetry. As such, both enjoyed a pronounced advantage in their efforts to compose light verse.

If in Burns one has a kind of peasant equivalent to Pope as a maker of light verse, then in Byron one has the authentic nineteenth-century continuator of this essentially middle and upper class poetic tradition. As Auden says in an essay on Pope, "To find 'natural speech' in the verse of the early nineteenth century, one must go to the least

'romantic' and most Popean in spirit of the poets--to the Byron of Don Juan and the Tom Moore of The Fudge Family in Paris."[41] However, Auden carefully limits the verse by Byron of which he approves: "His success lasts as long as he takes nothing very seriously; the moment he tries to be profound and 'poetic' he fails."[42] The key to Byron's successful poetry, Auden implies, lies in the poet's relation to his audience, for "However much they tried to reject each other, he was a member of 'society,' and his poetry is the result of his membership." Thus when Byron writes in the light, witty, "social" manner which comes naturally to him, he writes "successful" verse. When he tries to burst the limits inherent to this tradition, when he becomes "profound," mysterious, "Byronic"--in a word, "Romantic"—then his poetry fails.

Like Byron, in a minor way, in writing successful light verse which grows out of his Establishment background and in unsuccessfully attempting to write other kinds of poetry, is Winthrop Mackworth Praed, "whose serious poems," Auden declares, "are as trivial as his vers de société are profound."[43] Auden includes selections by Praed in both The Oxford Book of Light Verse and 19th Century British Minor Poets,[44] and he pays him a great compliment in a poem from The Shield of Achilles, "Ode to Gaea" (CSP, p. 251). Anticipating dark days, ". . . When the wise /

wilt in the glare of the Shadow," the poet expresses his hope that

> perhaps a last stand in the passes will be made
> by those whose Valhalla would be hearing verse by Praed
> or arias by Rossini
> between two entrées by Carême.

Fuller suggests that one of the "Four Occasional Poems" in About the House, "A Toast" (p. 54), is "in the manner of Praed,"[45] and certainly the poem, probably written for an Oxford college dinner, is as light as a meringue. Beginning in an off-hand, extempore manner ("What on earth does one say at a Gaudy, / On such an occasion as this"), the poem includes comic rhymes ("Gaudy" / "bawdy"; "dentures" / "adventures"), allusions to things associated with a certain style of civilized life ("marvelous parties / With bubble and brandy and grouse"; "aesthetes" and "hearties"; double-breasted waistcoats and "flannel trousers like skirts"), and it concludes in a burst of intimate comradeship and conviviality:

> God bless and keep out of quarrels
> The Dean, the Chapter and D,
> The Censors who shepherd our morals,
> Roy, Hooky, Little and me.
> May those who come up next October
> Be anständig, have esprit and nous:
> And now, though not overly sober,
> I give you a toast--TO THE HOUSE!

In one of Praed's poems included in the Oxford Book of Light Verse, "Good-night to the Season" (p. 388), one finds comparable grace, polish, and frothy wit which, however, does not necessarily result, in either case, in superficiality,

but instead produces a pleasing, light gaiety, mellowed by a hint of ironic melancholy at the passing of good things.

> Good-night to the Season! 'Tis over!
> Gay dwellings no longer are gay;
> The courtier, the gambler, the lover,
> Are scattered like swallows away;
> There's nobody left to invite one
> Except my good uncle and spouse;
> My mistress is bathing at Brighton,
> My patron is sailing at Cowes;
> For want of a better enjoyment,
> Till Ponto and Don can get out,
> I'll cultivate rural enjoyment,
> And angle immensely for trout.

Both poets, one feels, have been born to social privilege, and both fundamentally enjoy the cultivated pleasures associated with such privilege; further, both are addressing their peers, and they are doing so in language, common to their class, of wit, grace and brilliance. The poems formally are similar, consisting of relaxed lines of three accents, which result in a casual, "trotting" movement; and both employ an alternating rhyme scheme, which tends to give an effect of quatrains. That is to say, the poems move like ballads, except that each line has three accents. Both poems are filled with specific names, places, and items familiar to those for whom the poems are written. Both, in conclusion, are supreme examples of light, conversational vers de société.

Mention was made earlier of Auden's essay on Kipling, "The Poet of the Encirclement," in which he associates that writer, as well as Jonson, Dunbar, Butler, "most of Burns, Byron's Don Juan, etc." with "versification," rather than "poetry" because their work is conceived and organized

more within a discursive and rational framework than in terms of "musical interest." As Eliot summarizes the matter: "There is a harmonics of poetry which is not merely beyond the range of the poems--it would interfere with the intention."[46] Auden places Kipling within this poetic tradition, along with favorites like Burns and Byron; however, his attitude toward the Victorian is noticeably cooler than it is toward the others. Likening Kipling's handling of diction to his vigilant, defensive attitude concerning Imperial politics ("His ethics and his politics are those of a critical emergency"),[47] Auden notes, "His virtuosity with language is not unlike that of one of his sergeants with an awkward squad." Kipling orders words about so that "they can hardly be said to learn to think for themselves."

As a result of this rough handling of language, Auden concludes that Kipling's poetry is "arid," but that "personally, I prefer this to the damp poetry of self-expression." Disapprovingly, however, he concludes that "both are excesses." Further, to Auden, Kipling's poems seem to "have the air of brilliant tactical improvisation . . . to overcome sudden unforeseen obstacles, as if, for Kipling, experience were . . . an unending stream of dangerous feelings to be immediately mastered as they appear."[48]

Hence, Auden seems to consider Kipling as a poet for whom feelings are potentially dangerous and therefore are to be held carefully in check. One can imagine this attitude

possibly appealing to the Auden of the late twenties, who pronounced to his friends that "A poet must be clinical, dispassionate about life. The poet feels much less strongly about things than do other people."[49] Replogle, for example, discusses the "Kipling-like speaker" of "Get there if you can and see the land you once were proud to own."[50] The speaker is a type of games master, a "vigorous advocate of Life [who] will tolerate no nonsense about the literature of sensibility, the delicate music of the refined aesthete," or about art as a "construction fulfilling its own ends." This anti-emotional point of view, which carries the British public school code of the "stiff upper lip" to its logical conclusion, is expressed in the harsh, vigorous spoken tone of Kipling in brasher moments: "Shut up talking, charming in the best suits to be had in town, / Lecturing on navigation while the ship is going down."[51]

By the time that "The Poet of the Encirclement" was written in 1943, however, the by then-Christian Auden thought differently on many topics; and, while he still disliked public displays of emotion, yet he was not so distrustful of any honest revelation of feeling on the part of the poet, as his earlier statements to his friends suggest that he previously had been. In addition, one accepts the earlier statements <u>cum grano salis</u>, as having been made by a young man ever alive to the appeal of humorous exaggeration and spoof.

There is little doubt that, while Auden found aspects of Kipling's harsh, colloquial verse to his liking (he included "Danny Deever" in the anthology of light verse), he for the most part considered Kipling as a kind of bête noir, as an object of derision and parody, because of his role as apologist for British Imperialism and for the complex of attitudes and values we call "Victorian." In Part One of New Year Letter, for example, the poet alludes to "horrible old Kipling"; and Fuller refers to The Chase, an early version of The Dog Beneath the Skin, in which the first scene of Act One includes parody of Kipling.[52]

An attitude of partial reconciliation toward Kipling is implied by Auden in a discarded stanza from an early version of "In Memory of W. B. Yeats";[53] there he states that Time, which has great regard for language, "with this strange excuse / Pardoned Kipling and his views, / And will pardon Paul Claudel, / Pardon him for writing well." That Auden omitted this material from the poem's final version perhaps implies either that he changed his mind concerning this view; or that he later found the tone of these remarks inappropriate to the elegy; or perhaps he decided, as Fuller suggests, that "pardon is effectively complete," and therefore does not require expression. At any rate, however, it seems clear that Auden's attitude toward Kipling's art, and his colloquial poetry, in particular, is one involving a degree of admiration; and that his attitude concerning Kipling's politics and codes of ethics and morality is one of disapproval.[54]

Likewise, Auden admired the art of Yeats, while scoffing at his politics and occult interests. Stephen Spender recently remarked that, while the "Auden generation" admired the writing of Yeats, Auden thought that he, personally, was "a very bad character . . . untruthful and bogus." With a sly reference to "Sailing to Byzantium," Spender revealed Auden's distaste for Yeats's idea that "after death one might become a kind of mechanical bird."[55] Richard Ellmann admirably has discussed the aesthetic, ideological, and historical relationships which exist between Yeats and Auden.[56] Something more needs to be said, however, concerning the influence which Yeats exerted upon Auden's conversational style.

In an essay written in the late forties,[57] Auden discusses the two "main legacies" of Yeats for poets who follow him. First, through Yeats's influence the occasional poem has been transformed "from being either an official performance of impersonal virtuosity or a trivial <u>vers de société</u> into a serious reflective poem of at once personal and public interest."[58] As an example, Auden cites "In Memory of Major Robert Gregory" as "something new and important in the history of English poetry." Unlike <u>Adonais</u>, in which both the poet and the one for whom he mourns "disappear as people," Yeats's poem "never loses the personal note of a man speaking about his personal friends in a particular setting . . . and at the same time the occasion and the characters acquire a symbolic public significance." In other words, a poem like

this one maintains the balance between the public and the private which Auden likes, and it does so in the casual tones "of a man speaking about his personal friends in a particular setting." These remarks, of course, also may be taken to suggest the kind of occasional poem, written in a conversational, middle style, which is associated with Auden. Critics like Hoggart, Replogle, and Spears agree in affirming Yeats's influence upon Auden's handling of the form.[59] And indeed, the occasional poems in Another Time, including "In Memory of W. B. Yeats," "In Memory of Ernst Toller," "Voltaire at Ferney," and "Hermann Melville," [sic] all involve a noteworthy historical personage or event as a subject which Auden discusses in a quiet, intimate tone of voice and through which he implies or projects a universal significance.[60]

The second "legacy" with which Auden credits Yeats is that he "released regular stanzaic poetry, whether reflective or lyrical, from iambic monotony."[61] He admires the way that Yeats uses rhythmical variations and half-rhymes to obtain a free sense of "the most natural and lucid speech," at the same time maintaining formal metric bases and rhyme patterns to "supply coherent dignity and music."[62] One gets a sense of this influence in Auden's playing off of irregular, conversational elements against regular metrical and rhyme patterns in the occasional poem, "September 1, 1939":[63]

> I sit in one of the dives
> On Fifty-second Street
> Uncertain and afraid

As the clever hopes expire
Of a low dishonest decade:
Waves of anger and fear
Circulate over the bright
And darkened lands of the earth,
Obsessing our private lives;
The unmentionable odour of death
Offends the September night.

The half-rhymes ("dives" / "expire" / "bright" / "lives" / "night"; "street" / "fear" / "earth" / "death") and metrical irregularities (the anapests in the last foot of the first line and in the first foot of the fourth and fifth lines; the trochaic opening feet of lines six and seven, for example), which counterpoint the basic form of the stanza (iambic trimeter) give the passage an offhand, tentative effect. This effect contrasts with the poem's weighty substance, and as a result, the poem (which is written in the meter of Yeats's "Easter, 1916")[64] has, as Spears observes, a "bitter colloquialism and Yeatsian combination of disabused candor and dignified restraint, in which the meaning of the 'low, dishonest decade' is summed up."[65]

One is puzzled at Auden's recent remark that "Yeats . . . had a bad influence on me. He tempted me into a rhetoric which was, for me, oversimplified."[66] The nature of the influence about which Auden is speaking is not made clear. It would be difficult to agree, however, that the influence which Yeats exerted on Auden's conversation poems, at least, was "bad." The informal effect which results from the testing of metrical irregularities and half-rhymes against the formal, received pattern of a poem is a technique which

Auden certainly used, with felicitous results, until the end of his career. Likewise, his use of the occasional poem as a vehicle for reflective poetry "of at once personal and public interest" is one which, if anything, becomes increasingly pronounced in the later work. In any case, Auden adds, "Needless to say, the fault was mine, not his. He was, of course, a very great poet."

Auden, like most of the rest of his poetic generation, was influenced inescapably by T. S. Eliot and D. H. Lawrence; their influence, however, does not noticeably extend to his use of the middle style. As Isherwood attests,[67] Auden's doctrine of hard, "clinical" poetry evolved under the influence of Eliot; and John Blair claims, with regard to Auden's early period, that "he is a second-generation modern who formed his conception of poetry as a disciple of T. S. Eliot and The Criterion . . . . During his Oxford years, starting in 1926, Auden appropriated the theories of Eliot which define the general outlines of the modern mode, and then went on to carry the same principles further than his master."[68] In the thirties, however, we have noted how his style relaxed and moved away from the early, Eliotic obscurity.

Perhaps Eliot's greatest contribution to Auden's new way of writing was his insistence that the poet be conscious of his relation to his poetic ancestors (as he makes clear in "Tradition and the Individual Talent"). More particularly, as Spender has commented, Eliot was influential in directing

the taste of Auden's generation back to Dryden and Pope,[69] and it has been part of the intention of this chapter to emphasize the importance of these poets to the development of Auden's conversational style. Otherwise, as Auden wrote in 1948, Eliot's contributions to subsequent poets tend to be confined to his innovations in subject matter (which concerns "modern city life") and in "the ways in which poetic material can be organized" (i.e., "musical" structuring).[70]

As for Lawrence, one may safely assert that his influence upon Auden is confined to the level of ideas. Auden says in his essay on Lawrence that he first read that writer in the late twenties and "it was his message which made the greatest impression on me, so that it was his 'think' books like Fantasia on the Unconscious rather than his fiction which I read most avidly."[71] His reaction to Lawrence's poetry, in contrast, was negative, as "it offended my notions of what poetry should be." As one might guess, Auden's strongest objection to Lawrence's poetry lies in Lawrence's faith that, if felt strongly enough by the artist, a poem will "grow" naturally without much conscious shaping; that the creative process is thus an organic, "cyclical" process, a direction-less motion without a definite end. Auden, however, asserts that the artist who "hopes to produce something which will seem as natural as a flower" by means of this process is mistaken, for "the qualities of the natural are exactly what his product will lack."[72] Instead, a "natural" effect--"of being

what it has to be--can only be achieved in a work of art by much thought, labor and care." This point, incidentally, underlines a fundamental contrast between the "conversational" poetry of Lawrence and that of Auden, and it explains why a reader would be mistaken to assume that one influenced the other. Although a painstaking craftsman in his own way, Lawrence ever emphasized the spontaneous, the primary impulse, which he assumed emerges from the "solar plexus." Auden, while revering the unconscious sources and impulses of poetry (". . . it is from the sacred encounters of his imagination that a poet's impulse to write a poem arises"),[73] characteristically stresses the crafted nature of poetry: it demands "much thought, labor and care."

Much more congenial to Auden's attitudes about art is the Greek Alexandrian poet, Constantine Cavafy. In his introduction to that poet's complete translated poems,[74] Auden recalls having been introduced to Cavafy's poetry "over thirty years ago" (which would have been around 1930, or shortly before), and he states that "C. P. Cavafy has remained an influence on my writing; that is to say, I can think of poems which, if Cavafy were unknown to me, I should have written quite differently or perhaps not written at all."[75] As Auden did not know modern Greek, however, his only access to Cavafy "has been through English and French translations." As a poet, he realizes that poetry, for the most part, is untranslatable. "What then, is it in Cavafy's poems," he

asks, "that survives translation and excites?" His answer is, "Something I can only call, most inadequately, a tone of voice, a personal speech."[76] This unique "tone of voice" is implied to be the result of Cavafy's attitudes toward "love, art, and politics in the original Greek sense."

His attitude toward the craft of poetry and toward being a poet is, like Auden's, "an aristocratic one." In addition one recalls the modest view of the poet implied throughout Auden's own poetry, and his imagined jury of poetic mentors in New Year Letter as one reads his account of Cavafy's artistic attitudes: "His poets do not think of themselves as persons of great public importance and entitled to universal homage, but, rather, as citizens of a small republic in which one is judged by one's peers and the standard of judgement is strict."[77]

Likewise, as is true of Auden, especially since 1940, Cavafy's "poets write because they enjoy writing and in order to give aesthetic satisfaction, but they never exaggerate the importance of aesthetic satisfaction." Hence Cavafy can be seen to share with Auden a taste for marvellous workmanship; an opinion that the making of poetry is, in a sense, an engrossing game for the few with sufficient talent and cultivation; and a realization that "poetry can make nothing happen," which perhaps partly accounts for a certain scepticism, a kind of ultimate detachment which marks much of their poetry. This aestheticism, of a sort, this sense of writing for a cultivated minority, this wary scepticism are all common to

the tradition of polished middle-style poetry that runs from Horace, through Dryden and Pope, then to Byron and Auden.

As sceptical is the attitude toward politics which Auden attributes to Cavafy. "His Panhellenic world is politically powerless, and in it, therefore, politics are regarded with cynical amusement." Most interesting for our purposes, however, is Auden's account of Cavafy's attitude toward love. Most important in this respect is his "exceptional" honesty. The homosexual world in Cavafy's poems "is one of casual pickups and short-lived affairs. Love, there, is rarely more than physical passion, and when tenderer emotions do exist, they are almost always one sided."[78] Yet, "He neither bowdlerizes nor glamorizes nor giggles." As Auden characteristically manifests an aversion to intimate self-revelation in his own poetry, he thus writes little in the way of personal love poetry. However, the tone of Cavafy's love poetry--unapologetically honest, casually conversational, plain and concrete (as Auden notes, "whether he is speaking of a scene, an event, or an emotion, every line of his is plain factual description without any ornamentation whatsoever"), and with an overriding sense of impermanence and sadness--is the tone of a type of Auden conversational poem, say the famous "Lullaby" or "Musée des Beaux Arts":

> In Breughel's Icarus, for instance: how everything turns away
> Quite leisurely from the disaster; the ploughman may
> Have heard the splash, the forsaken cry,

> But for him it was not an important failure; the sun shone
> As it had to on the white legs disappearing into the green
> Water; and the expensive delicate ship that must have seen
> Something amazing, a boy falling out of the sky,
> Had somewhere to get to and sailed calmly on.
> (CSP, p. 124)

This passage shares similarities in tone with a passage from a Cavafy poem quoted by Auden:

> The fulfillment of their deviate, sensual delight is done. They rose from the mattress, and they dress hurriedly without speaking. They leave the house separately, furtively, and as they walk somewhat uneasily on the street, it seems as if they suspect that something about them betrays into what kind of bed they fell a little while back.

Similar voices, quiet and human, voices which accept cosmic indifference in the one case and deviant sexuality in the other, speak in both poems. The effectiveness of both poems perhaps is due partly to the juxtaposition of subject matter which is essentially passionate with a quiet voice of "personal speech"; the speakers seem to have experienced life very deeply and now are shocked at nothing.

One wonders just how influential Auden's reading of Cavafy was around 1930. The two poets, as Auden implies, share marked similarities in temperament. And the characteristic tone of Cavafy's love poetry, at least in translation, bears marked resemblence to that in many of Auden's conversational poems, those which seem sometime to rest just on the edge of despondency. As Auden writes, "When one is reading a translation, all one gets is the

sensibility, and either one likes it or one does not. I happen to like Cavafy's very much indeed."

Another poet to whom Auden was first attracted by a certain tone of voice is Marianne Moore. He notes in his essay on Miss Moore in The Dyer's Hand that, when he first attempted to read her poems in 1935, he "simply could not make head or tail of them."[79] This difficulty, he explains, arose from the inherent strangeness of syllabic verse to an English speaker, brought up on accentual meter. However, baffled as he was, he "persevered" because he "felt attracted by the tone of voice," and he came to like her poetry very much.

Referring to his essay," Writing," in which he classifies poets into those dominated by classical and those dominated by romantic tendencies (he calls them "Alices" and "Mabels," respectively), an arrangement to which we have referred earlier,[80] Auden asserts that, "What I did see from the first was that she is a pure 'Alice.'"[81] Interestingly enough, the qualities which he associates with "Alices" could as easily refer to Pope, and to himself, as to Marianne Moore. For example, her poetry manifests a "distaste for noise and excess," a pronounced "fastidiousness," a "love of order and precision," and an "astringent ironical sharpness."[82] In addition, Auden concludes that Moore's poems "convince the reader that they have been written by someone who is personally good."[83]

Given, therefore, the temperamental qualities which Auden shares with Moore: dislike of excess, "fastidiousness" and the rest--summed up by Auden in another context as being responsible for poetry which has the effect of "a quiet and intimate poetic speech";[84] and given his admiration for Miss Moore, personally; it is not surprising that, by 1940, as Blair notes, Auden "had followed Marianne Moore into syllable-counting verse."[85]

In his elegy, "In Memory of Sigmund Freud" (CSP, p. 166), Auden combines an easy conversational tone with a complex syllabic form (the syllables in the lines of each quatrain run 11/11/9/10).

> For about him til the very end were still
> those he had studied, the fauna of the night,
> and shades that still waited to enter
> the bright circle of his recognition
>
> turned elsewhere with their disappointment as he
> was taken away from his life interest
> to go back to the earth in London,
> an important Jew who died in exile.

The poem, as exemplified by the above passage, is written in stanzas, yet phrases and sentences "run over" ends of lines, as well as, occasionally, ends of stanzas. Caesuras, as Auden observes of Moore's syllabic verse, "fall where they may"; and although there is some rhyme ("still" / "exile"; "recognition" / "London"), it may very well be more the result of accident than of intention. What is happening in the poem, on one level, is that the tone of relaxed discourse is functioning as an easy and fluent disguise, behind which

lies a complex poetic form. What emerges is something of a tour de force.

Auden's working with strict forms, like syllabic meter, serves several purposes, however. Syllabics, for example, enable Auden to produce prose rhythms and to introduce certain polysyllables into verse, both of which are difficult to do in metrical verse. Further, as John Blair suggests, Auden's verse, "starting in the middle 'thirties, embodies a deep commitment to precision of formal control as a means to controlling and stimulating his imagination."[86] That is to say, "the process of meeting rigid formal demands may help him articulate thoughts he could not otherwise have conceived"; in addition, a given form restrains the poet from saying "whatever he happens to have on his mind." Hence, Auden found in syllabic verse a new, intricate pattern, within the limits of which he could fashion his art, an art which, by the forties and afterwards, tends to involve an elegant, worldly and thoughtful conversationalist.

Justin Replogle suggests that, in addition to having prompted Auden to the use of syllabics, Miss Moore also influenced the tone of voice in many of his poems: "Whatever their formal shape, many poems after 1940 contain an unmistakably similar voice, with its own strong speech rhythm . . . . and I am tempted to guess that both voice and rhythms owe something originally to Marianne Moore."[87] It is as though, Replogle adds, when Auden assimilated Moore's prosody, he also

assimilated "part of her voice (perhaps the one is nearly the sole cause of the other)." This distinctive speaking voice is displayed prominantly in Auden's occasional poem, written as a tribute to Miss Moore, "A Mosaic for Marianne Moore" (City Without Walls, p. 24-25). Miss Moore's "bestiary" (toads, flies, a polar bear, a "lion with ferocious chrysanthemum head," a jerboa, a "musk-ox who smells of water," and a "fond nautilus") is in the poem, as well as the qualities which Auden associates with "Alices." That she is seen in the middle of her garden, "sitting in a wide-brimmed hat beneath a monkey-puzzle," implies her love of retirement and quiet pleasures. She is "fastidious but fair," and she would never herself "write / error with four r's." The entire poem, with its sharp images and whimsical irony, manifests "astringent ironical sharpness." Indeed, Auden has written a poem about Marianne Moore which consists of a parody of her style, but a serious parody, and one which, at the same time, manifests the author's own exquisitely-crafted, pied style, in a certain kind of conversational verse to which he turned increasingly in later years. The closing lines, appropriately, might well apply to either poet:

> For poems, dolphin-graceful as carts from Sweden,
> our thank-you should be a right
> good salvo of barks: it's much too muffled to say
> 'how well and with what unfreckled integrity
> it has all been done.'

Some final words about a poet for whom Auden has expressed great fondness: John Betjeman. Betjeman is one of the few

twentieth-century poets included in Auden's anthology of light verse (others are Yeats, Hilaire Belloc, G. K. Chesterton, Vachel Lindsay, D. H. Lawrence, and Siegfried Sassoon), and he is the object of an extraordinary, if partly ironic, compliment in the final poem of Letters From Iceland, "Auden and MacNeice: Their Last Will and Testament":

> Item to John Betjeman (the most
> Remarkable man of his time in any position)
> We leave a Leander tie and Pugin's ghost
>
> And a box of crackers and St. Pancras Station
> And the Church of Ireland Gazette and our confidence
> That he will be master of every situation.[88]

In addition, Auden dedicated The Age of Anxiety to Betjeman, and he wrote an appreciative introduction to the American edition of Betjeman's poems. Certain of those poems, Auden acknowledges, make him, "frankly, rather annoyed because they are not by me."[89]

Certainly a poem like Betjeman's "In Westminster Abbey" suggests Auden. It involves rather complex metrical patterns: six-line stanzas of trochaic tetrameter and a rhyme scheme of xaxabb; further, each of the two unrhymed lines includes an extra, unaccented syllable, which adds a certain ease to the regular trochaic movement:

> Let me take this other glove off
> As the vox humana swells,
> And the beauteous fields of Eden
> Bask beneath the Abbey bells.
> Here, where England's statesmen lie
> Listen to a lady's cry.[90]

One notices in the poem an attention to surface detail, which recalls Auden:

> Think of what our Nation stands for,
> Books from Boots and country lanes,
> Free speech, free passes, class distinction,
> Democracy and proper drains.

Betjeman, like Auden, makes use of contemporary allusions ("Books from Boots"), and likewise he compiles a catalogue which achieves a satiric effect by virtue of false parallelism ("Free speech, free passes, class distinction, / Democracy and proper drains").

The poem's speaker, an Englishwoman who blandly prays, "oh bomb the Germans . . . . [but] Don't let anyone bomb me," is an example of Betjeman's fondness for exaggerated personae and for mimicry, also qualities which he shares with Auden.

The question, I suppose, is who influenced whom; or perhaps did the two poets simply happen to evolve separately along parallel lines. They are nearly the same age (Betjeman being a year older than Auden); both were at Oxford about the same time; both write poetry which displays wit, metrical virtuosity, frequent mimicry and pastiche, close attention to surface detail, and fondness for period styles and for exaggerated personae.[91] Auden has remarked on the immediacy of his own response to Betjeman's Georgian sense of place: "How . . . could he have entered so intimately into my childhood? How . . . could he be so at home with the

provincial gaslit towns, the seaside lodgings, the bicycles, the harmonium, above all, the atmosphere of ritualistic controversy?"[92]

On the other hand, there are important differences between the two poets. Auden, after all, is essentially a didactic, synthetic poet, adopting a variety of philosophical stances with which to face life. Be these philosophies Freudian, Marxist, or Christian, they are intended as tools to deal with the present, as well as the future. Betjeman's poetry, in contrast, can hardly be considered "searching": its values are locked in the past, in that lovely Georgian setting to which Auden refers. As a recent critic has put it, "Hope plays for the one the part that nostalgia plays for the other."[93] Whereas Auden has moved restlessly in search of themes and materials for his poetry: Iceland, Spain, China, America, Italy, Austria; Betjeman has stayed at home, in terms of place and values. "He makes a virtue out of anachronism."[94]

One has no answer to this question of influence. There are unquestionable poetic and temperamental resemblences between Auden and Betjeman, but then one can say this about Auden and any of a number of poets who can hardly be considered to have "influenced" his writing. One shuts one's book and remembers words of MacNeice:

> Past and future merely don't make sense
> And yet I thought I had seen them . . .
> But <u>how</u>, if there is only a present tense?

FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER III

[1]Monroe K. Spears, The Poetry of W. H. Auden: The Disenchanted Island (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1963), p. 317.

[2]The ideas in Auden's long poems are illuminated in Spears; Justin Replogle, Auden's Poetry (Seattle: Univ. of Washington Press, 1969; Herbert Greenberg, Quest for the Necessary: W. H. Auden and the Dilemma of Divided Consciousness (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1968); and George Bahlke, The Later Auden: From 'New Year Letter' to 'About the House' (New York: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1970).

[3]John Fuller, A Reader's Guide to W. H. Auden (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1970), p. 238.

[4]Greenberg, p. 189.

[5]My notion of Horace's poem is based on the excellent discussion in Reubon Brower, Alexander Pope: The Poetry of Allusion (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1959), pp. 168-76.

[6]Fuller, p. 220.

[7]One knows that Auden was still reading Horace about this time: as he told an interviewer in 1969, "I am now on a Horace jag" ("Craft Interview with W. H. Auden," The New York Quarterly I [Winter 1970], rpt in William Packard, ed., The Craft of Poetry: Interviews from "The New York Quarterly" [Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday, 1974], p. 1).

[8]Auden's writings on opera and libretti (see The Dyer's Hand [1962; rpt. New York: Vintage, 1968]: "Homage to Igor Stravinsky"), as well as his own libretti, including The Rake's Progress, Elegy for Young Lovers, and The Bassariads (written in collaboration with Chester Kallmann), testify to his interest in opera. An essay in The Dyer's Hand, "The Guilty Vicarage," which discusses patterns of innocence and guilt in the detective story, implies Auden's interest in that form of writing. Further, concerning his childhood reading, Auden has commented, "And I got my start reading detective stories with Sherlock Holmes" ("The Art of Poetry XVII," The Paris Review, 57 [Spring 1974], 36).

[9]W. H. Auden, "The Complete Poems of John Skelton," The Criterion, XI (January 1932), 316-19.

[10]First published in Poems, 1933. "Easy Knowledge" in Collected Shorter Poems, p. 27.

[11]Spears, p. 43.

[12]W. H. Auden, "John Skelton," The Great Tudors, ed. Katherine Garvin (London: Ivor Nicholson and Watson, 1935), pp. 53-67.

[13]W. H. Auden and Louis MacNeice, Letters From Iceland (London: Faber and Faber, 1937).

[14]W. H. Auden, The Orators (London: Faber and Faber, 1932), pp. 97-105.

[15]This passage in Collected Longer Poems, pp. 82-85.

[16]John G. Blair, The Poetic Art of W. H. Auden (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1965), p. 30.

[17]Spears, p. 151. Spears notes, however that, while Dryden ("the master . . . of arguing in verse") and Pope stand "massively in the background," with regard to Auden's handling of the poem's octosyllabic couplets, nevertheless, "the predecessors to whom Auden seems most indebted in the handling of the couplet are perhaps Yeats and Swift, as models of dignity and restraint."

[18]W. H. Auden, "Introduction," The Oxford Book of Light Verse (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1938), pp. xi-xii.

[19]Spears, p. 206.

[20]In Collected Longer Poems, p. 133.

[21]Fuller, p. 223.

[22]Many of these qualities, particularly the brilliant and elaborate use of wit and coloring, might also be called "baroque." And in fact, in his book A Certain World: A Commonplace Book (New York: The Viking Press, 1970), Auden uses a quote from Dryden as an example of "Baroque" style. Referring to baroque architecture, Auden writes, "Of all architectural styles, Baroque is the most this-worldly, a visible hymn to earthly pomp and power. At the same time, by its excessive theatricality, it reveals, perhaps unintentionally, the essential 'camp' of all worldly greatness. It is, therefore, the ideal style for princely palaces. But as ecclesiastical architecture it simply will not do, for nothing could be further removed from the Christian view of God and Man. The same is true of the baroque literature, of Paradise Lost" (pp. 28-29).

[23]One sees this attitude displayed in a British critic like R. G. Cox, who writes of Auden's post-thirties verse: "Technical facility, indeed, comes to seem Auden's chief danger henceforward. Poem after poem contains brilliant or powerful lines but is less successful as a whole because he has not been able to resist the irrelevant elaboration, the chasing of too many hares at once, the smart epigram, or the multiplication of self conscious ironies" ("The Poetry of W. H. Auden," The Modern Age: Volume 7 of the Pelican Guide to English Literature, ed. Boris Ford [Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1961], p. 383).

[24]This comparison is developed by Spears, pp. 337-38.

[25]W. H. Auden, "Criticism in a Mass Society," The Intent of the Critic ed. D. A. Stauffer (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1941), p. 132.

[26]John Blair notes that "Auden's later work has revealed such a strong native inclination toward moral allegory that he may have responded almost instinctively to poets like Langland" (p. 16).

[27]W. H. Auden, "Pope," From Anne to Victoria, ed. Bonamy Dobrée (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1937), pp. 89-107.

[28]Ibid., p. 93.

[29]Ibid., p. 98.

[30]Ibid., p. 103.

[31]W. H. Auden, "A Civilized Voice," The New Yorker (22 Feb. 1969), pp. 128-40, rpt. in Forwards and Afterwards (New York: Random House, 1973), pp. 109-24.

[32]Ibid., p. 111.

[33]Ibid., p. 119.

[34]Ibid., p. 124.

[35]These references are from Auden's "Introduction," The Oxford Book of Light Verse, p. viii.

[36]Auden, "A Civilized Voice," p. 124.

[37]Blair, p. 16.

[38]W. H. Auden, "Writing," The Dyer's Hand, p. 20.

[39]W. H. Auden, "The Poet of the Encirclement" The New Republic (24 October 1943); rpt. in Forewards and Afterwards, p. 352.

[40]W. H. Auden, "Introduction," The Oxford Book of Light Verse, p. xvii.

[41]Auden, "A Civilized Voice," p. 119.

[42]Auden, "Introduction," p. xvii.

[43]Ibid., p. xviii.

[44]Edited, and with an introduction by Auden. New York: Delacorte Press, 1966.

[45]Fuller, p. 248.

[46]Auden, "The Poet of the Encirclement," p. 352.

[47]Ibid., p. 354.

[48]Ibid., p. 356.

[49]Stephen Spender, "W. H. Auden and His Poetry," Atlantic Monthly (July 1953), p. 74.

[50]Replogle, pp. 100-01. The poem, not included in CSP, is from Poems, 1930 and 1933.

[51]Quoted in Replogle, p. 100.

[52]Fuller, p. 80.

[53]Discussed in Fuller, p. 167.

[54]In an essay, "Auden as a Monster," in the special "Auden Double Number" of New Verse (26/27 [Nov. 1937], 16), Geoffrey Grigson comments on Auden's moral relationship to Kipling: "Kipling was an Auden gone wrong. (When I read Danny Deever the other day I thought just how Auden would have made it exactly right.) The fault of the celebrated Kipling was not exuberance or energy. It was falsity of premiss, cheapness of feeling, atrophy of morals, mistraining of intellect and inefficiency of technique. Kipling was a remarkable human being wrong, Auden is a remarkable human being right, more or less; many worse poets than Auden who are 'better' poets than Kipling are only pencils and pens" (rpt. in Geoffrey Grigson, ed., New Verse: Numbers 1-32 and New Series: Volume I Number I: 1933--1939 [New York: Kraus Reprint Corp., 1966]).

[55]These notes were made from a discussion with Mr. Spender at the University of Oklahoma on December 11, 1973. In addition, Auden recently stated publically that "Yeats I only met casually and didn't particularly like him" (from the interview mentioned in note 7).

[56]Richard Ellmann, "Gazebos and Gashouses," Eminent Domain: Yeats Among Wilde, Joyce, Pound, Eliot, and Auden (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1967), pp. 97-126.

[57]W. H. Auden, "Yeats as an Example," The Kenyon Review, X,2 (Spring 1948), 187-95.

[58]Ibid., p. 193.

[59]With regard to the "conversational manner" present in Another Time, Hoggart writes, "Here Auden owes much to the example of W. B. Yeats, whose conversational verse he has always admired" ("Introduction to Auden's Poetry," from W. H. Auden: A Selection [London: Hutchinson Educational, Ltd., 1961], rpt. in Monroe K. Spears, ed., Auden: A Collection of Critical Essays, p. 114). Replogle notes that Yeats's "discursive poems are obviously models" for the conversational poems in Look, Stranger! (p. 122); and Spears, in The Poetry of W. H. Auden, calls New Year Letter "the great monument of the middle style," and says that Yeats and Swift are "the predecessors to whom Auden seems most indebted in the handling of the couplet . . . [with] dignity and restraint" (p. 151).

[60]Some of the phrasing here, as well as part of the idea, are from Blair, p. 91.

[61]Auden, "Yeats as an Example," pp. 193-94.

[62]These observations are congenial to those in Stephen Spender's autobiography, World Within World (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1951), p. 149, that Yeats "felt that poetry should always have an underlying lilt, as simple as Byron's: 'So we'll go no more a-rowing, / So late into the night.' He said he was brought up in an environment of aestheticism and artificiality. He had striven all his life to simplify his diction. Yet he did not think that to write free verse was a solution to the problem. He wanted to write starkly and yet not sacrifice the Byronic lilt."

[63]As Auden has suppressed this poem from the editions of his collected poetry (it first appeared in New Republic, 18 Oct. 1939), I am using the version which appears in Robin Skelton, ed., Poetry of the Thirties (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1964), p. 280.

[64]Hoggart, p. 114.

[65]Spears, p. 150.

[66]"The Art of Poetry," Paris Review, p. 62.

[67]Christopher Isherwood, Lions and Shadows (Norfolk, Conn.: New Directions, 1947), pp. 185-92. This point is discussed in Chapter Two, above.

[68]Blair, p. 13.

[69]Noted from a conversation with Spender at the University of Oklahoma, December 11, 1973.

[70]Auden, "Yeats as an Example," p. 193. Auden delivered a final word on the matter of Eliot's influence upon his own verse in the Paris Review interview (see note 8, above):

> Interviewer: What about Eliot's influence?
> Auden: Eliot can have very little direct stylistic influence on other poets, actually. What I mean is that it is very rare that one comes across a poem and can say, 'Ah, he's been reading Eliot.' One can with Yeats or Rilke, but not with Eliot. He's a very idiosyncratic poet, and not imitatable . . . . And I don't say this about Eliot in any pejorative sense at all." (p. 62)

[71]W. H. Auden, "D. H. Lawrence," The Dyer's Hand, p. 278.

[72]Ibid., pp. 283-84.

[73]W. H. Auden, "Making, Knowing and Judging," inaugural lecture given June 11, 1956, published by Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1957; rpt. in The Dyer's Hand, p. 59.

[74]W. H. Auden, "Introduction," The Complete Poems of Cavafy, trans. Rae Dalven (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1961), pp. vii-xv. This essay reprinted in Forewards and Afterwards, pp. 333-44, and as this is the most accessible text, it is the one to which I shall refer.

[75]Ibid., p. 333.

[76]Ibid., p. 335.

[77]Ibid., p. 337.

[78]Ibid., p. 336.

[79]W. H. Auden, "Marianne Moore," The Dyer's Hand, pp. 296-305. The quotation is on p. 296.

[80]See note 38, above.

[81]Auden, "Marianne Moore," p. 298.

[82]Ibid., pp. 298-99.

[83]Ibid., p. 305.

[84]From a review in The Mid-Century, #5, Fall 1959. Cited in Spears, p. 329.

[85]Blair, p. 150.

[86]Ibid., p. 151.

[87]Replogle, p. 184.

[88]Auden and MacNeice, pp. 243-44.

[89]W. H. Auden, "Introduction," to John Betjeman, Slick But Not Streamlined (Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday, 1947), p. 9.

[90]John Betjeman, John Betjeman's Collected Poems, ed. The Earl of Birkenhead (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1958), p. 91.

[91]These common qualities are suggested by Spears, p. 337.

[92]Auden, "Introduction," Slick But Not Streamlined, p. 10.

[93]Richard Ellmann and Robert O'Clair, eds., The Norton Anthology of Modern Poetry (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., Inc., 1973), p. 705.

[94]Ibid., p. 706.

Chapter Four

On the tradition of the Horatian Epistle in Pope's *Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot*, Byron's *Don Juan*, and Auden's *Letter to Lord Byron*

Alexander Pope
Never gave up hope
Of finding a motto
To affix to his Grotto.

Lord Byron
Once succumbed to a Siren:
His flesh was weak,
Hers Greek.

My first name, *Wystan*,
Rhymes with *Tristan*,
But--O dear!--I do hope
I'm not quite such a dope.

W. H. Auden

The genial, satiric Byron of *Don Juan*, also the Byron of "Beppo," "The Vision of Judgement," and the early "English Bards and Scotch Reviewers" doubtlessly provided the immediate inspiration for the *Letter to Lord Byron* (1937). Auden writes early in the first section that he has, "at the age of twenty-nine / Just read *Don Juan* and I found it fine."[1] Characterizing the book as "light and easy . . . warm and *civilisé*" (p. 39), Auden claims that Byron "offer[s] every possible attraction" (p. 57), and he defends him against the "moral and aesthetic brickbats" of such critics as T. S. Eliot and George Eliot ("A 'vulgar genius' so George Eliot said, / Which doesn't matter as George Eliot's dead" [p. 57]). He likes Byron's muse "because she's gay and witty, / Because she's neither prostitute nor frump, / The daughter of

A European city, / And country houses long before the slump." He likes the tone of the poetry "that does not make me jump"; and he finds Byron "sympatisch, a good townee, / Neither a preacher, ninny, bore, nor Brownie." Then marvelously characterizing Byron's style, Auden says, "You are the master of the airy manner" (p. 58).

One finds several distinctly "Byronic" echoes in Auden's poem, such as the parenthetical observation in the first section, "The thought of writing came to me today / (I like to give these facts of time and space)" (p. 38), which parallels a passage from Canto I of Don Juan, "'Twas on a summer's day--the sixth of June:-- / I like to be particular in dates, / Not only of the age, and year, but moon . . . ."[2] Again, Auden's occasional use of abrupt transitional devices ("Without a bridge passage this leads me straight / Into the theme marked 'Oxford' on my score") reflects Byron's not infrequent use of humorous, abrupt transition, such as the succinct "Here ends this canto . . ." (p. 657), near the end of Canto One. Byron's jaded, worldly pose is echoed in Auden's simile, explaining what it's like "To get to sleep in latitudes called upper": "like returning after orgies, when / Your breath's like luggage and you realize / You've been more confidential than was wise" (p. 45). Richard Hoggart has observed that in the Letter to Lord Byron, Auden catches Byron's jauntiness and facetiousness, and that, like Byron, he uses invocation, parenthesis, a wide, idiomatic and often superficial sweep,

and stanzas which close with an emphatic couplet.[3]

In considering Auden vis à vis Byron, however, one soon concludes that the relationship is incomplete. For the similarities between the styles of the Letter to Lord Byron and Don Juan are basically of a neo-classical nature; i.e., what Auden and Byron have in common is Pope, and particularly the Pope of the Horatian epistles.

That Byron was early introduced to Pope is indicated by the inscription in Byron's schoolboy hand on the first flyleaf of his copy of The Poetical Works of Alexander Pope: "Harrow on the Hill, Middlesex--A. D. 1803--Given me by my Friend Boldero."[4] Later at Cambridge, Byron indicated his appreciation of Pope's genius in a notation he scrawled on the flyleaf of his copy of Owen Ruffhead's The Life of Alexander Pope: "Of Pope's pithy conciseness of style Swift--no diffuse writer himself--has so emphatically said--'For Pope can in one couplet fix / More sense than I can do in six.'"[5]

Nor was this admiration for the Augustan merely an early enthusiasm. In a letter to his publisher, John Murray, written from Venice, April 6, 1819, Byron refers to Pope as "the parent of English real poetry,--poetry without fault . . . ."[6] Later in another letter to Murray, this time from Ravenna in March, 1821, Byron zealously defends the power of Pope's imagery and imagination: "I will show more imagery in twenty lines of Pope than in

any equal length of quotation in English poesy."[7] That same year Byron engaged in a "war of the pamphlets," initiated by Bowles, concerning the moral and literary character of Pope.[8] Byron's contribution--two rapidly-composed articles designated as "Letters" to Murray--includes vociferous, even extravagant, praise of Pope, "the greatest poet of his age,"[9] "the only poet that never shocks; the only poet whose faultlessness has been made his reproach,"[10] "the delight of my boyhood, the study of my manhood . . . [perhaps] the consolation of my old age,"[11] the "poet of a thousand years."[12]

Stephen Spender has noted that Auden, because of his scientific education, was unique in not having been brought up in the tradition of English Romantic poetry.[13] (Auden records in the fourth part of the Letter that "from my sixth until my sixteenth year / I thought myself a mining engineer." [p. 68]) Further, Spender suggested three reasons to account for Auden's taste for Dryden and Pope.[14] First, he undoubtedly would have responded to their careful and marvellous craftsmanship. Second, Auden would have been sympathetic to their anti-rhetorical, anti-Romantic view of poetry and of the poet, for Auden and others of his "group" disagreed with the view of the poet as "unacknowledged legislator of mankind"; instead, they were closer to the concept held by Dryden and Pope of the poet as a cultivated man addressing his peers. Third, Eliot, particularly in The Sacred Wood, was influential

in directing the taste of Auden's generation back to Dryden and Pope.

The best demonstration of Auden's taste for Pope, however, is in the poems, themselves, and the remainder of this chapter will consider the Letter to Lord Byron and the first Canto of Don Juan in the light of a representative Horatian epistle by Pope, An Epistle from Mr. Pope, to Dr. Arbuthnot. First, however, some observations on the form of the Horatian epistle.

Jay Arnold Levine defines the verse epistle as "that kind of poem, presented as a letter, which discusses serious matters of individual, social, or political conduct in an intimate or middle style."[15] He discusses several traits of the epistle, including an air of informality, freedom, "intimate spontaneity," an amateur quality--as if it were being dashed off by a gentleman--sophistication and worldliness, and a speaker of wit and cultivation addressing his peers. With these qualities one might associate those designated by E. P. Morris in "The Form of the Epistle in Horace."[16] Morris suggests that the Horatian epistle displays a three-part structure, and that the first and third parts involve personal details and are light and familiar in tone. The second part is used for the development of a general subject, if there is one, and its tone is more formal than that of the other two parts. The model, both in content and form, is the friendly letter, and one can assume that the

duality of tone exists to lighten the serious subject matter, and thus to make its development appropriate to a friendly letter. Thus the writer of the Horatian epistle seeks to preserve the tone of the friendly letter, while unobtrusively working in "subject matter of general interest."[17] In addition, Morris suggests that the form requires tact, good manners, mingled independence and deference, grace, and friendliness.

In his discussion of Pope's Epistle to a Lady, Reuben Brower asserts that the poem comes "nearer to an Horatian epistle" than any thing Pope had written to that time,[18] and he then points out several "Horatian" characteristics implicit in the poem. With regard to "matter," Pope is 'philosophic in Horace's most characteristic manner"; he expresses a mingled sense of "amusement and horror" at the wreckage people tend to make of their lives; however, he is profoundly gratified at "finding one life, Like Horace's Ofellus or Volteius, that seems to make sense." Also "Horatian" are Pope's refusal to be misled by "social prestige or pretension to wisdom," and his sincere appreciation of "deep but free and easy friendship." With regard to "manner," Brower notes that Pope resembles Horace in using "contrasting cases" in order to establish the "portrait of an ideal"; in his varied "tone of casual talk"; and in his use of transitions," which for Pope as for Horace, is not only a technique of style, but a technique of moving freely among moral and emotional possibilities."

Also helpful in elucidating the Horatian epistle are criteria suggested by Robert Matteson in an unpublished dissertation.[19] The epistle, he suggests, "avoid[s] the appearance of rigid systematic proceeding," and instead, progresses "conversationally." In addition, the poet often "record[s] actual conversations or take[s] the part dramatically of the person he addresses." Like Levine, Matteson notes the inclusion of "intimate or personal or autobiographical" details, as well as of illustrative anecdotes, which may be based on personal experience. Finally, he concludes that a work of this kind will be "primarily didactic but not obtrusively so," and the tone will shift easily "from grave to gay, from lively to severe."

It would be worthwhile, at this point, to discuss briefly a representative Horatian epistle, noting the presence of some of the criteria which these critics contend are characteristic of the form. The Second Satire of Book Two, Quae Virtus et quanta,[20] clearly embodies a tone of casual talk: at several points, colloquial questions and interjections are put forth: "Why all this? I will try to give you the answer" (p. 44); "So far, so good!" (p. 45); "What standard of living, then, should the sensible person adopt . . . ?" (p. 46). The natural results of these colloquialisms are an air of informality, freedom, and the "intimate spontaneity" which Levine proposes.

The speaker, one feels, is a man of worldly sophistication and wit, as well as of intuitive wisdom. He begins by informing his listeners (who, as gentlemen, are his social peers, although they are perhaps younger, being described, at one point, as in their "youth and vigor") that he will address them on the subject of plain fare, and he will do so "here and now before dinner" because he perceives that "no judge who has been bribed weighs the facts honestly" (i.e., that the glitter of dinner silver and the appeal of magnificent food will make them less than receptive to his message). He knowledgeably enumerates the delicacies of a gourmand's table: oyster, scar, "imported lagois," and peacock displayed marvelously "with its colored tail"; yet he rejects these expensive, overly-rich foods, in favor of "a little bread and salt."

The speaker is wryly amused at the lack of wisdom in those who cater to their palates: "A belly big enough for a voracious Harpy cries, 'If only I can see something lying full length on an enormous platter!'" (p. 46); or again, describing what will become of one who squanders a fortune on fancy dishes: "you will have a disapproving uncle, displeased neighbors, dissatisfaction with yourself, the unsatisfied longing for death when you no longer have five cents with which to buy a rope" (p. 48). Yet Horace is genuinely disturbed, even "horrified," as Brower says, at the prospect of self-indulgence: "Have you no better way of spending your surplus? Why are

deserving people in want while you have abundance? Why are the ancient temples of the gods going to wrack and ruin? Why, you reprobate, don't you spend something of your vast store for your beloved country? Doubtless you are the only man to whom reverses will never come" (p. 48). (These two closely-following passages also illustrate Horace's ability to accomplish quick and subtle modulations in tone: a "conversational" quality, in itself.)

In contrast to these examples of indulgence, Horace proposes the peasant, Ofellus, as a truly wise man, as one whose life "makes sense," in Brower's words. Ofellus eats simply ("Only under exceptional circumstances did . . . [he] ever have anything to eat on a work day except vegetables and a hock of smoked pork" [p. 48]), and he is stoically content with his lot, even though he now ploughs for another land which he, himself, formerly owned ("It will really never belong to anybody, but will grow its crops now for me, and presently for others" [p. 49]). Horace's implication, in general terms, is to follow the middle way: the wise man "will not go to extremes." The embodiment of this <u>via media</u> is Ofellus, who is able "to distinguish between cheap and simple living."

To heighten the epistle's conversational effect, Horace dramatically includes actual dialogue between himself and those he addresses:

> "Trausius is the man you should lecture to. I have a large income, as much money as three kings."
> Well and good. Have you no better way of spending your surplus?
>
> (p. 48)

Further, the illustrative stories (such as the account of Ofellus); the anecdotes (such as portraits of Gallonius and Avidienus); and old sayings ("As the saying goes, 'A wolf is on one side, a dog on the other'") intensify the sense of a man talking, freely and intimately, to friends.

As is characteristic of Horatian epistles, this selection is primarily didactic: the speaker has an important lesson to teach his auditors; yet it is not, as Matteson says, "obtrusively so." The remarkable tone of voice, which blends wit, sophistication, and folk wisdom; the inclusion of marvelous images of luxurious living on the one hand, and of anecdotes of plain living on the other; the subtly varied nature of the discourse, which at all times avoids the appearance of having been systematically organized: all blend to achieve an effect more like that of a friendly letter, as Morris would have it, than of an essay on ethics. It is discursive writing, but it never ceases to be conversational.

Finally, the epistle involves the three-part structure which Morris contends is characteristic of the form. Section one is addressed to the "gentlemen" of Horace's audience. He speaks familiarly of their everyday activities: hunting rabbits, training horses, playing ball. His tone is informal as he uses irony and homely imagery to capture his listeners' interest, as well as to introduce them to his topic: "in short, when vigorous exercise has knocked the nonsense out of you and you are thirsty and hungry, then reject if you can

plain food and refuse to drink honey-wine unless the honey comes from Hymettus and the wine from Falernum!" (p. 45). The middle section of the work, in contrast, is more formal and general, involving such plainly didactic statements as, "I pass now to the benefits of a simple diet"; and "You value, I presume, reputation--a good name which falls on the human ear more pleasantly than music?" This also is the section in which Horace sets forth contrasting character portraits, in order to establish an ideal in Ofellus, the peasant. The final section concludes with the account of Ofellus giving wise advice to his sons ("live a courageous life"). The general advice of the middle section is thus personally embodied in this particular scene.

One notices a loose adherence to Morris's three-part structure in both the Letters of Pope and Auden, as well as in Canto I of Don Juan. The beginning to the Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot, with its note of personal irritability, of Pope's having been driven near the edge by fatigue and harrassment, is famous:

> Shut, shut the door, good John! fatigu'd I said,
> Tye up the knocker, say I'm sick, I'm dead,
> The Dog-star rages.[21]

Satire upon literary opportunists follows, but it is accompanied by familiar, personal details: "They pierce my Thickets, thro' my Grot they glide"; "from the Mint walks forth the Man of Rymes / Happy! to catch me, just at

Dinner-time"; "All fly to Twit'nam, and in humble strain / Apply to me, to keep them mad or vain." Thereafter Pope turns to more general satire on bad writers, pedantic critics, literary patrons, and former friends with whom he has scores to settle: "Atticus" (Addison), "Sporus" (Lord Hervey), and "Sapho" (Lady Mary Wortley Montagu). The personal note never disappears, but perhaps is subordinated to these more general subjects until near the end of the poem, where the poet defends his family and friends, who had been attacked because of their proximity to Pope, himself. The most strikingly personal passage of the poem is the last stanza, in which the poet writes of his mother, who had died two years before the poem's publication, but of whom he speaks as if she were still living:

> O Friend! may each Domestick Bliss be thine!
> Be no unpleasing Melancholy mine:
> Me, let the tender Office long engage
> To rock the Cradle of reposing Age,
> With lenient Arts extend a Mother's breath,
> Make Languor smile, and smooth the Bed of Death,
> Explore the Thought, explain the asking Eye,
> And keep a while one Parent from the Sky!
> (ll. 406-13)

Byron's poem opens with "Fragment: On the back of the Poet's MS. of Canto I." This "fragment," a regular stanza of ottava rima, opens the work on an intensely personal note, describing the poet as he sits "reeling, / Having got drunk exceedingly to-day, / So that I seem to stand upon the ceiling." The stanza gives the impression of having been scribbled off in a moment of profound, if transitory, insight:

"I would to heaven that I were so much clay, / As I am blood, bone, marrow, passion, feeling . . . ." The stanza ends on a note of dismissal, yet with a suggestion of desperation: "I say--the future is a serious matter-- / And so--for God's sake--hock and soda-water!" Thereafter Byron abruptly begins the Dedication in a harder, more abrasive, general and public tone:

> Bob Southey! You're a poet--Poet-laureate,
> And representative of all the race:
> Although 'tis true that you turn'd out a Tory at
> Last,--yours has lately been a common case . . . .

After the satirical Dedication, Byron commences the comic narrative of Canto I, never allowing the personal digressions to disappear, but not permitting them utterly to dominate until the end of the Canto in stanzas CC and following. The most personal passages of all are in stanzas CCXIII ("But now at thirty years my hair is gray-- / [I wonder what it will be like at forty? / I thought of a peruke the other day--]") and CCXVI ("My days of love are over; me no more / The charms of maid, wife, and still less of widow, / Can make the fool of which they made before . . ."). One suspects of course, that Byron is "dramatizing" himself, that he has his tongue in his cheek; one does not, however, question the intimacy, the personal quality of the section.

Auden likewise opens the Letter with a chatty, personal address to Lord Byron: "Excuse, my lord, the liberty I take / In thus addressing you" (p. 37). The entire opening section,

a direct parody of the opening of Pope's "Letter to Dr. Arbuthnot," with Auden, himself, playfully assuming the role of one of the literary opportunists that Pope despised ("I know that you / Will pay the price of authorship and make / The allowances an author has to do"), is witty, suave and personal. For example,

> So if ostensibly I write to you
> To chat about your poetry or mine,
> There's many other reasons: though it's true
> That I have, at the age of twenty-nine
> Just read Don Juan and I found it fine.
> I read it on the boat to Reykjavik
> Except when eating or asleep or sick.
> (p. 38)

Thereafter, as in the case of the previous poems, the Letter turns to more general matters, though never losing touch with the personal: Section II deals with social issues ("news about the England of the day"); Section III with literary styles, criticism and critics, the poet's relation to his audience. The last section, however, is autobiographical, allowing Auden to dwell on details of his background, childhood and young-manhood to date: "Which brings me up to nineteen thirty-five; / Six months of film work is another story / I can't tell now" (p. 76).

Hence one can see how the tone of the friendly letter is maintained throughout each of the poems. Further, each writer begins and ends with personal details, as well as including them throughout the body of each work. At the same time, each unobtrusively works in "subject matter of general interest," as Morris puts it.

Appropriately, each poet implies by the inclusion of classical allusions in his poem his awareness of classical affinities. Pope advises would-be poets, overly-hasty to publish their work, to "'Keep your Piece nine years" (l. 40), an obvious reference to Horace's The Art of Poetry: "If, however, you should one day produce something . . . then put back the manuscript in your desk and let it stand for over a decade."[22] Further, his definition of the ideal poet stems directly from Boileau's Horatian-influenced L'Art poétique:[23]

> . . . but were there One whose fires
> True Genius kindles, and fair Fame inspires,
> Blest with each talent and each Art to please,
> And born to write, converse, and live with ease . . . .
> (ll. 193-96)

Finally, Pope's delineation of the ideal way of life is strikingly Horatian:

> Oh let me live my own, and die so too!
> To live and die is all I have to do:
> Maintain a Poet's Dignity and Ease,
> And see what friends, and read what Books I please.
> (ll. 261-64)

Byron begins his poem with a quote from Horace: "'Difficile est proprie communia dicere.'" Shortly thereafter, in stanza VI of Canto I, Byron refers to the practice of epic poets to "plunge 'in media res'" and again directly refers to Horace: "Horace makes this the heroic turnpike road . . . ." And near the end of the Canto, Horace is quoted once more: "'Non ego hoc ferrem calida juventa / consule Planco'" (p. 660).

These three explicit references to Horace in Canto I of Don Juan are reflected in Auden's Letter, but in a less obvious way. Here the Horace of Boileau, Dryden, and Pope is implicit throughout. A context of propriety and decorum is suggested in the already-quoted first lines, "Excuse, my lord, the liberty I take / In thus addressing you." An appealing, if perhaps coy, pose of Horatian modesty is introduced shortly thereafter: Auden comments that the poem "may not be a success. / There're many others who could do it better . . ." (p. 41); and later, he claims that, whereas Parnassus has many levels,

> The most I ask is leave to share a pew
> With Bradford or with Cottam, that will do:
> To pasture my few silly sheep with Dyer
> And picnic on the lower slopes with Prior.
> (p. 43)

Auden suggests that his generic literary tastes are pleasantly balanced, that in the manner of Horace's via media, they are intended to avoid concentration at any extreme:

> By all means let us touch our humble caps to
> La poésie pure, the epic narrative;
> But comedy shall get its round of claps, too.
> According to his powers, each may give;
> Only on varied diet can we live.
> The pious fable and the dirty story
> Share in the total literary glory.
> (p. 58)

(incidently, one should certainly not overlook the deliciously ironic echo of Marx in line four of that stanza.) He prefers a human-centered art, suggesting Pope's "The proper study of mankind is man": "To me Art's subject is the human clay, /

And landscape but a background to a torso; / All Cézanne's apples I would give away / For one small Goya or a Daumier" (p. 61). Then in the following stanza, Auden discusses the social nature of art: "Art, if it doesn't start there, at least ends . . . In an attempt to entertain our friends . . ." (cf. the poet's statement in his "Introduction" to The Oxford Book of Light Verse that the artist "wants to tell the truth, and he wants to amuse his friends").[24] In summary, sociable, sensible, moderate, Horatian attitudes permeate the poem.

In his essay, "Don Juan," Auden points out that Pope is a "satiric" poet in that his point of view "has its origin in passion, in anger at what is the case, desire to change what is the case into what ought to be the case, and belief that the change is humanly possible."[25] In contrast, Byron in Don Juan is "comic" because he does not "pass judgement"; he would persuade the reader "to accept the contradictions with humor as facts of life against which it is useless to rebel."[26] Nevertheless, both poems, as well as Auden's Letter, contain a great deal of satire, as indicated previously. And in all three cases, there is satire of harsh, vituperative nature, as well as of gentler, more genial nature.

In the Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot, perhaps the coldest, most withering satire is in the portrait of "Atticus," who is said to "damn with faint praise, assent with civil leer, /

And without sneering, teach the rest to sneer" (ll. 201-02). The most vituperative attack, however, concerns "Sporus, that mere white Curd of Ass's milk," "This painted Child of Dirt that stinks and stings," that "familiar Toad, / Half froth, half Venom, [who] spits himself abroad, / In Puns, or Politicks, or Tales, or Lyes, / Or Spite, or Smut, or Rymes, or Blasphemies" (ll. 306-22). Gentler criticism is reserved for "Sapho," "soft by Nature, more a Dupe than Wit" (l. 368).

Byron's harsh satire is applied to Robert Southey, whom Byron despises as being a turn-coat liberal, one who "lives to sing" the "slaves, allies, kings, armies" of Europe. Receiving even worse treatment is the "intellectual eunuch," Robert Stewart, Viscount Castlereagh: "Cold-blooded, smooth-faced, placid miscreant! / Dabbling its sleek young hands in Erin's gore" ("Dedication," XII). Wordsworth and Coleridge are ridiculed, but in a gentler way: "There [i.e., by a brook] poets find materials for their books, / And every now and then we read them through, / So that their plan and prosody are eligible, / Unless, like Wordsworth, they prove unintelligible" (XC).

Gentlest of all, indeed, "accepting," as Auden says, is Byron's satire on involuntary human weaknesses, especially those relating to sexuality. For example, the stanza which comments on Donna Julia's marriage to an older husband:

> Wedded she was some years, and to a man
> Of fifty, and such husbands are in plenty;
> And yet, I think, instead of such a ONE

'Twere better to have TWO of five-and-twenty,
Especially in countries near the sun:
And now I think on't, 'mi vien in mente,'
Ladies even of the most uneasy virtue
Prefer a spouse whose age is short of thirty.
(LXII)

Auden reserves his coldest satiric scorn for "the ogre, dragon, what you will," which "seems to sleep, but will not fail / In every age to rear up to defend / Each dying force of history to the end" (p. 54). In a sardonic passage, Auden evokes the contemporary European scene, ripe for World War II:

He that in Athens murdered Socrates,
And Plato then seduced, prepares to make
A desolation and to call it peace
Today for dying magnates, for the sake
Of generals who can scarcely keep awake,
And for that doughy mass in great and small
That doesn't want to stir itself at all.
(p. 55)

No less serious is the poet's ironic suggestion that Mickey Mouse is the new "hero" for an unheroic age:

There stands our hero in his threadbare seams:
The bowler hat who strap-hangs in the tube,
And kicks the tyrant only in his dreams,
Trading on pathos, dreading all extremes;
The little Mickey with the hidden grudge . . . .
(p. 52)

The poem also contains a great deal of lighter satire, often stated with epigrammatic brilliance: "Carnegie on this point was most emphatic. / A humble grandfather is not a crime, / At least, if father made enough in time!" (p. 49); or describing devotées of Wordsworth:

The mountain-snob is a Wordsworthian fruit;
He tears his clothes and doesn't shave his chin,

> He wears a very pretty little boot,
> He chooses the least comfortable inn;
> A mountain railway is a deadly sin;
> His strength, of course, is as the strength of ten men,
> He calls all those who live in cities wen-men.
> (p. 59)

Nor does Auden restrict his epigrammatic talent to satiric statements. In a couplet describing Byron's style, "A style whose meaning does not need a spanner, / You are the master of the airy manner" (p. 58), Auden illustrates what he implies to be the epigrammatic task of the poet in his reference to "a commonplace that's hardly worth / A poet's while to make profound or terse" (p. 60; one thinks of Pope's famous lines, "True Wit is Nature to Advantage drest, / What oft was Thought, but ne'er so well Exprest").

Pope's well-known ability to construct brilliant, epigrammatic couplets is illustrated in such lines as "a Lash like mine no honest man shall dread, / But all such babling blockheads in his stead" (ll. 303-04); "Who but must laugh, if such a man there be? / Who would not weep, if Atticus were he!" (ll. 213-14); or "His life, tho' long, to sickness past unknown, / His Death was instant, and without a groan" (ll. 402-03).

Byron's continuation of this tradition of concise, cleverly worded couplets is observable in lines like those referring to women: "The charming creatures lie with such a grace, / There's nothing so becoming to the face" (CLXXVIII). Another example is in Donna Julia's letter to Juan after she

has been sent to a convent; she refers to the fact that "'Man's love is of man's life a thing apart, / 'Tis woman's whole existence'"; "'Men have all these resources, we but one, / To love again, and be again undone'" (CXCIV).

Closely related to this epigrammatic tendency is the cultivation of wit and humor in the three poems. Pope, for example, referring to his being besieged by literary hopefuls, alludes to the mythical tale of Midas, whose ears were turned into ass's ears, and whose subordinates were thus placed in the delicate position of informing him of this fact: "And is not mine, my Friend, a sorer case, / When ev'ry Coxcomb perks them in my face?" (ll. 73-74). And in a subsequent passage, Pope wittily describes the shameless "Scribler" as a spider (an image recalling Swift's tale of the spider and the bee in The Battle of the Books), "Thron'd in the Centre of his thin designs; / Proud of a vast Extent of flimzy lines" (ll. 93-94). Nor can one overlook Pope's witty and somewhat bitter description of his flatterers' behavior:

> There are, who to my Person pay their court,
> I cough like Horace, and tho' lean, am short,
> Ammon's great Son one shoulder had too high,
> Such Ovid's nose, and "Sir! you have an Eye--
> Go on, obliging Creatures, make me see
> All that disgrac'd my Betters, met in me:
> Say for my comfort, languishing in bed,
> "Just so immortal Maro held his head:"
> And when I die, be sure you let me know
> Great Homer dy'd three thousand years ago.
> (ll. 115-24)

Byron likewise often writes with a high sheen of brilliant wit, although in his case the "wit" tends to be

shrewdly comic, rather than ingeniously metaphoric, as with Pope. Characterizing the learned jargon of Don Alfonso, Byron writes, "His speech was a fine sample, on the whole, / Of Rhetoric, which the learn'd call '*rigmarole*'" (CLXXIV). Anticipating his own later years, the poet supposes that "for a good old-gentlemanly vice, / I think I must take up avarice" (CCXVI). Indulging in word-play, including a comic feminine rhyme in the concluding couplet, Byron writes a witty stanza upon the word, "fifty":

> When people say, 'I've told you *fifty* times,'
> They mean to scold, and very often do;
> When poets say, 'I've written *fifty* rhymes,'
> They make you dread that they'll recite them too;
> In gangs of *fifty*, thieves commit their crimes;
> At *fifty* love for love is rare, 'tis true,
> But then, no doubt, it equally as true is,
> A good deal may be bought for *fifty* Louis.
> (CVIII)

On occasion in the *Letter*, Auden approaches Pope in the ingenuity of his comparisons. Referring near the beginning of the poem to the letters with which literary hopefuls inundate established writers, Auden wittily sees their compulsion for self-revelation as a need for the ritual of confession:

> For since the British Isles went Protestant
> A church confession is too high for most.
> But still confession is a human want,
> So Englishmen must make theirs now by post
> And authors hear them over breakfast toast.
> (p. 38)

Later in the poem Auden cleverly describes fluctuating artistic tastes in terms of financial stocks:

> The vogue for Black Mass and the cult of devils
> Has sunk. The Good, the Beautiful, the True
> Still fluctuate about the lower levels.

> Joyces are firm and there there's nothing new.
> Eliots have hardened just a point or two.
> Hopkins are brisk, thanks to some recent boosts.
> There's been some further weakening in Prousts.
> (p. 50)

As ingenious is the brilliant comparison in Section III of famous literary styles to "singing robes":

> There's every mode of singing robe in stock,
> From Shakespeare's gorgeous fur coat, Spenser's muff,
> Or Dryden's lounge suit to my cotton frock,
> And Wordsworth's Harris tweed with leathern cuff.
> Firbank, I think, wore just a just-enough;
> I fancy Whitman in a reach-me-down . . . .
> (p. 58)

Related to this element of wit in the poems is the satiric way in which rhyme is handled in the heroic couplets. Auden has pointed out the significance of the ottava-rima stanza to the development of Byron's comic voice;[27] that Byron had tried unsuccessfully to equal Pope and Dryden with satirical heroic couplets with masculine rhymes in English Bards and Scotch Reviewers and in Hints from Horace, but that of course he could not compete with these masters on their own ground. Not until after being introduced to the comic possibilities of ottava-rima through Frere's The Monks and the Giants did Byron's comic genius flower. And, as Auden emphasizes, the keys to the success were the feminine rhymes which Byron absorbed from the couplets of Frere's exact English imitations of Italian ottava-rima. ("Italian is," Auden reminds one, "a polysyllabic language, most of its words end on an unaccented syllable . . . .)[28]

Pope's Epistle contains only a few feminine rhymes, including one in the last couplet of the poem, which is very serious in tone: "A. Whether that Blessing be deny'd or giv'n, / Thus far was right, the rest belongs to Heav'n." The only feminine rhyme with a humorous effect in in ll. 163-64: "Yet ne'r one sprig of Laurel grac'd the ribalds, / From slashing Bentley down to pidling Tibalds." Pope's forte, of course, lies in the use of masculine rhymes in couplets of great satiric punch, such as "Out with it, Dunciad! let the secret pass, / That secret to each Fool, that he's an Ass" (ll. 79-80); and "has not Colly still his Lord, and Whore? / His Butchers Henley, his Free-mason Moor?" (ll. 97-98).

Byron evidently admired very much the satirical power which Pope was able to obtain in the heroic couplet. As implied above, however, Byron's particular talent lay in the primarily comical, rather than in the primarily satirical (I am using Auden's sense of these terms); and in using feminine, and even triple, rhymes, rather than masculine rhymes. These rhymes abound on each page, for example: referring to Robert Southey, "Gasping on deck, because you soar too high, Bob, / And fall, for lack of moisture quite a-dry, Bob!" ("Dedication," III); "He [Don José] died of the slow fever called the tertian, / And left his widow to her own aversion" (XXXIV); in reference to Donna Inez's fury at anyone's saying that Don Juan was nearly an adult, she would bite her lips "If any said so, for to be precocious / Was in

her eyes a thing the most atrocious" (LIV); concerning a rumor which the poet "fain would hush," "'Tis said that Donna Julia's grandmamma / Produced her Don more heirs at love than law" (LVIII).

Compounding the humor are numerous triple rhymes, which usually produce a comically ludicrous effect: concerning Donna Inez's learning, "Her thoughts were theorems, her words a problem, / As if she deem'd that mystery would ennoble 'em" (XIII); a truly-dazzling quadruple rhyme, "Oh! ye lords and ladies intellectual, / Inform us truly have they not hen-peck'd you all?" (XXII); commenting that, if Don José's discretion "were not so peaceable / As Numa's (who was also named Pompilious), / He had been ill brought up, and was born bilious" (XXXV).

Auden seems consciously to have adopted Byron's use of feminine rhymes for comic purposes in pentameter couplets. For example: using comic juxtaposition in a description of the course of Europe since Byron's death, "And Europe saw from Ireland to Albania / The Gothic revival and the Railway Mania" (p. 45); denying the assertion that England is completely technologized, "To those who live in Warrington or Wigan, / It's not a white lie, it's a whacking big 'un" (p. 46); and commenting upon spreading continental influence in England, "The south of England before very long / Will look no different from the Continong" (p. 48).

The poems' wit and humor contribute to what is perhaps their most noticeable shared characteristic: the informal, colloquial tone, which most accounts for their being called "conversational." Richard Hoggart has characterized conversational verse as that in which "the manipulation of speech rhythms . . . [produces] a distinct tone of voice in the verse," and in which the tone "may be racy, persuasive, cool, dramatic, easy, unfussed and unhurried, but is always there."[29] These qualities are very close, if not identical, to many of those characteristics earlier associated with the informal Horatian epistle; notice in particular Levine's "intimate spontaneity," as well as Morris's designation of the "friendly letter" as the epistle's model.

A more colloquial opening to a poem than that in the Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot cannot be found in Pope. The phrase of direct address, interjected in the third foot of the first line ("Shut, shut the door, good John! fatigu'd I said . . .") gives the line the effect of arresting immediacy, as do the three imperatives in the first couplet: "Shut . . . / Tye up . . . say . . . ." The diction is monosyllabic, except for two bisyllable words. The couplet, in short, serves brilliantly to establish an informal, if fretful tone, a sense of the poet in dishabille. Pope's mastery of meter, of the subtleties of the pentameter line, is displayed in line thirty-three, "Seiz'd and ty'd down to judge, how wretched I!" in which the trochee and spondee in the first

two feet balance the iambs in the last three feet and give to the line a loose, spontaneous, conversational effect. A little further on, Pope reacts to the suggestion that he and a would-be poet collaborate on a poem and split the profits: "Glad of quarrel, strait I clap the door, / Sir, let me see your works and you no more" (ll. 67-68). The interjection of dialogue into the exposition, the abruptly joined phrases of the first line, the short, incisive diction, produce an almost rough-and-tumble sense of informality and immediacy. The passage concerning Pope's impatience with an assumption that he enjoys no interests outside of his writing, further illustrates the tone of the poem:

> Why am I ask'd, what next shall see the light?
> Heav'ns! was I born for nothing but to write?
> Has Life no Joys for me? or (to be grave)
> Have I no Friend to serve, no Soul to save?
> "I found him close with Swift--Indeed? no doubt
> (Cries prating Balbus) "something will come out."
> 'Tis all in vain, deny it as I will.
> (ll. 271-77)

The elegant turns in the syntax, the parenthetical inserts, the interjections, the simple yet polished diction: these are responsible for the poem's being called "conversational."

The colloquialism of Byron's Don Juan is well known, and is related closely to the poem's wit. For the wit, as has been discussed, often is derived from clever, conversational puns and irregularities in syntax. The colloquial basis of such lines as the following needs no explication:

> A better cavalier ne'er mounted horse,
> Or, being mounted, e'er got down again,

Than José, who begot our hero, who
Begot--but that's to come--Well, to renew:
(IX)

In a passage like the following, Byron makes use of the conversational aside for ironic purposes:

Perfect she was, but as perfection is
Insipid in this naughty world of ours,
Where our first parents never learn'd to kiss
Till they were exiled from their earlier bowers,
Where all was peace, and innocence, and bliss
(I wonder how they got through the twelve hours)
(XVIII)

Ironic self-contradiction, inducing an air of spontaneous befuddlement and confusion is carried to the limits in the following lines:

For there one learns--'tis not for me to boast,
Though I acquired--but I pass over that,
As well as all the Greek I since have lost:
I say that there's the place--but 'Verbum sat,'
I think I pick'd up too, as well as most,
Knowledge of matters--but no matter what--
(LIII)

The casual, graceful, witty flow of the following passage can be seen to epitomize the conversational aspect of the poem: its wit, its intimate "just between-friends" tone, its use of asides, its air of spontaneous disorganization, its informal, yet polished and worldly level of diction:

But just suppose that moment should betide,
I only say suppose it--inter nos.
(This should be entre nous, for Julia thought
In French, but then the rhyme would go for nought.)
(LXXXIV)

Auden's poem likewise exhibits a witty conversational tone, which is established in the first stanza. After four lines of quietly conservative diction, Auden introduces

a colloquial term, "fan-mail," to refer to the letters that authors receive; and in the following two lines he includes a pun, an interjection, slang, and the names of three well-known people:

> And then a lord--Good Lord, you must be peppered,
> Like Gary Cooper, Coughlin, or Dick Sheppard . . . .

Further, the first stanza runs-on into the second: "With notes from perfect strangers . . . ." Slang is found in several places in the poem; for example, "At any language other than my own / I'm no great shakes . . ." (p. 38), and "It may be D. H. Lawrence hocus-pocus, / But I prefer a room that's got a focus" (p. 47). Auden characterizes the style of both Don Juan and (by implication) of his own poem in the couplet concerning his reasons for including a copy of that poem on his Icelandic journey: "So looking round for something light and easy / I pounced on you as warm and civilisé" (p. 39).

Auden explicitly discusses his formal objectives for the poem in the following passage:

> I want a form that's large enough to swim in,
> And talk on any subject that I choose,
> From natural scenery to men and women,
> Myself, the arts, the European news . . . .
> (p. 42)

This idea of a loose, "omnibus" form, combined with a "light and easy . . . warm and civilisé" tone precisely describes a conversational poem, and Auden applies that term to his poem on its last page: "here I end my conversational song."

Like Pope and Byron, Auden mixes exposition with digression, as in the following stanza:

> We're out at sea now, and I wish we weren't;
> The sea is rough, I don't care if it's blue;
> I'd like to have a quick one, but I daren't.
> And I must interrupt this screed to you,
> For some other little jobs to do;
> I must write home or mother will be vexed,
> So this must be continued in our next.
> (p. 56)

He achieves the natural sense of men talking partly by means of direct address, and by mixing statements with questions and asides: "Byron thou should'st be living at this hour! / What would you do, I wonder, if you were?" (p. 53; one notes here the specific parody of Wordsworth's sonnet to Milton: "Milton! thou shouldst be living at this hour . . ."). In the following passage, he offsets a flat statement composed in standard English with an ironic aside which includes a colloquial term:

> We're starting soon on a big expedition
> Into the desert, which I'm sure is corking:
> Many would like to be in my position.
> I only hope there won't be too much walking.
> (p. 56)

A witty, conversational tone implies a witty, conversational speaker. And indeed, each of these poems involves a worldly, sophisticated speaker addressing his peers. One aspect of this literary personality, at least in the latter two poems, involves the idea that, as a gentleman, the poet writes at whim, that he dashes off lines in idle moments, that he has neither the will nor the inclination to revise his work, that his genius is natural, a gift of nature rather than the result of drudgery.

Although Pope seems in the Epistle at least to give the impression that he is a hard-working poet ("The Dog-star rages": i.e., it is August, the time in ancient Rome that poetry was rehearsed), he manages to make the point that he does have interests other than poetry ("was I born for nothing but to write?"). One remembers Pope's habit of setting back the dates of his early publications in order to accentuate his youthful prodigiousness, and one notes his observation, in the present poem, "As yet a Child, not yet a Fool to Fame, / I lisp'd in Numbers, for the Numbers came" (ll. 127-28).

Byron's observation in the already quoted Fragment, "I write this reeling, / Having got drunk exceedingly to-day," also implies a "dashed-off" image, as does Auden's lethargic couplet, "I'm writing this in pencil on my knee, / Using my other hand to stop me yawning . . ." (p. 44). Further, Auden develops the idea that poetry is a leisurely occupation, that poets do not work very hard on their verse, in comparison to good novelists:

> The average poet by comparison
> Is unobservant, immature, and lazy.
> You must admit, when all is said and done,
> His sense of other people's very hazy,
> His moral judgements are too often crazy,
> A slick and easy generalization
> Appeal too well to his imagination.
> (p. 40)

The image of a worldly, avuncular figure, sitting by fireside in a dressing gown, drinking claret, and confiding his wit and wisdom to a friend perhaps comes through most

strikingly in these poems in the last portion of the first canto of Don Juan. Byron muses on his spent youth ("in short, I / Have squander'd my whole summer while 'twas May . . ."), on his approaching old age ("In short, I must not lead the life I did do . . ."), and on the hollowness of fame ("What is the end of fame? 'tis but to fill / A certain portion of uncertain paper . . ."). But then, the wit, wisdom, elegance, grace of each of these speakers are implicit in each line of the poems, and these qualities are implied in each topic discussed above. Why say more?

Hopefully it will be clear at this point that a common tradition runs through Pope's Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot, Byron's Don Juan (of which the first canto surely can be accepted as representative), and Auden's Letter to Lord Byron. I think it is in the context of this tradition, which has its origins in Horace, that Auden ultimately will be read. The tradition remains vital in such recent work as Kenneth Koch's superb comic epic poem in ottava-rime, Ko: or a Season on Earth (1959), which most obviously suggests Byron, but also implies Auden and Pope as well. But that's another matter.

FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER IV

[1]W. H. Auden, Letter to Lord Byron, in Collected Longer Poems (New York: Random House, 1969), p. 38. Subsequent references will be from this edition.

[2]George Gordon, Lord Byron, Don Juan, in Byron: Poetical Works (London, Oxford University Press, 1904), p. 648. Subsequent references to the poem will be from this edition.

[3]Richard Hoggart, Auden: An Introductory Essay (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1951), p. 52.

[4]Leslie A. Marchand, Byron: A Biography (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1957), notes, p. 9.

[5]Ibid., p. 138.

[6]Thomas Moore, The Life, Letters and Journals of Lord Byron (1830; rpt. London: John Murray, 1932), p. 392.

[7]Ibid., p. 500.

[8]Clement Tyson Goode, Byron As Critic (Weimar: R. Wagner Sohn, 1923), p. 149.

[9]Moore, p. 697.

[10]Ibid., p. 699.

[11]Ibid., p. 712.

[12]Ibid., p. 712.

[13]A comment made during a reading in Norman, Oklahoma, December 10, 1973.

[14]These observations were noted during a discussion with Mr. Spender in Norman, Oklahoma, December 11, 1973.

[15]Jay Arnold Levine, "The Status of the Verse Epistle Before Pope," Studies In Philology, 59 (1962), 661.

[16]E. P. Morris, "The Form of the Epistle in Horace," Yale Classical Studies (1931), pp. 81-114.

[17]Ibid., p. 113.

[18]Reuben Brower, Alexander Pope: The Poetry of Allusion (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1959), p. 281.

[19]Robert Steere Matteson, English Verse Epistles, 1660-1758, Diss. Univ. of Oklahoma 1968, p. 115.

[20]Horace, "The Simple Life," trans. Hubert Wetmore Wells, in Caspar J. Kraemer, Jr., ed., The Complete Works of Horace (New York: Modern Library, 1936), pp. 44-49. Subsequent references will be from this edition.

[21]John Butt, ed., The Twickenham Edition of the Poems of Alexander Pope: Volume IV: Imitations of Horace with An Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot and The Epilogue to the Satires (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1942), p. 96. Subsequent references will be from this edition.

[22]Horace, The Art of Poetry, trans. Edward Henry Blakeney, in The Complete Works of Horace, pp. 409-10.

[23]This observation made in Geoffrey Tillotson, Paul Fussell, Jr., Marshall Waingrow, eds., Eighteenth-Century English Literature (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1969), p. 664.

[24]W. H. Auden, "Introduction," The Oxford Book of Light Verse (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1938), p. viii.

[25]W. H. Auden, "Don Juan," in The Dyer's Hand and Other Essays (1962; rpt. New York: Vintage, 1968), p. 387.

[26]Ibid., p. 388.

[27]Ibid., pp. 394-400.

[28]Ibid., p. 396.

[29]Hoggart, Auden: An Introductory Essay, p. 51.

Chapter Five

An Evolving Style

> Auden's poetry is a poetry moving toward talk.
> Justin Replogle

The pervasive tone of the lovely volume, Poems, 1933,[1] is one of understated irony, enigma, and lingering sadness: the book is, after all, about the death of a culture. Because most of the poems are stylistically condensed, they could not be called "conversational" (although an offhand element carries many of them almost to that point). The few poems which do warrant that label, however, tend to make use of the middle style for satirical purposes.[2]

For example, in the third poem of the collection, "Since you are going to begin to-day" ("Venus Will Now Say a Few Words," CSP, p. 33), the speaker, a personification of nature, analyzes the subject, who seems representative of the bourgeois, in the coldly objective manner of a logician. A certain superciliousness is apparent from the opening lines:

> Since you are going to begin to-day
> Let us consider what it is you do.
> You are the one whose part it is to lean,
> For whom it is not good to be alone.

The schoolmasterish quality of the address ("Let us consider what it is you do") is effectively intimidating, for the speaker, it must be remembered, represents the inevitable and impersonal force of evolution.

Yet there is inherent pathos in the poem, arising perhaps from the subject's feelings of helplessness and

futility. On one level, he is a representative of the decadent bourgeoisie--the object of Auden's satire and of nature's sneers--and as such, he deserves the death he unconsciously wishes for: better that he be swept away in favor of "another form, perhaps your son," who when his turn comes, also "will be tipped, / Found weeping, sighed for, made to answer, topped." Yet this person is also ourselves--Auden, as well as his bourgeois readers: in anticipating his demise, we do the same with regard to ourselves.

The poem's meter is a loose pentameter, and its form consists of couplets which are given an unposed, slightly wrenched effect by means of double consonance, rather than rhyme. The sentences tend to be long and complex, with plenty of subordinate and qualifying phrases and clauses: appropriate to the rather awesome character of the speaker.

In "We made all possible preparations" ("Let History Be My Judge," CSP, p. 24), the speaker is a political reactionary in power who seeks to justify his side's repressive, counter-revolutionary methods against revolutionary forces. He expresses himself in the hackneyed, periphrastic jargon of bureaucracy:

> We made all possible preparations,
> Drew up a list of forms,
> Constantly revised our calculations
> And allotted the farms . . . .

His case includes euphemism ("Most, as was expected, were obedient, / Though there were murmurs, of course"); outrageous

assumption of privilege (referring to "Our old right to abuse"); smugness ("there could be no question of living / If we did not win"); as well as genuine perceptiveness, concerning the origins of social disruption ("Others, still more astute, / Point to possibilities of error / At the very start"). As before, the satire contains an element of poignancy in the reader's uneasy recognition that the speaker is not only an "other"; he represents the "privilege" enjoyed by the bourgeois reader, himself.

The poem's form involves a pattern of quatrains, with irregular, alternating three-and four-stress lines. Lines one and three in most cases employ rhyme, while two and four involve double consonance. This quasi-ballad arrangement allows for a spoken effect which "lilts along" unobtrusively; the awkward, bureaucratic conventionality of the language thus plays off against the basically musical form in a manner pleasingly appropriate to satire.

The use to which Auden will put the conversational style in future volumes is perhaps most evident in the long, four-part poem, "It was Easter as I walked in the public garden" ("1929," CSP, p. 34). The second and third sections of the poem, which concerns Auden's Berlin year, are predominantly in the condensed mode common to most of the rest of the volume. Parts I and IV, however, exhibit definite hints of the discursive conversational style soon to develop, and still noticeably removed from the two satirical conversational poems just discussed.

> And recent particulars come to mind;
> The death by cancer of a once hated master,
> A friend's analysis of his own failure,
> Listened to at intervals throughout the winter
> At different times and in different rooms.
> But always with success of others for comparison,
> The happiness, for instance, of my friend Kurt Groote,
> Absence of fear in Gerhart Meyer
> From the sea, the truly strong man.

The poet, one feels, is talking rather directly in this passage. If a persona be involved, it is one of intelligence and sensitivity, as opposed to the theatrical personae of "Since you are going to begin today" and "We made all possible preparations." The articles--the "a's," "an's," and "the's"--are intact, for the most part, in contrast with their frequent absence in Parts II and III; and this contributes to the natural effect of the passage. The tone, like that in many of the famous Auden poems of the later thirties, is restrained, thoughtful, monochrome.

During the next five years, 1936 to 1941, Auden perfected the conversational style, making of it a poetic medium capable of handling widely varied intentions and effects. Ever didactic, yet scornful of the notion of the poet as "prophet," Auden, as Spears notes, makes of the middle style "a flexible instrument for rational discourse and statement that can be public without falsity or loss of integrity."[3] Between the publication of Look, Stranger! and Another Time, he masters the technique of making public statements, as well as of pursuing philosophical inquiry, in an informal manner; of being didactic without speaking from a lectern;

one might almost say, of being "prophetic" without raising his voice.

A good example of this blending of public, formal concerns with a private, informal manner lies in the poem, "Here on the cropped grass of the narrow ridge I stand" (Look, Stranger!, p. 42). The first stanza of the poem, which Fuller characterizes as "a love poem of absence and resolution,"[4] but which also is about industrialism's having gotten out of hand, concerns both the public and the personal. The meditative first line, which Replogle finds reminiscent in tone of "Tintern Abbey,"[5] involves a speaker who, while speaking in a rather formal and declamatory fashion, "nevertheless uses the first person pronoun, looks at real landscape, and speaks in the manner of nineteenth-century meditative verse."[6] In contrast to this rather personal, Romantic opening is the reference to "the retired and rich" in Wales, which introduces the poem's social theme. One also notices that the entire first stanza (eleven lines), consisting of a single, heavily clausal sentence, syntactically complex but grammatically precise, with several compound verbs and objects,[7] contrasts with the peculiar syntax and elliptical language characteristic of the earlier poems.

However, the earlier work is reflected in the second stanza's mention of an unexplained "crime," and in the ambiguous "it." The third stanza returns to the juxtaposition of the public and the private: "Gross Hunger," as well as

"Europe," who "grew anxious about her health," are personified in the best neo-classical manner of Dryden or Pope; but the stanza opens on a personal note--"For private reasons I must have the truth." Further, in the last two lines, an impersonal image is contrasted strikingly with a personal image: "business shivered in a banker's winter / While we were kissing."

Although the fifth stanza involves a series of particular images, each is cited in the plural, and hence the impression is of a whole society:

> Deaf to the Welsh wind now, I hear arising
> From lanterned gardens sloping to the river
> Where saxophones are moaning for a comforter,
> From Gaumont theatres
> Where fancy plays on hunger to produce
> The noble robber, ideal of boys,
> And from cathedrals,
> Luxury liners laden with sould,
> Holding to the east their hulls of stone,
> The high thin rare continuous worship
> Of the self-absorbed.

Part of the stanza's effect arises from the piling up of image upon image, each gaining strength not only by virtue of its being more grand than the one preceding it (from "lanterned gardens" to "Gaumont theatres" to "cathedrals" which are "luxury liners laden with souls" to "hulls of stone"), but also from the simple force of accumulation: in this sense, image number four is more striking than image number one because it has been prepared for three times. Auden expertly ends the stanza with an ironic <u>coup</u>: the wispy evaporation of the impressive, foregoing images into

"the high thin rare continuous worship / Of the self-absorbed."

The sixth and seventh stanzas bring into the poem "memory" and the context of history ("here, which looked north before the Cambrian alignment"; "the hopes of time"; "empires stiff in their brocaded glory"; "intercalary ages of disorder"; "the civilization of the delicate olive"), which reinforce the poem's effect as general statement. In addition the hawk and the sky are introduced as general symbols:

> The hawk is the symbol of the rule by thirst,
> The central state controlling the canals;
> And the blank sky
> Of the womb's utter peace before
> The cell, dividing, multiplied desire,
> And raised instead of death the image
> Of the reconciler.

In the eighth stanza, "the thunder mutters" a pronouncement (one thinks at this point of The Waste Land). This oracular statement, however, is made in deflationary, down-to-earth terms ("the common language of collective lying, / In codes of a bureau, laboratory slang / and diplomats' French"). In stanza ten, the "bones of war" continue the pronouncement begun by the thunder. This section rebounds in terse, three-line stanzas: the form is implicitly a very strong one; yet the mixed imagery and the cool tone of voice, which derives in part from the precise, grammatically organized syntax, involving a great deal of coordination and subordination, produce an effect which remains off-hand and "Audenesque":

> But pompous, we assumed their power to be our own,
> Believed machines to be our hearts' spontaneous fruit,
> Taking our premises as shoppers take a train.
>
> . . .
>
> Unable to endure ourselves, we sought relief
> In the insouciance of the soldier, the heroic sexual pose
> Playing at fathers to impress the little ladies . . .

The opening of the final stanza sharply contracts to focus upon the immediate surroundings and personal concerns of the speaker:

> The Priory clock chimes briefly and I recollect
> I am expected to return alive
> My will effective and my nerves in order
> To my situation.

The stanza ends, however, after the inclusion of quotations by Wilfred Owen and "Kathy" (Katherine Mansfield?), with aphorism:

> These moods give no permission to be idle,
> For men are changed by what they do;
> And through loss and anger the hands of the unlucky
> Love one another.

Thus the poem is an example of verse that blends the personal and the topical, the historical and the political; that makes general statements in a quietly discursive manner. It resembles the great Romantic meditative poems in containing the personal and the philosophical (using that term very generally); it differs from them in its use of neo-classical personifications, in its Modernist echoes, in its multifarious efforts to avoid a "prophetic" stance, and in its hard-headed refusal to allow the problems raised to be resolved by the Imagination. Instead, it insists upon the necessity of one's

becoming socially "engaged" in order to overcome those problems:

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

One attraction of the middle style is its potential versatility. Auden uses it during this period to produce the witty, suave Letter to Lord Byron, as well as the bitter, anxious "September 1, 1939." It is also used for satire, as in much of Letter to Lord Byron, in "The Unknown Soldier," and in the rather horrible "Danse Macabre" (Another Time; CSP, p. 105).

This poem, spoken by a self-appointed hero who believes that he has been chosen by God to destroy undesirable elements and thus to save humanity,[8] is composed in neat iambic tetrameter couplets. The innocuous, cultivated speaker, evidently at home in elegant surroundings, nevertheless is ready to give up those pleasures:

> The works for two pianos, the brilliant stories
> Of reasonable giants and remarkable fairies,
> The pictures, the ointments, the frangible wares
> And the branches of olive are stored upstairs.

From the first line, the poem includes a great deal of anapestic meter--"It's farewell to the drawing-room's mannerly cry"--which gives the lines a swirling, graceful movement. Further, the understated, confidential tone of voice--the speaker twice uses the phrase, "dear heart"--and the occasionally playful, fantastic details, as in the anapestic line "And down the long street I shall turn the cartwheel," produce a

"comfy" and complacent air which contrasts with frequently outrageous imagery and statements by the speaker. Like the Vicar in The Dog Beneath the Skin, the speaker employs the myth of Satan's fall to account for human sin and to justify his own vindictive efforts,[9] and his oversimplified similes and imagery are disturbing, as well as slightly ridiculous:

> Like influenza he [the Devil] walks abroad,
> He stands by the bridge, he waits by the ford,
> As a goose or a gull he flies overhead,
> He hides in the cupboard and under the bed.

The explicit statements which the speaker unblinkingly delivers, concerning his "mission," are the vehicles of the poem's most obvious satire.

> Hundreds of trees in the wood are unsound:
> I'm the axe that must cut them down to the ground.
>
> For I, after all, am the Fortunate One,
> The Happy-Go-Lucky, the spoilt Third Son;
> For me it is written the Devil to chase
> And to rid the earth of the human race.

Like the speakers of Swift's "A Modest Proposal" and Defoe's "The Shortest-Way with the Dissenters," the speaker in Auden's poem expresses himself in the smooth, conversational tones of a moderate, rational man. A certain over-glibness, an unflappable, yet outrageous acceptance of the extreme point of view, however, make him the object, rather than the agent of satire. The cloyingly "nice" tone, set against the subject of annihilation, make the last stanza an excellent example of the poem's method:

> So good-bye to the house with its wallpaper red,
> Good-bye to the sheets on the warm double bed,
> Good-bye to the beautiful birds on the wall,
> It's good-bye, dear heart, good-bye to you all.

As Auden uses the conversational style for satiric ends in these years, he also uses it for serious philosophical discourse of a high order. The most notable example is, of course, the monumental New Year Letter. In the Letter's more than 1700 lines of octosyllabic couplets, Auden considers the existential problem of "how shall we live?" and he does so in a constantly varied manner. The model for the poem is undoubtedly provided by Dryden, the "master of the Middle Style," although Yeats and Swift taught Auden a great deal about how to handle the couplet in a manner of smoothly-flowing dignity and restraint.[10] Appropriately establishing a personal tone, the poem opens and closes with affectionate, personal tributes to Auden's "dear friend," Elizabeth Mayer.

The middle style also lends itself to heightening, as in "Consider this and in our time," "Easily, my dear, you move, easily your head," and "Journey to Iceland." In the latter poem (CSP, p. 100), which explores the implications of the statement from the prose letter following the poem, that "We are all too deeply involved with Europe to be able, or even to wish to escape,"[11] the tone for the most part is thoughtful, quiet, analytical. The sentences are long but precisely-conceived, reflecting a sensitive, yet rationally-channeled consciousness:

> These plains are for ever where cold creatures are hunted
> and on all sides: white wings flicker and flaunt;
> under a scolding flag the lover
> of islands may see at last,
> in outline, his limited hope, as he nears a glitter
> of glacier, sterile immature mountains intense
> in the abnormal northern day, and a river's
> fan-like polyp of sand.

The last stanza, in contrast, is noticeably more intense:

> Tears fall in all the rivers: again some driver
> pulls on his gloves and in a blinding snowstorm starts
> upon a fatal journey, again some writer
> runs howling to his art.

Instead of the long, run-over, discursive constructions of previous stanzas, this sentence opens with a strong simple statement, which is then amplified with two highly rhetorical clauses, each introduced by "again." Instead of the closely observed, but essentially neutral, topographical details which fill the rest of the poem, the images in this stanza are powerfully suggestive: tears and rivers; "a blinding snowstorm"; "a fatal journey"; and the nightmarish image, somehow suggesting Edvard Munch's famous drawing, "The Cry," of the writer running "howling to his art." A "conversational" feeling permeates the stanza: the result of the caesura in the first line, the repetition of "again," as well as of the indefinite adjective, "some." Nevertheless, one experiences a definite intensification in this, the poem's climactic stanza.

And then the great public elegies from Another Time: on Yeats, Freud, Ernst Toller; the famous "September 1, 1939." Among the most remarkable of Auden's shorter poems, they serve as exemplary models of the form in which Auden has acknowledged

being influenced by Yeats, the occasional poem--"a serious reflective poem of at once personal and public interest."[12] For example, the elegy, "In Memory of W. B. Yeats" (CSP, p. 141), makes a public statement of considerable density. It expresses Auden's own philosophical conviction that "poetry makes nothing happen"; yet it also implies that the poet's role, even in the face of this truism, is to continue his efforts toward humanizing men, to "still persuade us to rejoice." In addition, the poem is an expression of the general despair of 1939, when "all the dogs of Europe bark, / and the living nations wait, / each sequestered in its hate"; and finally, it is a personal tribute to William Butler Yeats, the "Irish vessel," that lies "emptied of its poetry."

At the same time, the poem expresses Auden's personal response to a public figure whom he had neither known well nor particularly liked, but for whose poetic artistry he had great respect. The ambiguity of these attitudes--personal antipathy and professional admiration--is summarized in the line, "You were silly like us; your gift survived it all." Further, the poem's deflationary irony, particularly in the first section, whose account of the poet's death is somewhat like a weather report ("He disappeared in the dead of winter . . . . What instruments we have agree / The day of his death was a dark cold day . . . . The current of his feeling failed; he became his admirers") has the double effect of eliminating any aggrandizing note in the tribute, while making the account

so pathetic, by means of its very impersonality, that, paradoxically, it becomes deeply affecting. Thus the poem serves as an example of Auden's technique of obtaining strong poetic results by means of minimalization and deflation; of his adherence to the saw, "less equals more." Finally, throughout the poem, the lucid, reflective conversational voice never blurs. It presents grounds for despair as well as something like a prayer in the closing stanzas; yet its tone of quiet reflection wavers neither toward a tear nor a shout.

Auden and Isherwood left England for the United States on 18 January 1939, and that event marks a significant break in Auden's writing. The primary influence upon his poetic development during the subsequent years seems to have been his conversion to Christianity, which undoubtedly prompted his abandonment of the humanistic values of the thirties. Many critics have interpreted this shift of residence and the change in values as a failure of nerve (one anonymous reviewer maliciously remarked that "Auden's love for Henry James was understandable, since both had changed nationality for the same reason--that England was at war"),[13] and have argued that Auden's post-thirties poetry is lacking in the particularly brilliant virtues of the earlier verse.[14] Whether that be the case or not--and John Press makes the valid observation that, while "many of Auden's more recent poems are slack, trivial and coy . . . it is equally true that many of his early poems are silly, pretentious, slapdash,

and needlessly obscure"; and that "the proper scale of comparison is between his finest work before 1939 and his finest work since then"[15]--one is struck by the noticeable difference in the poetry which Auden wrote in the years after coming to America.

The Collected Poetry of 1945 contains several pieces drawn from New Year Letter, as well as a group of new poems.[16] The selections from New Year Letter tend to embody various lines of philosophical and theological inquiry in quiet, conversational tones. They strike one as being essentially drab and prosaic, although not lacking in the high sheen of craftsmanship. For example, "The Dark Years" (CSP, p. 176), originally the "Epilogue" to New Year Letter, opens with a wondrously-suggestive, poetic stanza:

> Returning each morning from a timeless world,
> the senses open upon a world of time:
> after so many years the light is
> novel still and immensely ambitious . . . .

One notes the virtual absence of colorful, particularized images; instead, one finds generalized images, often abstract, and involving plays upon words ("a timeless world" / "a world of time"), which are appropriate to the poem's essential character as versified philosophical discourse. The elegant formality, the stately tone, and the balanced, periodic sentences give the poem the effect of good Restoratian prose--say, of something by George Savile, or John Dryden, or one of the Anglican sermon-writers: Isaac Barrow, Robert South, or John Tillotson:

> . . . Nevertheless,
> whatever the situation and the blame,
> let the lips make formal contrition
> for whatever is going to happen,
>
> time remembered bear witness to time required,
> the positive and negative ways through time
> embrace and encourage each other
> in a brief moment of intersection,
> that the spirit orgulous may while it can
> conform to its temporal focus with praise,
> acknowledging the attributes of
> one immortal, one infinite Substance,
>
> and the shabby structure of indolent flesh
> give a resonant echo to the Word which was
> from the beginning, and the shining
> Light be comprehended by the darkness.

The intellectual complexity and technical brilliance of this passage would make it very impressive theological prose, were the margins even. The tone of discourse never quite disappears: the offhand "nevertheless," which opens the sentence; and the elaborate but utterly precise syntax, which follows, one word after another, in a linear conversational flow, help account for this--nevertheless, it is very earnest "conversation," on a rarified level.

A less austere conversational style emerges in several of the new poems. This style, which is in the tradition of the Letter to Lord Byron and which comes to full fruition during the late forties, often involves a worldly, genial persona who speaks tête à tête, and whose manner seems so natural that it suggests the poet is in the process of discovering a comfortable poetic voice, one that is "just right," for himself, as Byron did in his late, ottava rima poems.

"Atlantis" (CSP, p. 202) captures our attention by using the search for Atlantis as a metaphor for the individual's quest for truth. The witty, theological discussion takes the form of instructions to an unnamed, but apparently specific, individual. The effect of most of the poem, however, is predominantly impersonal; the focus is upon colorful topographical details which compose the conceit. Yet in the last stanza, the tone becomes quite personal; the "you" becomes "dear friend," and the details are directly related to that person:

> All the little household gods
> Have started crying, but say
> Good-bye now, and put to sea.
> Farewell, dear friend, farewell: may
> Hermes, master of the roads
> And the four dwarf Kabiri,
> Protect and serve you always;
> And may the Ancient of Days
> Provide for all you must do
> His invisible guidance,
> Lifting up, friend, upon you
> The light of His countenance.

The theological orientation of the passage is obvious. Yet the tone is direct and confidential, and the imagery is ingenious and colorfully concrete, in contrast to the sobriety of the previous theological poems.

"In Sickness and in Health" (CSP, p. 204) preserves a façade of intimacy, which belies the poem's underlying grandeur and formality. A kind of wedding poem, the work involves a Kierkegaardian view of love and its role in an absurd world ("Met through their tohu-bohu comes a voice / Which utters

an absurd command--Rejoice"). There is a certain gorgeous, metaphysical exhuberance to the imagery and the diction; for example, Tristan and Isolde, "the great friends," who echo "each other like two waterfalls,"

> Make passion out of passion's obstacles,
> Deliciously postponing their delight,
> Prolong frustration til it lasts all night,
> Then perish lest Brangaene's worldly cry
> Should sober their cerebral ecstasy.

And indeed, the dense and highly intellectual nature of the poem further suggest metaphysical parallels. Yet the epistle form; the device of addressing the poem to a friend, variously characterized as "Dear," "Beloved," and "dear love"; and the understated imagery and diction (the poem opens quietly with the image of the "benevolence of fingering lips," and it closes with the characteristic couplet, "Preserve us from presumption and delay, / And hold us to the ordinary way") help maintain an offhanded, conversational air in this basically formal and highly rhetorical poem.

An avuncular, Byronic persona appears in "Many Happy Returns" (CSP, p. 208). In contrast to the intricate syntactic patterns of "In Sickness and in Health," this poem is in short syllabic lines. Fitting a birthday poem for a seven-year-old, the diction is rather plain, and learned allusions are held to a minimum (although the reference to "what / Whitehead calls the art of Negative Prehension" might puzzle the poem's youthful recipient). Perhaps the most appealing characteristic of the poem is its gentle humor, particularly in light of the

previous poems. The poet requests "Johnny" to accept these "Verbal celebrations / of a doubtful Fish" (Auden was a Pisces), and then he cleverly discusses the boy's birth in terms of stage imagery:

> Seven years ago you
> Warmed your mother's heart by
> Making a successful
> Debut on our stage;
> Naïveté's an act that
> You already know you
> Cannot get away with
> Even at your age.
> So I wish you first a
> Sense of theatre . . . .

The affectionate teasing of the speaker--who is aware of the mock-heroic effect which he is making--contributes to the peculiar aura of the poem, which Spears describes as a "mixed style--colloquial, but humorously inflated."[17] And characteristically, Auden uses this idiomatic informality to express public, general truths: the poem, one realizes, is built around the speaker's advice to the boy. Perhaps the kernal of this advice is contained in the stanza which counsels that one adhere to a <u>via media</u>--timeless wisdom as characteristic of Confucius or Horace or Pope as of Auden:

> Tao is a tightrope,
> So to keep your balance,
> May you always, Johnny,
> Manage to combine
> Intellectual talents
> With a sensual gusto,
> The Socratic Doubt with
> The Socratic Sign.

In the pleasant, vernacular last stanza, four brief, imperative statements gracefully draw the poem to a close

without the least condescension or coyness:

> Happy Birthday, Johnny,
> Live beyond your income,
> Travel for enjoyment,
> Follow your own nose.

If the dominant concerns of Auden's poetry of the early forties were theological, resulting in what Spears has characterized as "a kind of theological light verse,"[18] the tone and preoccupations of the verse of the next nine years, 1948 to 1957, tend in the direction of the comic and the secular. These were years in which Auden spent springs and summers on the island of Ischia, and his poems of the period seem to reflect the island's sunny climate. During the New York years, Auden had agonized over man's existential predicament; during his "Mediterranean" period, he turned away somewhat from religious, exploratory themes, in favor of poetry which, as Fuller observes, deals with "the themes of nature and history, language and truth, friendship and landscape."[19] The verse becomes less Kierkegaardian, and more Horatian: it includes an abundance of classical allusions, and it is implicitly "mythological," as Auden's poetry previously had not been.

"Mythological," however, should not be taken to suggest metaphysics, but should be understood, rather, in a Christian and personal sense. In the early forties, Auden's focus had been on man's existential relation to God and to life. In the late forties and throughout the fifties, the poet's focus returns, as it had begun to in the thirties, "to the problem

of man in his social context."[20] He becomes increasingly disturbed by the dehumanizing effects of a mass state, run by cold-blooded "managers" (see his poem, "The Managers," CSP, p. 300), whose view, as Stephen Spender has pointed out in a review of Nones, is "that--for the time being at any rate--only generalized concepts based on officially approved statistics matter."[21]

Spender suggests that Auden's response to the growing influence of the "managers" was to write in a manner "seriously unserious": i.e., to "reduce the cosmos to the personal and the gossipy even," and to oppose "private experience" to "a) the public calamity threatening at every moment to destroy us and b) the managerial view of society." In writing thus, Auden "is fighting for the whole position of poetry; because if we live in a world entirely dominated by external happenings or by governmental and centralized reasonings and generalizings, poetry is no longer possible."[22]

Hence in this period, Auden's often whimsical, conversational style can be seen as containing social implications: against the dehumanized facade of the Organization, Auden projects an eminently civilized and "human" face. And of course, taken outside of a social context, the style is the logical result of tendencies associated with light verse, which we have followed from the 1930's.

Foremost among these tendencies is the poet's playfulness. As the speaker of "'The Truest Poetry is the most Feigning'"

(CSP, p. 315) advises the would-be poet,

> Be subtle, various, ornamental, clever,
> And do not listen to those critics ever
> Whose crude provincial gullets crave in books
> Plain cooking made still plainer by plain cooks.

The poet's love for esoteric diction and intricate poetic forms reaches new prominence in this period; and further, one notes Auden's intensified delight in assuming varied personae. As Greenberg has written, "His new role is to display a delight in roles--in contrivance, playfulness, and eccentricity--that seems possible only in someone secure in his sense of self for whom role-playing is no longer a necessity."[23]

One reason, certainly, for Auden's secure sense of identity is his profound satisfaction in his Christian faith. During the "New York" period, he had evolved his thinking on theological matters; in the following years, he seems to be writing from a point of view of serene assurance. His aim is no longer to satisfy himself as to the validity of his theology--he has done that. Instead, as Greenberg continues, "though the results are not fully classifiable, Auden today [1968] is writing out of his Christianity rather than about it."[24]

This serenity can be taken largely to account for the fact that nearly all the poetry in this period is comic. Replogle makes the point that in the early forties, Auden's poetry "was not very serene. Acceptance of men and life was still mixed in with a fairly strong emphasis on the unpleasantness

of human suffering."[25] During the late forties, however, "as the tragic receded from Auden's comic vision, life began to seem both funnier and more lovable, and as the love grew so did the serenity. If the earlier work stressed the absurdity of a loved existence, the later stresses love for an absurd one."[26]

Hence, the three collections published during these years--Nones (1951), The Shield of Achilles (1955), and Homage to Clio (1960)--differ from the poetry of the preceding period in their predominantly secular, rather than religious, concerns, and in their comic vision, which manifests itself in a remarkable playfulness on the part of the poet. One is able, moreover, to distinguish between the three volumes with regard to these concerns.

Justin Replogle remarks of Nones that its "speakers are clear descendants of New Year Letter, and almost all of them range outward from a familiar middle style toward the high comic."[27] The dedicatory poem to Reinhold and Ursula Niebuhr, "We Too Had Known Golden Hours" (CSP, p. 318), establishes the tone which characterizes most of the poems in the volume. Although the speaker has known exquisite emotions and sensations which cry out for expression "in the grand old manner . . . from a resonant heart," he shrinks from using romanticized diction and an earnest tone because,

> . . . pawed-at and gossipped-over
> By the promiscuous crowd,
> Concocted by editors

> Into spells to befuddle the crowd,
> All words like Peace and Love,
> All sane affirmative speech,
> Had been soiled, profaned, debased
> To a horrid mechanical screech.

The only style which the speaker finds still valid is "the wry, the sotto-voce, / Ironic and monochrome." These adjectives particularize the mild, middle style which one finds in evidence throughout the volume.

For example, "In Transit" (CSP, p. 237), which concerns the uneasy nature of man's relationship to his environment, makes use of flowing, anapestic and dactyllic rhythms and of a generally simple and unpretentious level of diction.

> Let out where two fears intersect, a point selected
> Jointly by general staffs and engineers,
> In a wet land, facing rough oceans, never invaded
> By Caesars or a cartesian doubt, I stand,
> Pale, half asleep, inhaling its new fresh air that smells
> So strongly of soil and grass, of toil and gender
> But not for long; a professional friend is at hand
> Who smiling leads us indoors; we follow in file . . . .

The enigmatic use of "fears" in the first line, perhaps to suggest airplane flights; the disarming false parallelism of "Caesars or a cartesian doubt"; the casual rhyming of lines four and seven; the wry and precise observation: all work to produce an effect of relaxed, even playful, ease. "Monochrome" might be too strong a term to describe this passage: "the wry, the sotto-voce" and "ironic" fit it perfectly. Secular concerns are implied in the allusions to the nameless "general staffs and engineers" whose efforts have determined the speaker's debarcation point. The reassuring appearance of

"a professional friend" suggests the personal values which Auden has taken to heart during this period.

Another typical poem is "A Walk After Dark" (CSP, p. 231), which makes the serious philosophical observation that individuals are responsible for their actions ("Somebody chose their pain, / What needn't have happened did"). The attitude of the speaker, however, differs from that of, say, the persona of New Year Letter, which treats a related idea. In the present case, the tone is lightened by comic observations such as the following:

> It's cosier thinking of night
> As more of an Old People's Home
> Than a shed for a faultless machine,
> That the red pre-Cambrian light
> Is gone like Imperial Rome
> Or myself at seventeen.

The adjective, "cosy," applied to a sky full of stars; the figure of "an Old People's Home," in referring to the same; and the false parallelism of "Imperial Rome / Or myself at seventeen" effect a sense of playfulness which would simply be out of place in the Letter. In addition, the remark that "the clockwork spectacle is / Impressive in a slightly boring / Eighteenth-century way," the neat rhyme scheme (abcabc), and the jogging, three-stress lines produce an Augustan effect.

A poem like "In Schrafft's" (CSP, p. 220), on the other hand, demonstrates how the mild conversational style of this period is simplified to achieve an unadorned, emblematic effect. As Fuller remarks, the image of the "somewhat shapeless

figure / Of indeterminate age / In an undistinguished hat," who sits smiling and "stirring her cup" after "having finished the Blue-plate Special" suggests Salinger's fat woman, who is associated with Christ.[28] There is no excess to the poem: the striking image of the woman is established, and then commented upon by the poet.

> Which of the seven heavens
> Was responsible her smile
> Wouldn't be sure but attested
> That, whoever it was, a god
> Worth kneeling-to for a while
> Had tabernacled and rested.

This quiet poem employs an implicitly religious point of view, but leaves it at that. Piety is the basis for a way of perceiving; it is not the topic of discussion.

In contrast to the mild simplicity of "In Schrafft's," "Under Which Lyre: A Reactionary Tract for the Times" (CSP, p. 221) is in a more dressed-up, Popean, mock-heroic mode. Involving the conflict between true art (represented by Hermes) and "useful" art, such as that employed in advertising (represented by Apollo), the poem is dazzling and amusing from beginning to end, and thus provides an ideal showcase for Auden's virtuoso talents. In six-line stanzas, with lines one, two, four and five in iambic tetrameter couplets; and lines three and six rhyming and in dimeter, the poem is full of classical allusion and sharp wit:

> Lone scholars, sniping from the walls
> Of learned periodicals,
> Our facts defend,
> Our intellectual marines,

Landing in little magazines
Capture a trend.

By night our student Underground
At cocktail parties whisper round
From ear to ear;
Fat figures in the public eye
Collapse next morning, ambushed by
Some witty sneer.

In reading the poem, one is certain that Auden thoroughly enjoyed the composing of it: the artful double-entendres, the witty mock-heroic parallels, the challenges posed by the rather intricate form. In addition, the effect of the work is solidly to commend the practitioners of "true" art, rather than those who produce "Useful Knowledge": during this period, Auden is as strong a believer as Cardinal Newman in the concept, "Knowledge Its Own End" (during his "Marxist" period he might have advocated another point of view).

The Shield of Achilles, perhaps Auden's finest single collection of short poems, stylistically follows the lead of Nones, although, as Replogle has shown, the comic poems tend to "move farther away from a mild middle style" and, as a result, "become more daring and exciting."[29] Certainly the poet's sense of playful artifice, his delight in pure craft, is never more pronounced than in the "Bucolics" (CSP, p. 255). Exploring in each poem the moral qualities with which he invests a particular landscape--resulting in a series of paysages moralisés--the poet works within several formal patterns to produce a variety of tonal shades. "Winds" blows along in unrhymed syllabic verse of alternate six and seven

syllable lines. As Spears notes, the poem, dedicated to Alexis Léger (St.-John Perse) "begins as a kind of irreverent commentary on his Vents,"[30] and its flowing, sun-flecked tone contrasts with the solemn, enigmatic tone of Perse's work. "Woods," the next poem, is composed of sturdy six-line rhymed stanzas of regular iambic pentameter; and its elegant, allusive, style suggests the eighteenth century, although mock-heroic, twentieth-century diction and imagery produce the typically "Audenesque" blended effect of whimsical thoughtfulness:

> Old sounds re-educate an ear grown coarse,
> As Pan's green father suddenly raps out
> A burst of undecipherable Morse,
> And cuckoos mock in Welsh, and doves create
> In rustic English over all they do
> To rear their modern family of two.

"Mountains" is in a quirky syllabic pattern of stanzas whose lines contain, respectively, 11/7/11/7/11/13/13/9/5/ 11/5 syllables. Further, lines two and four, and nine and eleven rhyme in pairs. The tone is friendly and confidential, allowing the poet casually to explore his ambiguous attitudes concerning the landscape of the title: he enjoys the beauty and freedom of mountains, but suspects that they produce anti-social behavior.

> And it is curious how often in steep places
> You meet someone short who frowns,
> A type you catch beheading daisies with a stick:
> Small crooks flourish in big towns,
> But perfect monsters--remember Dracula--
> Are bred on crags in castles.

"Lakes" is more conventionally composed in six-line stanzas of unrhymed, alternating iambic hexameter and

pentameter, and its tone, like that of "Woods," is cosily confidential. "Islands" is in ballad stanza, and its tone is wittily satirical. "Plains," in unrhymed eleven-syllable lines, is more sober, expressing the poet's eerie reaction to a landscape where "nothing points." His negative reaction ("I cannot see a plain without a shudder") is personal and obviously sincere, but as in the other poems of the group, it is put forth with grace and wit:

> Romance? Not in this weather. Ovid's charmer
> Who leads the quadrilles in Arcady, boy-lord
> Of hearts who can call their Yes and No their own,
> Would, madcap that he is, soon die of cold or sunstroke.

"Streams," quite simply, is music. In regular unrhymed quatrains, the dactyllic rhythms and open sounds (the poem contains an extraordinarily large number of stressed "a" and "e" sounds) suggest the movement of a dappled brook. In addition the poem involves a scheme of internal rhymes which is dazzling in its intricacy: in each quatrain, as Spears explains, "the first two lines have twelve syllables and masculine endings, the third nine and a feminine ending, the fourth ten; a syllable within line one rimes with a syllable in line three; the final syllable of line two rimes with the penultimate syllable of line four, and the penultimate syllable of line three rimes with a syllable within line four."[31] The result is a poem in tribute to the element which Auden portrays as "pure being." As Mozart's overture to The Marriage of Figaro might be called "absolute music," so this

poem might be called "pure poetry" (not to be confused with *poésie pure*); the rippling sounds and the sun-and-shade images *become* the streams to which the poet pays homage.

The volume's title poem, on the other hand, carries the middle style in the other direction, toward quiet reflection and simple dignity. Involving mock-heroic juxtaposition of a modern, war-desolated landscape with the heroic landscape engraved upon the shield of Achilles in the *Iliad*, the poem's effect is shattering, and the more so because of the restrained, even passive point of view adopted by the speaker.

> Barbed wire enclosed an arbitrary spot
> Where bored officials lounged (one cracked a joke)
> And sentries sweated for the day was hot:
> A crowd of ordinary decent folk
> Watched from without and neither moved nor spoke
> As three pale figures were led forth and bound
> To three posts driven upright in the ground.

The travesty of the Crucifixion involved in the stanza, the outrageousness of the scene, is heightened by the deliberately casual, matter-of-fact tone of the speaker. This technique of achieving tension by means of playing off passionate subject matter with a neutral tone is similar to that which Auden used in "Musée des Beaux Arts," with similarly devastating results. The sense of despondency, of utter, post-war fatigue, is akin to the mood in some of Stravinski's music of the forties, the *Symphony in C*, for example, and in particular to its last movement, which ends with a hollow chorale, played by the bassoons, suggesting gathering darkness, darkness which signals a long and empty night.

About Auden's next collection, Homage to Clio, Replogle has written, "it contains little that is new, and nothing old that had not been done better before."[32] And indeed, this assortment of poems, prose, and clerihews, suggests a bag of odds and ends. One remembers, however, that after the magnificent achievement of the previous volume, there would seem almost inevitably to be some slackening in quality in immediately succeeding work: not every effort can be on such a high level. This however, is not to suggest that the book is without many fine and pleasing poems.

Such poems as "Metalogue to The Magic Flute," "On Installing an American Kitchen in Lower Austria," and "Good-bye to the Mezzogiorno" are unsurpassed in Auden as examples of light, conversational verse. The last of these poems, for example, which constitutes a leave-taking by the poet of his Ischian summer home (in 1957, Auden bought a home in Kirchstetten, Lower Austria, and began spending his springs and summers there), is utterly lucid and personal. The poet discusses the effects of the "sunburnt otherwhere" of the south upon "the pallid children / Of a potato, beer-or-whiskey / Guilt culture" and concludes that "there yawns a gulf / Embraces cannot bridge." Yet he leaves "grateful" and affirms that "though one cannot always / Remember exactly why one has been happy, / There is no forgetting that one was." Nowhere in the poem does the reader sense that the poet is striving to make an effect or to be witty and bright (as one

sometimes feels in reading the early Auden). The discourse seems perfectly natural, the wit unassuming and genuinely delightful. The Auden *persona* seems an old friend whom one expects to be entertaining as well as wise, and one is not disappointed in this poem.

One perhaps misses this sense of marvellous harmony, of "decorum" in an eighteenth-century sense, between speaker and tone, in such efforts as "An Island Cemetery" and "Walks." These poems, with their perfect rhymes and Frostian tones, appear to represent an attempt to write a "simpler" poetry: parables based on nature, told by a simple, Wordsworthian observer. One's conclusion is that Auden is no Wordsworth:

> Returning afterwards, although
> I meet my footsteps toe to toe,
> The road looks altogether new
> Now that is done I meant to do,
>
> But I avoid it when I take
> A walker's walk for walking sake:
> The repetition it involves
> Raises a doubt it never solves.
>
> ("Walks," *Homage to Clio*, p. 63)

The painfully measured meter--de dum de dum de dum de dum--the self-conscious tone of introspection, the studiously simple diction: these are not Auden's *forte*. The noble simplicity evidently striven for simply ends in seeming coy. Auden's poetic voice would appear necessarily to involve a certain "sophistication," in the popular sense of that word--a certain polish, chicness, and air of learning. When he tries to

limit himself too severely in terms of a persona--as he seems to do in these poems--the results ultimately are unsatisfying.

In the volume's interesting prose "Interlude," entitled "Dichtung und Wahrheit: (An Unwritten Poem)," (HC, p. 35), one gains insight into Auden's determination in favor of the middle style. He says that, in evaluating his own poems, he demands, first, that they "be genuine, recognizable, like my handwriting, as having been written, for better or worse, by me." Secondly, he demands that his poetry "be true." In other words, Auden's poetic ideal, as expressed in this context, is that his verse reflect his own personality, and that it be true to experience. Auden was, to all accounts, an eminently urbane and "civilized" individual, leading one to conclude that he realized the proximity of his own personality to that of many of his speakers in his poems.

His demand that poetry be "true" is illuminated by the assertion, a few pages further, that if Hector or Achilles had had to compose their own stories, it would have been inappropriate for them to write either in a "grand" style ("'Genuine heroes do not speak about their deeds in this grand way. These fellows must be play-acting'") or in a "comic" style ("Shall we not then suspect him of false modesty?"). The elimination of these alternatives leaves one with a "middle" range of styles. During this period, as we have observed, Auden makes widespread use of personae in his poems. Therefore, one might conclude, in accordance with

these criteria, that unless the persona is to be used as the object of satire, he will tend to express himself in some sort of middle style, one neither "grand" nor falsely-modest.

Finally, a few observations on Auden's last three collections of verse, About the House (1965), City Without Walls (1969), and Epistle to a Godson (1972).[33] Perhaps the most striking feature of this poetry is its mundane quality: its preoccupation with, its reverence for, the "thereness" of beings and things. As Fuller comments, regarding "Thanksgiving for a Habitat" (About the House, p. 38), "one can see the concern in earlier poems taking a generalized symbolic form (in, say, 'Bucolics'), but for the first time the daily circumstances of the indiyidual's life are seen not only to be symbolic of that individual's existential nature, but to have meaning in themselves."[34] For example, in the poem, "Hammerfest" (AH, p. 47), the speaker discusses an unspoiled Norwegian town, north of the Arctic Circle. This "northernmost township on earth," produces goods worth of veneration: "the best deep-frozen fish sticks you can buy," and "the beer of the world's most northern brewery." Although "louts . . . German this time-- / Had left their usual mark" during the Occupation, the land remains pristine: "Here was a place we had yet to disappoint." The landscape is impervious to "history"; its rocks reflect nothing of "the glum Reptilian Empire / Or the epic journey of the Horse, 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." In a century, it might "realize / How we behave to regions or to beings / Who have anything we're after"; for the present, it is perfect en soi--it is that which it is--"My intrusion had not profaned it: / If innocence is holy, it was holy."

Related to this regard for particular essence in beings and things, is the poet's growing emphasis upon the ritual nature of everyday life. One senses that, as the poet has grown older, his appreciation of the pleasures of civilized living has increased--especially when taken against the backdrop of a world growing ever more intolerant of the pleasures which Auden tenderly associates with his middle-class Georgian upbringing ("The class whose vices / he pilloried was his own, / Now extinct, except / for lone survivors like him / who remember its virtues"--"Marginalia," City Without Walls, p. 67). Against the social flux, the poet balances the pleasant rituals of an ordered day: "a dinner party, / however select, / is a worldly rite that nicknames or endearments / or family / diminutives would profane" ("Tonight at Seven-Thirty," AH, p. 30). Those whom the poet would ask to his table are those "who enjoy the cloop of corks, appreciate / depatical fare, yet can see in swallowing / a sign act of reverence, / in speech a work of re-presenting / the true olamic silence."

It is obvious that during this period, Auden is strongly anchored in Christianity. As during the Italian years, he writes out of his Christianity, rather than about it,[35] and if possible, there is an even less dogmatic air than there was formerly. As Greenberg notes, "his playfulness is the result of an outlook settled in essentials and free to arm itself with whimsy in their defense."[36] Hence, no Horae Canonicae is produced during these years; the major sequence is "Thanksgiving for a Habitat," in which the poet candidly talks about himself, in which he fully accepts his familiar self, whose identity is secure.[37] The keynotes are serenity and inner resourcefulness; he writes in celebration of life, without claiming that it is perfect, or even satisfactory. Yet, it is life, and thus it is good.

As in the later Yeats, there is a certain roughness, knottiness, harshness to much of the verse of this period, in contrast to the sheen and suppleness of much of the poetry from the previous period. This may, in part, be accounted for by the poet's ubiquitous use of syllabics, with their potentially rough, "sprung" effect, rather than of stanzaic forms. Also involved is the new emphasis upon simplicity--"thereness"--which calls for a less varnished tone than the wry, sophisticated themes of previous poems.

In addition to roughness of tone, esoteric diction--technological, archaic, obscure, coined words--also characterizes this period. The effect of this diction is,

on the one hand, to increase the density of the verse, to give it a learned quality; on the other hand, however, it emphasizes its roughness by the very fact of its unpoetic nature. For example, in the first stanzas of "Ode to Terminus" (CWW, p. 97) one finds "telescopes and cyclotrons," "the elegant / euphemisms of algebra," "the vulgar anthropomorphic / tongue," "galaxies" which "bolt like panicking mobs," and "mesons" which "riot like fish in a feeding-frenzy." The amalgamation of scientific, scholarly, and polite diction creates a satirical, anti-poetic effect which harmonizes admirably with the syllabic patterns of the poem (11/11/9/10); the effect is disarming, quirky, anti-poetic--"rough," rather than smooth.

The cragginess of much of the verse in these collections (its point of view being that of a wise, cantankerous and occasionally outrageous old man) suggests the later Yeats; its lucid clarity, the later Stevens; its knotty internal stress and strain, Hopkins.

"The Cave of Making" (AH, p. 8) is an example of the best in the later Auden. One is struck immediately by a strong sense of the "thereness" of objects, the effect in this case deriving from the poet's establishing an archetype for his subject (which is his study) and then describing it in terms of strong, particular details:

> For this and for all enclosures like it the archetype
> is Weland's Stithy, an antre
> more private than a bedroom even, for neither lovers nor
> maids are welcome, but without a

bedroom's secrets: from the Olivetti portable,
the dictionaries (the very
best money can buy), the heaps of paper, it is evident
what must go on.

One is captivated by the intimate tone: the lines spin on so naturally, so effortlessly, that the speaker seems naturally to be thinking aloud in verse.

I wish, Louis, I could have shown it you
while you were still in public,
and the house and garden: lover of women and Donegal,
from your perspective you'd notice
sights I overlook, and in turn take a scholar's interest
in facts I could tell you.

The poem--an elegy, written in the form of an epistle, and referred to off-handedly by the poet as an "egocentric monologue"--is personally directed toward Auden's long-time friend, Louis MacNeice, who died in 1964. Yet, as Bahlke observes, "at the same time, the personal voice . . . moves toward a level of general observation, which gives significance to the occasional basis of the poem."[38]

Part of this significance is implied in the speaker's rich sense of time and history. He speaks as one who has experienced time, and who is the wiser for his experience.

Born so, 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:
both watched with mixed feelings
the sack of Silence, the churches empty, the cavalry
go, the Cosmic Model
become German, and any faith if we had it, in immanent
virtue died. 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.

These final lines also suggest the historical scope introduced into the poem by way of allusions ranging from Weland and the Romans to Carolingian Bavaria to Goethe and "the Francophile / gaggle of pure songsters" (i.e., the Symbolistes) to "Stalin and Hitler." In addition, the lines also illustrate the poet's ability to handle rather dense philosophical ideas in a graceful and nimble manner. The result of this ability is a certain depth which pervades the poem, yet which seems completely natural and unstrained. Again, one's impression is that of a wise man, a sage, talking.

As always in Auden, there is a playful mixing of levels of diction: on "dowly days when the self is a nonentity / dumped on a mound of nothing," we need to be reminded of our dead friends to counter-balance "our self-enchantment when lip-smacking / imps of mawk and hooey / write with us what they will." There are the seemingly effortless aphorisms:

> We're not musicians: to stink of Poetry
> is unbecoming, and never
> to be dull shows a lack of taste.

and

> Even a limerick
> ought to be something a man of
> honor, awaiting death from cancer or a firing squad,
> could read without contempt . . . .

And there is Auden's characteristic, hard-headed clarity, his utter truthfulness, a certain good-humored toughness in his point of view which distinguishes his verse from that of poets like James Merrill, who often resemble him superficially. For example, he refers to MacNeice,

with whom I
Once collaborated, once at a weird Symposium
exchanged winks as a juggins
went on about Alienation.

Auden refuses to repeat invalid platitudes simply because they are acceptable or fashionable: of the loyal band of poetry readers he observes

our handful
of clients at least can rune. (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.)

The statement concerning starving people's lack of interest in poetry is not insensitive; it is factual, and it expresses a truth with which Auden is concerned at that point. However, a more sentimental, or less courageous, writer might simply have avoided this issue.

In City Without Walls, one is impressed by an increasing spareness in the verse. Most of the poems are written in short lines, and there is a lot of haiku. In addition to the title poem, which is written in alliterative meter, the most successful poem in the collection is perhaps "Ode to Terminus," discussed above. With its prosy, syllabic meter and its esoteric mixture of diction it expresses a comic and very wisely bounded, modest view of life. As was the case with Nones and its predecessor, The Shield of Achilles, this collection suffers somewhat in comparison with the impressive achievement of About the House.

In Epistle to a Godson, the poet goes back over much familiar ground. For example, the title poem is much like "Many Happy Returns" (published in the Collected Poetry, 1945): both are epistles to young boys, written in similar tones of wisdom and wit, and both end with a similar sequence of three maxims:

> . . . it's time I brought these
> Verses to a close:
> Happy Birthday, Johnny,
> Live beyond your income,
> Travel for enjoyment,
> Follow your own nose.
> (CSP, p. 211)

> I'll close this letter with some worldly maxims:
> Be glad your being is unnecessary,
> then turn your toes out as you walk, dear
> and remember who you are, a Spender.
> (Epistle, p. 6)

Nevertheless, one is impressed by the greater depth in the advice of the later poem, and by the extra warmth gained by the conversational endearment.

"The Garrison" (Epistle, p. 23), which opens at "martini-time" in the living-room which Auden shared with Chester Kallman, and proceeds as a reflection upon their roles in society ("Whoever rules, our duty to the City / is loyal opposition"), naturally calls to mind "The Common Life" (AH, p. 36), which is a meditation upon the room and the common life which the two friends share. The mood of the earlier poem, however, is more expansive, more spontaneously relaxed. In the present poem, one senses that the material of the earlier

work has been chipped away at, as a sculptor chips at a piece of marble to reveal its essential character. What emerges is a rather spare, but brilliant little poem. Only a few particular touches remain: the intimate first stanza, and a direct address, later on, "We, Chester." The remainder of the poem consists of generalized reflection upon their peculiar situation.

> 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.

Many of the poems are occasional, including the title poem; a piece in memory of a physician, "The Art of Healing"; "Lines to Dr. Walter Birk on his Retiring from General Practice"; "Moon Landing"; "United Nations Hymn," and others. There is a poem on insects ("The Aliens"), a "Short Ode to the Cuckoo," a poem on "Talking to Dogs," and one on "Talking to Mice." One suggests that these animal verses are more successful than the Frostian efforts in Homage to Clio: one does not receive the impression of a very worldly man making a great effort to appear simple. Instead, Auden uses cleverly mixed levels of diction, as well as his characteristically witty tone of voice. The effect of simplicity, as in the "Short Ode to the Cuckoo" (Epistle, p. 56), seems genuinely the result of a weathered and wisely-simplified temperament, rather than largely the result of art; it comes from within the poet, rather than being impressed by him upon his poem.

> Science, Aesthetics, Ethics, may huff and puff but they
> cannot extinguish your magic: you marvel
> the commuter as you wondered the savage.
> Hence, in my diary,
>
> where I normally enter nothing but social
> engagements and, lately, the death of friends, I
> scribble year after year when I first hear you,
> of a holy moment.

As the last few lines of the poem suggest, the poet is preoccupied in this volume with old age. "Doggerel by a Senior Citizen" treats that theme, as does "Old People's Home" (p. 52), whose quiet, conversational facade does not conceal its essential concern with the pathos and outrage of old age. Of the occupants of an "old people's home," the poet observes,

> their generation
> is the first to fade like this, not at home but assigned
> to a numbered ward, stowed out of conscience
> as unpopular luggage . . . .

Auden, from the beginning able to express the peculiar despair of his age, in these final poems on aging and death, voices the apprehensions experienced by those of vital mind, yet burdened, as Yeats put it, with "decrepit age that has been tied to me / As to a dog's tail." The last poem of the collection is entitled "Talking to Myself." Like the final poem in About the House, "Whitsunday in Kirchstetten," it opens with a casual evocation of the Austrian landscape, "Spring this year in Austria started off benign." The poet's attention, however, soon shifts to the subject of his own body, his "mortal manor," which, though seldom a

"bother," was for "many years . . . a martyr to horn-colic." Speaking quite freely as Wystan Hugh Auden, the poet acknowledges having abused his eyes with too many books and his lungs with cigarettes. He is thankful, however, that his body has given him good service. Old age approaches. In the final stanza the poet makes a petition couched in wry tones, the polite diction being offset in the final line by a salty phrase which gives an ironic edge to the passage, and emphasizes its implicit dread.

> 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.

Auden, one is glad, got his wish.

FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER V

[1]Unless otherwise noted, page references will be to the accessible Collected Shorter Poems: 1927-1957 (New York: Random House, 1964).

[2]Spears makes this point, pp. 35-37. Monroe K. Spears, The Poetry of W. H. Auden: The Disenchanted Island (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1963).

[3]Ibid., p. 150. The argument of this section of the paper is indebted to Spears.

[4]John Fuller, A Reader's Guide to W. H. Auden (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1970), p. 256.

[5]Justin Replogle, Auden's Poetry (Seattle: Univ. of Washington Press, 1969), p. 122.

[6]Ibid., p. 118.

[7]The terms of this description are from Herbert Greenberg, Quest for the Necessary: W. H. Auden and the Dilemma of Divided Consciousness (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1968), p. 74.

[8]Seen in the context of the Spanish Civil War, the poem naturally suggests that conflict--"Now matters are solved with gas and with bomb"--and more particularly, the fascist mentality (Fuller, p. 116).

[9]Ibid., p. 116.

[10]Spears, p. 151.

[11]This point made in Fuller, p. 113.

[12]See Chapter Three, note 57, above.

[13]This point made in John Press, A Map of Modern English Verse (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1969), pp. 187-88.

[14]See the "Introduction" to Monroe Spears, ed., Auden: A Collection of Critical Essays (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1964) for a lucid discussion of the mixed critical reaction which Auden's post-thirties poetry has received.

[15]Press, p. 188.

[16]Spears notes that, "there are, in all, some 24 pieces in the Collected Poetry that had not previously appeared in book form, though more than half of these had been published in periodicals or anthologies. Most of them, of course, date from 1940-44" (The Poetry of W. H. Auden, p. 199).

[17]Ibid., p. 198.

[18]Ibid., p. 197.

[19]Fuller, p. 238.

[20]This phrase from Greenberg, p. 177.

[21]Stephen Spender, "Seriously Unserious," Poetry (Chicago), LXXVIII (September, 1951), 353.

[22]Ibid., p. 352.

[23]Greenberg, p. 172.

[24]Ibid., p. 172.

[25]Replogle, p. 221.

[26]Ibid., p. 222.

[27]Ibid., p. 162.

[28]Fuller, p. 184.

[29]Replogle, p. 162.

[30]Spears, p. 312. Many of the observations which I include concerning the "Bucolics" are drawn from Spears' discussion of the same, pp. 312-15.

[31]Ibid., p. 315.

[32]Replogle, p. 164.

[33]W. H. Auden, About the House (New York: Random House, 1965); City Without Walls and Other Poems (New York: Random House, 1969); Epistle to a Godson and Other Poems (New York: Random House, 1972). Subsequent references to poems in these vols. will be from these editions.

[34]Fuller, pp. 241-42.

[35]Greenberg, p. 172.

[36]Ibid., p. 173.

[37]This point made in George W. Bahlke, The Later Auden: From 'New Year Letter' to 'About the House' (New York: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1970), p. 178.

[38]Ibid., p. 176.

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