MODES OF SOCIO-POLITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS
IN THE POETRY OF W.H. AUDEN

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Abstract

This is a study of the socio-political consciousness in the poetry of Wystan Hugh Auden, one of the most versatile and prolific poets of the twentieth century. He is not only a poet, but also a playwright, opera librettist, critic and a thinker. He has been described contrastingly as an atheistic Freudian Communist and as a Christian existentialist liberal. He is also referred to as a scientist, a musician, a ritualist and a Scandinavian. However, he is also a moralist, concerned with the problem of human guilt. By the end of the 1930s, he was an established and influential poet. Since none of his contemporaries equalled him in writing poetry on a wide range of subjects with varied and impressive techniques, he was befittingly acknowledged as the leading spokesman of a group of young poets such as C. Day Lewis, MacNeice and Stephen Spender. Subsequently, all these poets came to be known as the “Auden group”. He was viewed as a worthy successor of W.B. Yeats and T.S. Eliot.

Auden was influenced by a number of poets such as T.S. Eliot, Thomas Hardy, William Blake, W. B. Yeats, and Laura Riding. William Wordsworth too was an early influence but was discarded as Auden resolved to write in the manner of T. S. Eliot. A significant role in Auden’s poetic growth has been played by his father, whose rich library contributed greatly to Auden’s knowledge since it was full of books on various disciplines ranging from medicine to classical and folk literature to psychology. From the very beginning the impulse behind a lot of Auden’s poetry has been the plight of common man. Since Auden was aware of
the psychological theories of Sigmund Freud and Homer Lane, he felt that therein lay the solution to man’s problems.

Auden’s early poetry is concerned with the analysis and exploration of man’s anxiety, guilt, and isolation by largely using the psychological theories of Sigmund Freud and Homer Lane. A number of poems written under the influence of Lane’s theories focus on the unconscious conflict and the repression of natural instincts in man, leading to disastrous consequences. That trifling with the “id”, the “ego” and the “superego”, according to Freud, can also lead to psychic ailments is also made use of by Auden. Anxiety, death wish, repression, guilt, suppression of the unconscious, conflict between the ego and the super-ego and the resultant psychic maladies and diseases in individuals, become an integral part of a number of poems written by Auden during the early phase of his poetic career. His poetry at this stage advances the argument that neurosis is the result of the suppression of natural instincts. According to Auden, in keeping with the various psychological theories to which he was exposed, man should lead a life which is in keeping with his instincts since instinctual behaviour is good. Psychological aspects are such an integral part of his poetry that the borders or frontiers that figure in his poems often have psychological implications. These borders or frontiers are the repressors of natural human instincts.

Auden was greatly disturbed by the social and economic problems that surrounded common man. The period of the nineteen thirties was one of severe economic depression in England as well as America. There was widespread unemployment and poverty. These were the after effects of the First World War
in many ways. Common man was being suppressed and oppressed. This led to
dejecion and frustration. So, a lot of poetry written during the early phase of
Auden’s career emphasises the idea of change or the desirability of establishing
a new order which is possible only if man alters himself as well as society.
Analysing the condition of modern man living in the Capitalist society Auden’s
poetry proposes that a change at the social as well as individual level, is the
need of the hour.

Auden’s poetry now, tends to fuse social and psychological elements in
order to reform man and society. He realizes that the psychological theories of
Sigmund Freud and Homer Lane, on which he had relied to a great extent earlier,
are insufficient and cannot alone help man solve his problems. So, along with
man’s psychological problems, his attention gets focussed on the problems
arising out of social complications and class divisions in the capitalist society of
his time. The poetry that Auden wrote during the English period concentrates to
quite an extent on the political, social and economic conditions of the 1930s. The
negative impact of Capitalism on common man becomes a major issue that is
explored in his poetry. It was a period of great political unrest and the public
events were so strong that man’s private life could not remain unaffected.
Auden’s poetry also highlights how public events encroached upon man’s private
life. Often his poetry advocates a change through a violent revolution initiated by
the proletariat in order to overthrow Capitalism and replace it with Communism.
The proletariat may be represented by a garage boy, a voyager, a wanderer or a
man of action who can initiate and execute a violent revolution in order to bring
about that change which is needed to end the tyranny of Capitalism. Auden at this stage seems to believe in the Marxist theory of the inevitable decay of Capitalist society. A number of poems that Auden wrote also predict the destruction of the Capitalist system. Alienation and loneliness caused by the tyranny of Capitalism is a significant theme in a number of poems written in the nineteen thirties. This sense of alienation and loneliness also leads to tension, frustration and loss of individuality. Auden condemns Fascism, Imperialism and Capitalism that affect the lives of individuals in an adverse manner and lead to the exploitation of the common man and even war. The adverse impact of the Sino-Japanese war on soldiers as well as common man is also focussed upon by Auden in his poetry. A number of poems written by Auden highlight the helpless condition of man and explore how politicians have befooled common man. This tendency of committing evil deeds by politicians because of their lust for power and material wealth is also highlighted by Auden. Thus, Auden’s poetry is the survey of human history in a way. It also focuses on the struggle between good and evil. Finally, Auden now realizes that neither Freudianism nor Marxism can be instrumental in alleviating man’s suffering since suffering is an essential part of life, and it is futile to attempt to change the state of things. He returns to Christianity in his search for a system which would mitigate man’s plight.

A considerable amount of the poetry that Auden wrote after his migration to the U.S.A. is dominated by religious belief. The Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard’s (1813-55) Christian existentialism becomes the foundation of a lot of poetry he wrote during the later phase of his career. He continues to focus on
the failings of man and society but from a religious point of view. Quest for religious values is an important theme of this period. So, modern man is portrayed as an existentialist hero who is out on religious quest in the world that is spiritually sick. Auden’s poetry also highlights the three categories of human experience: the Aesthetic, the Ethical, and the Religious. Auden seems to return to Christianity in his search for a system which would replace the failed systems of the world. Auden’s poetry also exhibits his belief in Kierkegaard’s Christian existentialism according to which man can get rid of his despair by following Christianity. Auden discovers that man is a fallen creature with a natural bias to do evil. Christian themes of temptation, guilt and salvation are central concerns of a number of poems written during this period. Auden explores man’s relationship to God at both levels, the physical or material and the spiritual level as well. Auden advocates selfless love that is universal in nature which is a central tenet of Christianity.

Thus psychology, politics and religion emerge as the three major strands in Auden’s poetry, the three modes through which Auden’s socio-political consciousness is revealed.
Dedicated to

My Late Mother Ms. Anwara
Certificate

This is to certify that Mr. Abdul Mabood has worked on the topic “Modes of Socio-Political Consciousness in the Poetry of W. H. Auden” for his Ph.D. under my supervision.

To the best of my knowledge, it is his original work, worthy of submission for the award of Ph.D. degree.

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(Abdul Mabood)
Contents

1. Introduction: The making of the Poet 1-33

2. Psychology in Auden’s Poetry 34-64

3. Politics in Auden’s Poetry 65-97

4. Religion in Auden’s Poetry 98-128

5. Conclusion 129-138

Bibliography 139-144
Wystan Hugh Auden (1907-73) is one of the most versatile and prolific poets of the twentieth century. From a very early age he harboured an ambition of becoming a mining engineer, but later turned to exploring the problems faced by human beings through his literary work. He himself admitted that “I had no intention of studying English literature academically, but I wanted to read it, and the English school would give me official licence to do so.” W.H. Auden is not only a poet, but also a playwright, opera librettist, critic and a thinker. He has been described contrastingly as “an atheistic Freudian Communist, as a Christian existentialist liberal, metaphysical and materialistic, compassionate and clinical, orderly and untidy, generous and mean, brilliant and foolish, unhappy and optimistic, innovatory and traditionalist, joky and serious.” Christopher Isherwood introduces him as “a scientist, a musician, a ritualist and a Scandinavian.” He called himself a “Pink Liberal.” However, “he is a moralist, concerned with the problem of human guilt. Of that his own guilt, the guilt of the comfortably reared Englishman, is only one form.” By 1939, when he emigrated to the USA and became an American citizen, he was an established and influential poet. Since none of his contemporaries equalled him in writing poetry on a wide range of subjects with varied and impressive techniques, he was befittingly acknowledged as the leading spokesman of a group of young poets such as C. Day Lewis, MacNeice and Stephen Spender. Subsequently, all these poets came to be
known as the “Auden group”. He was viewed as a worthy successor of W.B. Yeats and T.S. Eliot. Eliot himself remarked, “This fellow is about the best poet that I have ever discovered in several years.”

Auden’s poetry concerns itself with the social and political pressures of his time. His long poetic career shows his great interest in man and his problems. He viewed poetry as “memorable speech” which “must move our emotions, or excite our intellect.” The anxiety and trauma of the common man of his age thus become the cause for the movement of his emotion or the excitement of his intellect. So the impulse behind Auden’s poetry is the plight of common man. Both his emotional and intellectual faculties were stimulated by the social and political conditions of the world, especially Europe and England. Auden acquired the motivation for reading poetry and later writing poetry from intellectuals and scholars. As mentioned earlier, Auden was not seriously interested in poetry in the beginning, but gradually as his interest and commitment increased, it acquired the status of “a game of knowledge” which became “too strong to be abandoned at a whim.”

During his school days, Auden’s zeal and enthusiasm for poetry was strengthened by listening spell-bound to his master Tock Tytler’s recitation of a few verses. Auden himself acknowledged that “from listening to him reading the Bible or Shakespeare, I learnt more about poetry and the humanities than from any course of University lectures.” From this time onwards, as he grew up, his thirst for reading poetry on varied subjects became a source of great pleasure for him. Initially, he admired William Wordsworth greatly and wrote poems based on
his model. However, after coming in contact with the poetry of T.S. Eliot, he discarded Wordsworth’s style of writing poetry and adopted Eliot as a model. Auden expressed his admiration for Eliot’s poetry in a conversation with Neville Coghill his tutor:

Auden: ‘I have torn up all my poems’.
Coghill: ‘Indeed! Why?’
Auden: ‘Because they were no good. Based on Wordsworth. No good nowadays.’
Coghill: ‘Oh . . . ?’
Auden: ‘You ought to read Eliot. I’ve been reading Eliot. I now see the way I want to write’.12

With the passage of time, he delved deep into subjects related to human life and its problems, emerging as one of the most prolific and versatile poets England has ever produced. Throughout his career as a poet, man remains his central concern, though the natural landscape is also often focused upon. About the subject and the setting for art, he once declared, “To me Art’s subject is the human clay. And landscape but a background to a torso.”13 Auden has shown remarkable ability to write poetry on subject-matters like “lead mines and their machinery, pumping engines, and the long slow curving of the Fells.”14 His liberal and socialist outlook led him to empathize with the mental and physical agony and anxiety of common people like the strikers of the 1926 General Strike or the victims of the Spanish Civil War etc. His friend David Ayrest, the then chairman of the Oxford University Labour Club, also played a significant role in drawing his attention to the exploited and downtrodden. Auden’s in-depth study of Philosophy, Politics and Economics at Oxford helped to sharpen his understanding of the contemporary world and also provided him with a different
subject matter for poetry. It was Oxford where on asking about his plan in later life, Auden said to Neville Coghill his tutor, “I am going to be a poet”.15

In the beginning, Auden’s father played a significant role in shaping and sharpening his creative faculty. His father, Dr. George Auden, was a voracious reader and also possessed a rich library which Auden could access at will. About his father’s library Auden himself has stated:

In my father’s library scientific books stood side by side with works of poetry and fiction, and it never occurred to me to think of one as being less or more “humane” than the other. . . My father’s library not only taught me to read, but dictated my choice of reading. It was not the library of a literary man nor of a narrow specialist, but was a heterogeneous collection of books on many subjects, and included very few novels. In consequence my reading has always been wide and casual rather than scholarly, and in the main non-literary.16

Auden’s father’s library boasted of books from varied fields such as medicine, literature, Anglo-Saxon and Norse antiquities. Since books from different fields were within his reach, Auden had the opportunity to read them. His vast reading enhanced the range of his poetry. Thus, his father’s library played a significant role in making him the prominent poet that he becomes. The stories and legends that he heard from his father also contributed immensely to his knowledge. Highlighting this aspect, Humphrey Carpenter states:
From his father he acquired an interest in legends and stories, and in ideas. Before Wystan could read, Dr Auden, who had a sound knowledge of classical literature, entertained him with tales of the Trojan War and of quarrels among the gods of Olympus. He also told Wystan about other mythological figures – Thor, Loki, and the rest of the deities of Icelandic legends.\textsuperscript{17}

Thus, his knowledge about classical literature, legends, fairy tales and stories of gods and goddesses acquired from his father at an early stage, served as a catalyst in the exploration of his own age later in his poems and plays often using myths, contrasting the past with the present. His father’s library also equipped him with the sagas, fairy stories, detective novels, and psychology. All these provided the raw material for his artistic creations. Thus, it can be said that the knowledge he acquired as a child enhanced his poetic imagination to a great extent. Besides, as pointed out by Joseph Warren Beach, Auden always kept abreast of knowledge:

He has been very much aware of the main contemporary currents of thought in political theory, science and psychology, the fine arts and literature, philosophy and religion. . . He knows as much of Darwinism as can be learned from Samuel Butler, Bernard Shaw, and Gerald Heard; as much as can be learned from the Communist Manifesto; as much of psychology as can be learned from Grodedeck, John Layard, and Jung’s integration of the Personality. . . No poet of our time has covered more
ground, or ground more favourable to the growth of
speculations suited to the felt needs of the time.\textsuperscript{18}

The environment in which Auden was brought up endowed him with an
imaginative insight into various disciplines ranging from medicine, to classical
and folk literature to psychology. His fascination for psychology was further
increased by his meeting in Berlin with John Layard who introduced him to the
psychological doctrines of Homer Lane. Lane believed that:

Human nature is innately good; the unconscious processes
are in no way immoral (this has been called ‘the Doctrine of
Original Virtue). Lane argued from this that complete
freedom of behavior – full self-expression – must lead
inevitably to goodness, anything unethical quickly being
eliminated after initial mistakes. A failure to permit this full
self-expression, together with the suppression of desires,
especially in childhood, will lead to neurosis.\textsuperscript{19}

At a stage of his poetic career, armed with theories of Freud and Homer
Lane he tries to analyze the illness of man in the context of psychology. His
poetry assimilates Lane’s idea that “unconscious conflict was the cause of all
physical ills.”\textsuperscript{20} The most important factor that determines human personality and
controls man’s mental state is what Freud has termed “Id”. The id, “primitive and
unrefined, is the source of instinctual drive, of emotion and tension.”\textsuperscript{21} Apart from
“the Id”, “the ego” and “the super-ego”, according to Freud, are the constituent
elements of human personality. “The ego is the portion of the personality which
enforces repression and inhibition of instinct, whereas the super-ego consists of the portion of ego that represses the natural instinct based on moral grounds. A lot of Auden's poetry proposes that if man trifles with these drives he becomes a victim of psychic illness. As a consequence, personal relationships are affected. All these can lead to social disorder and anarchy since inter-individual relationships are dependent on individual mental states and vice-versa. In his poetry Auden explores the psychic and social ailments of man and also their possible causes. The diagnosis of such sickness and exploration of their causes are among the dominant themes of his early poetry.

The books of D. H. Lawrence especially *Fantasia of the Unconscious* further concretized Auden's concepts. So, on the basis of his exposure to various theories drawn from the field of psychology, Auden explores man's mental sickness which he believes is the root cause of all social problems. Thus, Auden was also indebted for his psychological ideas to Lawrence's concept of the relationship between body and mind, and how they are inextricably interwoven to control the individual self. Auden was convinced of the fact that if the body and mind lose coordination, man loses stability, mental as well as physical, and becomes psychically and physically ill.

But Auden gradually realizes that psychology alone cannot help to solve all the problems faced by man. He believes that throughout his life, man has to encounter two worlds: one is the inner world and the other the outer one. When man suffers within his self (i.e. inner problem) from frustration, anxiety and tension leading to neurosis, he fails to carry on his responsibility towards society.
he is living in. He finds that some of the solutions offered by Marxism can be effectively used to tackle this social disorder. For Auden now both Marx and Freud are equally important and one is incomplete without the other. So, in the words of Rod Mengham, “Auden was strongly sympathetic towards the idea of subordinating Freud to Marx, but he was no member of the party, and was capable of moments of pessimism and misgivings over the value of subordinating the individual to the collective.”

Auden believes that both the individual as well as the society in which he lives should be healthy. If society is in a state of disarray, man suffers mentally and physically leading to all kinds of psychic problems or ailments. The belief that such disease arise out of social complications, constitutes an important theme in Auden’s poetry.

From the study of Marxism Auden learnt that human society can be divided into two hostile classes – the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, with great economic disparity and social inequality between them. Auden perhaps believes that the class-system and the class-struggle in capitalist society is the result of the evils of endless greed of man. About this class-system in the capitalist world, Auden has said:

The industrial revolution broke up the agricultural communities, with their local conservative cultures, and divided the growing population into two classes: those whether employers or employees who worked and had little leisure, and a small class of shareholders who did no work, had leisure but no responsibilities or roots, and were therefore preoccupied with themselves.
Thus, Auden has minutely observed the two classes of people and the existing complicated relationship between these two, that is to say, the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, and how this complication was intensified as the former tried to impose its dominance over the latter by appropriating wealth, political advantage and high social status, and how the dominant exploited the subordinate by making the so-called legitimate ideology that embodied their selfish material interest. The advancement of science and technology led to the industrial revolution but it accelerated the emergence of owner and labour classes. Often small factory owners were reduced to simple labourers because of their failure to purchase modern advanced machinery required for manufacturing due to its unaffordable high price. Though the industrial revolution made the process of work faster and easier, it became a curse in another sense, as it made people competitive which is the root cause of tension and frustration. Thus, the industrial revolution has brought to man an anxiety in the disguise of comfort and luxury, as the use of high-tech machines in the manufacturing industry leads to mass unemployment, with machines replacing a huge mass of human workers. As a result, wealth started accumulating in a few hands, and their desire to gain more and more led them to suppress and exploit their fellow-men to meet an endless greed. Consequently, both the exploiters and the exploited are tormented by the pangs of anxiety in their respective worlds. This economic disparity and social inequality which produces class-antagonism, exploitation, suppression and hypocrisy attract Auden's attention along with the psychological ailments of man. That Auden sought the removal of this economic disparity and
social inequality with the help of Marxist Communism, finds expression in the poetry of his Marxist phase.

Auden conforms to the Marxist idea that man is a social animal. About this, Auden himself has opined: "Man has always been a social animal living in communities. . . The individual is the product of social life; without it, he could be no more than a bundle of unconditioned reflexes." At the same time, this idea makes Auden accept the Marxist theory of alienation according to which man is an alienated being in a capitalist society.

Auden believed that "a society consists of a certain number of individuals living in a particular way, in a particular place, at a particular time; nothing else." The society advocated by Communism is free from exploitation, inequality, injustice and oppression, Auden realized. Moreover, Auden strongly decries the so-called democratic government that works in favour of the bourgeoisie ignoring the proletariat, the major section of society. He accepts Marx's "saying that sovereignty or government is not the result of a contract made by society as a whole, but has always been assumed by those people in society who owned the instruments of production." He understands that "no society is absolutely good; but some are better than the others," and that "man is good and corrupted by society; therefore all social forms are bad. If every individual will were allowed to operate freely, there would emerge a general social will." All these ideas lie at the root of Auden's poetry written during his Marxist phase.
Auden’s poetic growth was further influenced by his early reading of Thomas Hardy about whom he said, “My first Master was Thomas Hardy, and I think I was very lucky in my choice. He was a good poet, perhaps a great one, but not too good.” The poetry of Hardy that lays greater stress on truth than on beauty, as it explores the realities of life, has been instrumental in giving a similar thrust to Auden’s poetry. It is Hardy who seems to have, to a certain extent at least, taught Auden to explore the misery and grief of common man, especially the poor and destitute. It is Hardy’s poems such as ‘To an Unborn Pauper Child,’ which seem to have impacted Auden’s poems such as ‘The Watershed,’ ‘The Witnesses’ etc.

Furthermore, Auden’s reading of T. S. Eliot, especially his long poem ‘The Wasteland’ played a great role in determining his concept of poetry. Humphrey Carpenter points out that Auden “adopted not just Eliot’s style but his whole attitude to poetry.” Auden himself said that “if it is a natural preference to inhabit a room with casements opening upon Fairyland, one at least of them should open upon the Waste Land.” Thus, Eliot’s poetry seems to have been a window through which Auden could have a glimpse at the state of hollowness, despair and disintegration existing in modern society. Eliot’s poetry presents the condition of man’s alienated or rootless existence in the modern waste land. In ‘The Wasteland,’ the line “Bin gar keine Russin, stamm’ aus Litauen, etch deutsch” is a good example of the alienated and rootless existence of man in modern society. The same rootless existence or alienation of man is also highlighted by Auden in his poetry. Throwing light on the lonely and alienated life
of man, Auden mentions in his longer poem ‘New Year Letter,’ “Aloneness is man’s real condition”. Man’s sense of alienation in living in big cities also finds expression in some of his poems like ‘1929’ and ‘The Capital.’

Eliot’s art of employing mythical technique to concretize his idea about the deplorable condition of modern man has also had a great impact on Auden’s poetry. Like Eliot, in order encompass a wide range of subject matter concerning human affairs, Auden has employed myths in his poetry, by contrasting the present with the past. For example, like Eliot, Auden has in the poem ‘The Shield of Achilles’ presented contrastingly the Greek mythical character. Achilles’ shield gives us a clear picture of past history, which contrasts with the modern shield that represents the modern age. In another poem, ‘Musee des Beaux Arts,’ Auden has presented the condition of the Greek mythic character “Icarus” to show a similar plight of the modern man.

In his use of symbols and images as well, Auden seems to have been inspired by Eliot. Poetry enriched with symbols is occasionally accused of being obscure, and hence, is difficult to understand and interpret. Often both Eliot’s and Auden’s poetry is difficult to interpret due to the use of symbols. Several symbols are common in their poetry. For example, “water,” used in ‘The Wasteland,’ is the symbol of cleansing and purifying the souls of sinners. For Auden, in ‘Paysage Moralise,’ “water” represents those creations of man which satisfy his sense of purpose, particularly art.\textsuperscript{33} Again, in ‘The Wasteland’, Eliot has used the image of “Unreal city” that refers to London and symbolizes alienation, loneliness, pain and misery of the common people. Similarly, the title of another poem ‘The
Capital' is employed by Auden to symbolize the condition of urban life like that of London. Thus, T. S. Eliot's poetry influenced Auden in a major way.

Besides Eliot, Wilfred Owen played an important role in extending the range of Auden's poetry. About the influence of Owen on Auden, Richard Hoggart points out, "in his pity and anxiety to help, he echoes the tone and the technique of Wilfred Owen." It is from Owen that he has derived his concept of heroism, as also the cruel and evil deeds of the politicians who are responsible for wars and the resultant anarchy in the world. Though Auden borrows ideas from Owen, he presents them in his own way.

It is also to be noted that "Auden himself acknowledges a considerable debt to Yeats." Like Eliot, W. B. Yeats has also influenced Auden's use of images in his poetry. For instance, the imagery of Yeats' poem 'The Second Coming' seems to have influenced Auden's poem 'The Sphinx'. Religion and ideas drawn from religion find a place in the poetry of both Yeats and Auden. But whereas Yeats, in the poem 'Sailing to Byzantium,' tries to find the solution to problems faced by an old man in a materialistic world, and in 'The Second Coming,' shows that religion has lost its touch with mankind, Auden discovers that religious belief and practice is the ultimate solution of all problems and complications faced by mankind in poems such as 'The Prophets,' 'Atlantis' etc. During the early nineteen thirties, like Yeats' 'Sailing to Byzantium,' Auden's poem 'A Summer Night' also explores mystical experience. Moreover, Auden's hostile attitude towards the bourgeoisie originated perhaps, at least partly, from his reading of Yeats.
It has been said that Auden’s poetic development was influenced by G. M. Hopkins as well. According to Carpenter, Auden “was impressed also by Gerard Manley Hopkins, and occasionally copied him.” It can be said that Hopkins played a significant role in opening the door for Auden’s experimentation with different verse forms.

The influence of Laura Riding is also apparent in Auden’s early poems such as ‘Never Stronger’, ‘Easy Knowledge’ etc. About this influence, John Fuller points out that “Auden’s early reviewers noted that his syntax and absence of visual imagery in many poems recalled the work of Laura Riding.”

Auden’s early poetry was also shaped by William Blake (1757-1827). Both of them have expressed similar views about “… animals' mental stillness, their natural goodness or neutrality, their moral calm.”

The social and political conditions of his times also had a profound impact on Auden’s poetry. The First World War that broke out in 1914, when Auden was just a little boy of seven and was living with his mother as his father had gone to fight in the war, brought about drastic changes in the political as well as social life of the time. With the commencement of the most disastrous war, the world had ever seen, heavy clouds of darkness descended upon almost the entire world. The war crippled the social and economic life of Europe including England, Auden’s native country. As a teenager and Oxford graduate, Auden saw a sudden economic decline in the post-war period leading to mass unemployment. Regarding this decline which lasted for a number of years, Allan Rodway states:
Public expenditure was drastically reduced, wages and salaries severely cut – with the result that people had less purchasing power, so that many firms collapsed, unable to sell their products, more people lost their jobs thus further reducing purchasing power, and the vicious circling set in that culminated in a peak of three and three-quarter million unemployed in Britain by 1932, Germany had six million unemployed, the US twelve million.\(^{39}\)

It is clear that even after the First World War was over, man could not heave a sigh of relief because it left a deep impact, intensifying the sense of disillusionment and insecurity as poverty was at its peak. The war adversely affected not only the social life of man but also the national and international politics as it “was immediately followed by worldwide disturbances, including British fighting in Russia and Ireland; the pre-war class system and its great disparity of wealth remained unchanged, unemployment was rife, economic recovery slow.”\(^{40}\)

The First World War adversely affected England’s international trade. Her misery was also heightened by the emerging dominance of America and Japan over international trade. The collapse of firms led to the dismissal of the employed or to low wages. Low wages ultimately led to the General Strike of 1926 when Auden was just nineteen. The sad plight of the strikers of the General Strike touched his heart. Auden’s was a liberal and socialist outlook, which made him greatly conscious of the plight of the poverty-stricken common man who was being exploited. The hardships and problems of the poor and middle-class
people became one of the major concerns of his poetry. Auden realized that the exploitation of the proletariat by the bourgeoisie led to great economic disparity between the two. The economic crisis of the nineteen-twenties resulted in the Great Depression or Slump of the nineteen-thirties. During the Great Depression, several European nations including England could not ensure their people the means of sustenance, as the war had adversely affected, among other things, their economy. Auden picked up this suffering of the common man as subject matter for his poetry.

Germany was the worst affected nation, for she was forced to make reimbursements to the allied forces. This led to massive unemployment which invited severe criticism of the Weimar government from the communists. Moreover, the winter which Auden spent in Berlin was marked by political unrest. There were massive protests by the communists during the rally in May 1929. The Weimar government in Germany did its best to suppress the activities of the Communists by banning protests and rallies, but the wide political disturbance continued. Auden was a witness to the utterly deplorable condition of the Germans when he was in Berlin in 1929. This condition of Germany is evident in Auden's poem '1929':

Walking home late I listened to a friend
Talking excitedly of final war
Of proletariat against police –
That one shot girl of nineteen through the knee
They threw that one down concrete stair –
Though public demonstrations had been banned, Auden still managed to witness a major clash between the communists and the police during his stay in Berlin in 1929. The communists tried to block the public streets, especially in the Neukölln area, very near to where Auden lived. In this horrible violence, which lasted several days, public property like vehicles, street-lamps, buildings etc. were badly damaged, many lives were lost and a large number of people were seriously wounded. All these events provided raw material for the political ideas that were to be explored in his poetry, as is evident in his early poem ‘1929.’

The social and political upheavals and movements of the 1920s gnawed into the decade of the nineteen thirties in which the Great Depression or Slump made life more difficult. Massive unemployment enhanced misery and hardship, inducing meaninglessness and ugliness in the life of mankind. Food security became a major concern, and its scarcity led to hunger, oppression, chaos and despair. Political unrest increased, public demonstrations, fighting with the police in places like Hyde Park etc. became everyday occurrences. About this Allan Rodway states: "... as public violence increases, the private life recedes, and the private man is drawn out of his closed world, into the streets." Eventually, there emerged in England an important leader Sir Oswald Mosley who founded “The British Union of Fascists” in 1932 with the objective of working for the betterment of the British people. Inspired by this, Auden, in his poetry, has made an attempt to seek a “Leader” who might, as he hoped, save the people.

At this juncture, in addition to the British Union of Fascists founded by Mosley, Oxford Club and October Union came into existence. The activities of
these organizations, like anti-war demonstration, had caused the government to change its policies for the welfare of the people leading to economic improvement in Britain. The conditions of the other European countries also began to improve. However, the improvement in the economic condition became a curse in disguise for the people of the world because countries seemed to be moving with considerable rapidity towards another major armed confrontation. The growth of the economy had enabled them to consolidate and strengthen their military power. Germany on its part under the leadership of Hitler was motivated by a feeling of retaliation against the Allied Forces of the First World War. The lust for political dominance over the others spurred the emerging powerful nations of the world such as Japan, Italy and Russia in their military campaigns over Europe and Asia. Throwing light on this situation Rodway observes:

As the economic depression slowly improved, the international situation steadily worsened: from the Japanese invasion of Manchuria in 1931, through the invasion of Abyssinia by Italy (1935), the Rhineland (1936), Austria (1938), Czechoslovakia (1939) by Germany, to the outbreak of World War II when Hitler invaded Poland – and Russia took the opportunity of attacking Finland, in the autumn of 1939.42

Thus, the decade of the thirties saw European nations displaying their own individual power as superior to that of others. This attitude, adopted by several nations, had forced not only the European continent but the entire world into a
state of crisis. Consequently injustice, hypocrisy, violence and treachery contaminated almost the whole of mankind leading to a state of constant tension. People living in the Western world were plagued by anxiety at the individual, social as well as the political level. It appeared that every individual was utterly helpless, caught in a state of conflict. The situation in England is effectively summed up by Samuel Hynes who, speaking of The Orators, aptly remarked that:

... it creates its own atmosphere, its 'world': a sick England with a sick people, its industries closed and its workers idle; the middle classes fearful and defensive, afraid of change, afraid of life; and the young, feeling the need for action, for a journey beyond the border of the familiar into a new life but uncertain and afraid and wanting a leader.\textsuperscript{43}

The worsening political situation led to the fall of the Labour Government in 1932. Unemployment was at its peak. The value of the pound also dropped. Due to the heavy cost of war, England lost her position of dominance in international politics. Germany had, as mentioned before, to pay reimbursement to the allied forces, so her economic condition worsened. In spite of this Germany continued to rearm itself causing great concern the world over. "... the great Disarmament Conference, convened at Geneva ... was adjourned indefinitely, as no nation was prepared to take action over Germany’s illegal rearming."\textsuperscript{44} In the words of Allan Rodway, "by April 1939 fascism was triumphant in Spain; in September
Nazi and Soviet armies met at Brest Litovsk in mid-Poland. Japan was master of China; Italy seized Albania, Russia Finland.\(^{45}\)

The large scale unemployment in Germany brought the Nazis to power in 1933 and Hitler became the German Chancellor. His strong war-like speeches moved the unemployed masses. According to Samuel Hynes, “On 1 September 1939 German armies entered Poland, and that was that: England and France declared war on Germany on the 3\(^{rd}\), and the decade of the ‘thirties was over.”\(^{46}\) With this the Second World War began, bringing great grief to the innumerable mothers and children all across Europe. Expressing this situation of the world, Samuel Hynes states that “the end of the thirties had been a long death-bed vigil, and now that the waiting was over, the deceased became a subject for discussion, to be analyzed, simplified, generalized about and judged.”\(^{47}\)

In Germany itself, Hitler’s persecution of the Jews reminded Auden of the fact that the Jews had in the past unlawfully persecuted and crucified Jesus Christ; they even distorted Christ’s preaching. Even after two thousand years the Jews were still paying the price for the heinous crime they had once committed. This fact made Auden believe in the cyclical process of history, which constitutes an important theme in his poetry. Auden has focused on the Nazi’s brutal treatment of the Jews and the persecution and crucifixion of Christ by the Jews as a cyclic process of history in his shorter poems like ‘Diaspora’. Thus, the emergence of Hitler-led Nazism also became the concern and subject matter of literary writings of the thirties’ authors like Auden and Stephen Spender.
Auden's concern with the problems of the world had also been enhanced during his visit to Spain in 1937, when the country was reeling under a disastrous civil war. This perhaps made him equally conscious of how political power corrupts man morally, depriving him of his spiritual values, sense of brotherhood and humanity. Moreover, it is the general public who becomes the victim of all violence, injustice and suffering. Witnessing Spain during the Civil War, he was shocked at what barbarism and greed could do to man living in contemporary civilized society. The nasty and inhuman attitude of man towards his fellow-beings touched him so much that he couldn't rest without writing a poem entitled 'Spain', wherein he delineates the impact of the Spanish Civil War upon the people of Spain:

In psychological, not political terms, an eruption of the sickness of modern society: in Spain, the enemy is us – our fears and greeds; and the people's army is psychological, too, a sort of metaphor for loving feelings. . . what was mental has become physical, and therefore mortal. The struggle, then, is a struggle between sickness and health, Spain is a case. The treatment is immediate choice, commitment to some form of action.48

After his visit to China, Auden's experience of the Sino-Japanese war becomes another important subject matter of his poetry, especially 'The Sonnets from China.' This poem gives a vivid picture of China being bombarded by the Japanese Army. Auden eulogizes the Chinese and admires the country. He is shocked at the atrocities of the Japanese army that didn't hesitate to bomb the
civilians, and did not even spare the slum dwellers. Carpenter states about Auden’s and Isherwood’s visit to China that:

They watched another air-raid, and afterwards visited the slums where many of the bombs had fallen, missing their target, the Arsenal. Here they saw the injured and dying. ‘War’, Auden wrote afterwards, ‘is bombing a disused arsenal, missing it and killing a few old women . . . War is untidy, inefficient, obscure, and largely a matter of chance’.49

These myriad encounters and experiences convinced Auden of the fact that modern man has fallen into a bottomless pit which is ignorantly being engineered by him, and this constitutes one of the important themes of his poetry. Besides this, he seeks to explore man’s failure to understand the reality of life and the way he moves forward in the opposite direction of his destination. This escape from life and its reality results in nothing but sorrow, suffering and frustration. Such mental and physical agony is further compounded by man’s spiritual decay. Auden believes that man’s evasion of inescapable reality is the only factor that has acted as a catalyst in driving him to such a doom. Auden describes how man is perishing:

So many, doubtful, perished in the mountain,
Climbing up crags to get a view of islands,
So many, fearful, took with them their sorrow
Which stayed them when they reached unhappy cities,
So many, careless, dived and drowned in water,
So many, wretched, would not live their valleys.

(‘Paysage Moralise’)
Thus, wherever Auden travelled whether to Europe or to America, he found no change but the same sick society inhabited by people who were morally, spiritually, psychologically or politically crippled. Man’s new ideology seemed to have shaken the foundation of all human relationships among individuals. The whole of mankind appeared to be burning in the fire of greed, treachery and hypocrisy. Man had become the victim of frustration, restlessness and loneliness as he had lost the sense of security as well as faith in any system and had to live an isolated life, without social and moral support which is essential for peaceful and comfortable existence. Regarding Auden’s perception of the conditions of people, Richard Hoggart states:

Politically and economically, Auden might have said in the thirties, we move from slump to strike to war to slump and so on; psychologically we are assailed, with the help of scientifically applied mass-suggestion, by the creeping secret diseases of civilization. We are a society of out-of-work and frustrated persons. More, we are without belief, without organic unity; we are ‘depressed in the vale of no faith’. Our world is cold, inhibited, out of balance, all brain and no heart.50

This state of the world reminds us of W.B. Yeats’ poem ‘The Second Coming’, “Turning and turning in the widening gyre, / The falcon cannot hear the falconer; / Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;”. The bond that binds individuals together with strong human relationships was shaken. As a result man had become directionless; he had no way out of his problems; he lived an
empty and meaningless life without a sense of brotherhood; nowhere could he find justice and equality. Thus, since “democracy, liberty, justice, and reason are being seriously threatened, and in many parts of the world, destroyed,” the world seemed to have turned into a mere jungle inhabited by wild animals. In such a state of crisis, Auden felt that society needed to be healed both psychologically and politically. Unless all such illness were diagnosed and removed completely from society, man could not escape from his tragic state of existence.

In 1939, Auden left his native country for America, and took American citizenship. With his migration from England to America, a perceptible change in thought is also palpable. Simultaneously, he migrates from Freudianism-Marxism to Christianity and stands firm by it for the rest of his life as a poet. The breaking out of the Second World War, like other circumstances in his life, had also contributed to Auden’s conversion to Christianity. Besides, the war influenced him to write a poem entitled ‘September 1, 1939.’ With the start of the Second World War, the Europeans were constantly being threatened by Hitler’s speeches and actions. People could neither do their work in the day time, nor sleep at night quietly, as every day they got news about mass slaughter and destruction of property. Thus, the decade, without doubt, is termed as the “Age of Anxiety”. All the evils of mankind that cause suffering and anxiety which had been the constant theme of his poetry are henceforth dealt with in a religious context. Auden calls the nineteen-thirties “a low and dishonest decade” (‘September 1, 1939’). As Samuel Hynes points out, “Auden takes the war to be
a consequence, not of the wickedness of Hitler, or even of politicians in general, but of human evil." This is highlighted by Auden in the lines from the poem 'September 1, 1939,' “Those to whom evil is done / Do evil in return.” In this way, the “low and dishonest decade” went deep down into the bottomless ocean of grief and anxiety. Subsequently, Auden’s movement towards religion began.

Another turning point in Auden’s life and literary career was his experience while watching a film in Yorkville Cinema in November 1939. As Humphrey Carpenter points out, “it was largely German-speaking area, and the film he saw was *Sieg im Poland*, an account by the Nazis of their conquest of Poland. When the Poles appeared on the screen he was startled to hear a number of people in the audience scream ‘Kill them!’ This experience had shaken his earlier belief in the goodness of man’s nature, and he felt how cruel and hard-hearted people really were. This took him back to where he once belonged. As mentioned earlier, Auden’s upbringing had been strictly Christian but his belief in religion had eroded almost completely as he grew up. With his growing awareness of Freudian psychology and then Marxism, and finally, the inability to find any solution to the problems that gripped man and his society he turned back to where he started, in search of serenity and peace. Besides all these experiences, his movement towards Christianity was greatly influenced by his reading of Soren Kierkegaard (1813-1855). According to Auden, “Kierkegaard was neither a poet nor a philosopher, but a preacher, an expounder and defender of Christian doctrine and Christian conduct.” Kierkegaard talks of the two spheres of human existence: the aesthetic and the ethical. Man is free to choose either one of them
or both. According to Kierkegaard, the man who chooses only the former ultimately cannot get rid of boredom and despair, while the latter makes man committed to social responsibility. But religious belief makes man submit himself to the will of God, and with this action he can get true freedom. All these ideas of Kierkegaard impressed Auden immensely. He returned to the religious beliefs and practices which were once encouraged by his mother during his childhood days. As Carpenter describes, "in about October 1940, Auden resumed the religious beliefs and practices of his childhood. From now on he attended Holy Communion early on Sunday mornings – avoiding later services so that he did not have to hear sermons – and regularly said private prayers."55 His mother’s sudden death strengthened his belief in Christianity even further. From then onwards Auden lived the life of a true Christian. But with his return to Christian folds, Auden’s poetry changed once again as its subject matter was now determined by his Christian faith to quite an extent. However, in spite of this his main concern still remains social and political.

Furthermore, after a keen observation of all the circumstances and how aggressively man was being pressurized by the social and political disorders of the decade and the approaching war, Orwell, one of the prominent and important British war poets, has aptly described the decade of the nineteen-thirties as “an age in which every positive attitude has turned out a failure. Creeds, parties, programmes of every description have simply flopped, one after another. The only ‘ism’ that has justified itself is pessimism.”56
Keeping in view all these happenings overflowing the vales of the thirties, Samuel Hynes has remarkably and aptly described the decade as a tragic play in the following words:

Looking back on the thirties, we can see in the history of the decade the shape of a tragic play – the initiating errors, the complicating actions, the climax, and the fall towards disaster and death. In that pattern, 1936 is the peripeteia, the point where the action turned: in that year Hitler occupied the Rhine land and the Versailles Treaty was finished, Abyssinia surrendered and the League of Nations had failed, the Rome-Berlin Axis was formed and the German-Japanese Pact was signed. And, the most emotional and implicating of all the year's events, the Civil War in Spain began, and gave to the Western world a parable-in-history of the struggle between the Left and the Right. And so we think retrospectively, that was the year that was crucial, the moment when the tragic action might still have been altered.\(^{57}\)

All these tragic events that surrounded the people at that time touched Auden in a powerful way. Moreover, like other poets of his group, Mac Niece for example, Auden is also concerned with the exploration of the disintegration of modern life because he saw that almost all people lacked an equilibrium. This imbalance started from the individual and then spread to the community and among the nations. This belief of Auden is highlighted by Richard Hoggart: “He lays more stress than they (his contemporaries) on the fact that disintegration comes from an inner sickness which starts with the individual.”\(^{58}\)
This disintegration that originated within the individual is one of the major concerns of Auden’s poetry because for him “poetry is not magic. In so far as poetry, or any other of the arts, can be said to have an ulterior purpose, it is, by telling the truth, to disenchant and disintoxicate.” Auden views poetry in different ways, intending to give man the approach to reality he has to face, and he further states:

Speaking for myself, the questions which interest me most when reading a poem are two. The first is technical: “Here is a verbal contraption. How does it work?” The second is, in the broadest sense, moral: “What kind of a guy inhabits this poem? What is his notion of the good life or the good place? His notion of the Evil One? What does he conceal from the reader? What does he conceal even from himself?”

It is obvious that Auden’s poetry is not divorced from focusing on the moral aspect of man’s life. Moral error is the root cause of all disorders whether within individuals or within society. In his poems, Auden underlines that it is human weakness that makes man deviate from his path in every sphere of life. For example, in the poem ‘Lullaby’ he writes “Lay your sleeping head my love, / Human on my faithless arm.”

Moreover, Auden has said that “poetry is a game of knowledge”, that “poetry is not concerned with telling people what to do, but with extending our knowledge of good and evil, perhaps making the necessity for action more urgent and its nature more clear, but only leading us to the point where it is possible for
us to make a rational and moral choice. It is clear that Auden wrote poetry with dedication seeking to reform individuals as well as society by spreading the knowledge of good and evil among mankind. Unlike Shelley, his poetry is free from utopianism but decries the guilt and immoral activities of man, who is, according to him, greedy and selfish. Auden intended to enable man to distinguish between good and evil, and act accordingly.

Auden, most probably got this idea of reforming man and his society from his reading of Freud’s psychological doctrine and then Marx’s social and political theory because “both Marx and Freud start from the failures of civilization, one from the poor, one from the ill. Both see human behaviour determined, not consciously, but by instinctive needs, hunger and love.” So, it can be said that “from the start of his career as a writer, Auden became used to thinking about psychological models in relation to the customs and rituals of a society, rather than exclusively with reference to the personal history of the individual.”

At different times Auden was inspired by assorted strains of different intellectual threads out of which psychology, Marxism and Christianity were the chief ones. Thus his poetic career can roughly be divided into three phases which overlap each other but finally the balance tilts towards Christianity during the late nineteen-thirties. It can be said that after traversing from Freud’s psychological doctrine to Marxism and then to Christianity and ultimately to Kierkegaard’s Christian existentialism, Auden finds the final solution to all the problems of man, in the form of love for humanity. Auden believes that it is this love for mankind that alone can induce in the human heart the goodness which is
necessary to cleanse man of the evil thoughts and actions towards his fellow beings, living with him in society. It is only the feeling of love, along with goodness that holds individuals living together in society. Auden himself has said that "we must love one another or die"; that is, only the exercise of love between human beings would save humanity from self-destruction.\textsuperscript{64}

The present study is mainly devoted to the exploration of the various ways in which Auden has given expression to his socio-political consciousness in his poetry. Auden has employed different modes to present before us his concerns with human life and its problems. He often uses the didactic, the fictional and the comic modes. Like the metaphysical poet John Donne, Auden has also shown mastery in writing argumentative poetry. Apart from this, Auden has earned considerable success in producing poetry that is metaphoric, contemplative, or fantastic. Viewing Auden’s poetic creations, Allan Rodway aptly remarks commenting from the point of view of modes used by Auden: “in Mode, the poetry is fictional, didactic, metaphoric, comic, contemplative, argumentative, or fantastic.”\textsuperscript{65} All these modes enable Auden to delineate sometimes a clear picture, and sometimes a hazy one, of the problems of man, especially common man, and the political situation of the world particularly Europe.
References:

8. Ibid., p. 327.
15. Ibid., p. 54.
17. Ibid., p. 7.
20. Ibid., p. 88.
22. Ibid., p. 147.
25. Ibid., p. 373.
26. Ibid., p. 374.
27. Ibid., p. 374.
28. Ibid., p. 375.
35. Ibid., p. 51.
40. Ibid., p. 35.
45. Ibid., p. 38.
47. Ibid., p. 382.
48. Ibid., pp. 253-254.
57. Ibid., p. 193.
CHAPTER: 2

Psychology in Auden’s Poetry

Auden’s early poetry is concerned with the analysis and exploration of man’s “anxiety, guilt, and isolation” by largely using the psychological theories of Sigmund Freud and Homer Lane. Lane argues, among other things, that all problems arise from the unconscious conflict and the repression of natural instinct. Unconscious conflict and repression cause psychosomatic illness. On the other hand, trifling with the “id”, the “ego” and the “superego”, according to Freud, can also lead to psychic ailments like hysteria and neurosis. Based on such ideas, Auden tries to find solutions to the problems existing in human society. He discovers that society is rotten from top to bottom and believes that its causes are psychological. So, reforming man and society become the chief motives of his writing. To execute his strong desire of reforming man and his society, Auden lays more stress on the understanding of psychological illness than on anything else, in the early part of his career as a poet. According to John R. Boly, “Auden found his earliest ally in Freudian psychology . . . he added that psychology and poetry share a common mood, disillusionment, and a common hope.” Richard Hoggart points out, “. . . the constant neurotic dread” and “. . . the awful sense of threat” that pervade Auden's early poetry. Thus, Auden commits himself to writing poetry that explores psychological illnesses and their cure.
Auden believed that the First World War was a major cause of man's mental trauma as it adversely affected the social and political life of almost all the inhabitants of the world. He witnessed how during the post-war era the collapse of industry and dislocation of international trade resulted in mass unemployment. Life became very difficult even for those individuals who managed to retain their jobs. It was a time of great uncertainty, at every level, be it economic, social or political. The psyche of man was adversely affected, leading to acute anxiety. Auden attempts in his poetry to bring this anxiety to the fore. This is one of the psychological strains that runs throughout his early poetry and finds expression through various modes. It is not just the common man, the poor worker, who is struggling for survival but the industrialist too is adversely affected and his survival at the economic level is also threatened, often leading to a state of conflict. This conflict finds expression in the poem ‘Let History Be My Judge’ (1928), wherein the speaker “proposes, with all the deadly reasoning of a self-righteous counter-revolutionary, a justification of repression and control by authority in the face of developing resistance to it. The ‘situation’ might be a generalized version of the General Strike of 1926.” In an argumentative mode, the speaking persona gives in detail the measures taken by the management in order to deal with the crisis and refers to its “old right to abuse,” thereby highlighting the suppression and cruelty practiced by the powerful. It effectively mirrors the tension and the tug of war that have become part and parcel of life, be it the poor and the needy, or the rich and the powerful. Here, the resultant anxiety of man, as a psychic ailment among other things, is the focus of attention.
for Auden, inspired by the theories advanced by Sigmund Freud and Homer Lane. With its focus on man’s alienation under the capitalist system as well as man’s anxiety which can be interpreted as a by-product of this alienation, the poem has psychological as well sociological overtones.

This prolonged and persistent anxiety that man is suffering from has made him a divided individual and “frightened soul” in the capitalist society where he leads a materialistic life, eating, sleeping and breeding just like “sheep.” Such an existence does not befit human beings. There has been an erosion of moral values at the individual as well as social level. Due to this man has been reduced to the state of a helpless child who has been “weaned from his mother” and is suffering from a feeling of grave insecurity.

Auden believes that change is required in every sphere of man’s life. This change will improve the life of all human beings. In 1929, when Auden went to Germany, he encountered what he calls the “solitary man,” who is a constant sufferer from anxiety and despair caused perhaps by the catastrophic war or by his being destitute. This solitary man is not a particular individual but the modern man in general, who suffers from loneliness, frustration, mental trauma and despair. Auden’s use of the image of the “helpless and ugly embryo chicken” conveys convincingly the state of the individual due to the inner conflict which he is experiencing. Auden refers continually to “the lost, the lonely, the unhappy, the “loneliness”, the sick souls, self-imprisoned, time-obsessed, subsisting on aspirins and weak tea.”^ Auden’s concern for man’s loneliness and isolation is effectively communicated in the following lines from the poem ‘1929’:
But thinking so I came at once
Where solitary man sat weeping on a bench,
Hanging his head down, with his mouth distorted
Helpless and ugly as an embryo chicken.

(‘1929’)

Auden sought to cure this illness at both the individual as well social level. He realizes that without this man’s life will remain difficult and unhappy. The social and political systems of the world have become so imbalanced that happiness and peace are a mirage. Man has lost the support that these institutions provide and as a result he feels lonely and helpless. This is the anxiety of common man or “solitary man” that Auden comes across in Germany in 1929. Due to this anxiety, man is also subjected to the inner conflict, a conflict confined within his self. Change is the need of the hour, Auden realizes. For change to take place “social and psychological death and rebirth” are essential. According to Fuller, he “needs to suggest a mysterious interrelationship of various cycles of change, personal, bodily, social and psychological.” This is exactly what he does in ‘1929.’ The poem is divided into four sections. The first part is largely preoccupied with death and rebirth: “... all of those whose death / Is necessary condition of the season’s putting forth.” The second section explores the result of giving freedom to the natural instincts employing the image of ducks. The enjoyment by the ducks in the harbour shows that they are free from anxiety and restlessness. Auden appears to advocate that if man allows his natural instincts to be free, he would be like the ducks. This shows the influence of Homer Lane’s theory that diseases are the result of “disobedience to the inner law of our own nature.” Moreover, the idea of the interdependence of body and
mind also figures in the poem. The imbalance between them leads to diseases like anxiety. The poet also gives expression to the anxiety caused by the police atrocities, but he is hopeful that this shall one day lead to a revolutionary change. As one season follows the next, the revolution, Auden believes, will usher in the new conditions needed for the betterment of mankind. Section three again focuses on man's anxiety and his divided self. In the last stanza the focus is on how seasonal experience prepares us for change in which death is an instrument:

Startle by the violent laugh of a jay
I went from wood, from crunch underfoot,
Air between stems as under water;
As I shall leave the summer, see autumn come
Focusing stars more sharply in the sky,
See frozen buzzard flipped down the weir
And carried out to sea, leave autumn,
See winter, winter for the earth and us,
A forethought of death that we may find ourselves at death
Not helplessly strange to the new conditions.

('1929')

The final section highlights psychological illness, madness and through them the anxiety of man and finally "Death of the old gang" which will lead to a rebirth and change that is desired: "...deep in clear lake / The lolling bridegroom, beautiful, there." A bit of the Christian concept of love and resurrection also play a role, and lend themselves easily to Auden's main argument in the poem.

Another idea that Auden reinforces by his poetry is that in spite of being conscious of the afflictions of society, the intellectuals of the modern world do not take any measures to improve the situation, which, the poet believes, is critical
and needs to be remedied. The rich who are “seen as totally conditioned by their psychological state of mind,” need to be cured as much as the poor and common people. In such a situation, the intellectuals are not playing the active role that is needed. They are inert and simply ask questions, whereas they should take active interest and try to set things right. The following lines from the poem ‘The Questioner Who Sits So Sly’ effectively describe the attitude of the intellectuals:

Yet wear no ruffian badge,
Nor lie behind the hedge,
Waiting with bombs of conspiracy
In arm-pit secrecy;

Here, as well as in ‘1929,’ death is seen as a cure to psychic maladies and is “personified as hypochondriac, eccentric, and possibly homosexual.”

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

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

Whose anecdotes betray
His favourite colour as blue,
Colour of distant bells
And boy’s overalls.

His tales of the bad lands
Disturb the sewing hands;
Hard to be superior
On parting nausea;

(‘The Questioner Who Sits So Sly’)
Auden stresses illness by employing the image of the "invalid chair" in stanza five that refers to the malaise of society. This image of the invalid chair came to Auden possibly when he saw one of his pupils' father Colonel Solomon who was seriously injured in the First World War, and "was paralyzed from the waist down; he went about in a wheelchair."\(^1\) It seemed that he longed for its replacement by death that "represents this overriding wish of a society to destroy itself."\(^2\)

Homer Lane advocated that all illness is of psychological origin. And the "unconscious conflict was the cause of all physical ills."\(^3\) According to him, "all instinctual behaviour is good, not just in a biological sense but in a moral sense as well . . . Instinctual desires are implanted by nature and are therefore inherently good."\(^4\) He is in favour of letting the natural instincts of man be free so that he can grow and live a sound and healthy life. So, initially Auden views human illness in this light. He has often employed Lane's theory of the repression of natural instincts of man and the resultant anxiety while discussing love in his early poetry. The anxiety that results from love that has not been consummated is explored in an argumentative mode in the early poem 'The Secret Agent.' The poem presents man's instinctual desire to find the "new district," which stands for "contact with another human being," that is, his beloved and to enjoy her company. But this instinctual urge of man is often suppressed by him due to the pressure of society. Since the speaker has suppressed his love he functions like a "secret agent" whose love should not be discovered or found out: "He, the trained spy and had walked into the trap / For a bogus guide, seduced by the old
tricks." The "old tricks" are the conventions of society which prevent man from living an instinctual life. In this condition he feels entrapped and isolated. The bridges that "were unbuilt" stand for his failure to establish contact or fulfil his sexual urges. "They would shoot, of course" gives expression to the pressure exerted by society which guides the conscious will of the speaking persona. He is left longing and dreaming:

The street music seemed gracious now to one
For weeks up in the desert. Woken by water
Running away in the dark, he often had
Reproached the night for a companion
Dreamed of already.

("The Secret Agent")

Thus, man's failure to understand his natural instincts and handle them properly leads to anxiety, isolation and loneliness.

Man's anxiety, isolation and loneliness are also explored in another early poem of Auden 'The Watershed.' The poem apparently highlights the condition of man in terms of the "arduous life of the lead-miners." However, it is also the exposition of the dilemma of a traveller or stranger who gazes at a strange land which is "cut off" and "will not communicate" with other human beings. No matter how hard he tries he fails in communicating with the inhabitants. As a result he feels frustrated and worried, estranged and alienated:

Stranger, turn back again, frustrate and vexed:
This land, cut off, will not communicate,
Be no accessory content to one
Aimless for faces rather there than here.
Beams from your car may cross a bedroom wall,
They wake no sleeper.

("The Watershed")
The condition that is described here is not that of a particular man but is the condition of modern man in general who suffers from alienation and estrangement. At this point of time, the traveller could see an industry which already lacked energy and was in an unconscious state:

... dismantled washing-floor,
Snatches of tramline running to a wood,
An industry already comatose,
Yet sparsely living. A ramshackle engine
At Cashwell raises water; for ten years
It lay in flooded workings until this,
Its latter office, grudgingly performed.
('The Watershed')

The comatose industry and the sleeping inhabitants of this poem complement each other and effectively give expression to the erosion of emotion among individuals of the modern industrial age.

Auden believes at this stage of his poetic career that with the advancement of science and technology in the modern industrial world, emotional attachment between individuals has been greatly reduced. 'No Change of Place' is a poem which highlights the fact that in spite of the improvement in the means of communication people have become impersonal in their manner of communication and fail to connect with each other in a warm and personal way. "Emotional energy is expended on the anticipation of love letters not on human contact, spring flowers arrive smashed, and the impersonality of the telephone reduces human sympathy to a merely functional response." It is just the professional traveller or writer who makes an effort to understand life through
experience and tries to explore it. Everyone else seems to have been gripped by a strange apathy which has divorced man from reality and is dangerous for him: “And all the while / Conjectures on our maps grow stranger / And threaten danger.” According the last stanza, “the knowledge which the ‘professional traveller’ may have acquired has something to do with a possible change of social forms,” but no one seems to be interested:

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

(‘No Change of Place’)

The poem reinforces the idea that change is the need of the times. This idea finds expression in poems such as ‘1929’ as pointed out earlier.

Since after the end of the First World War there was a reaction against it and also against “... the generation of leaders who had declared war and had directed its continuance.” So, a lot of poetry written after the First World War does not celebrate traditional “military heroism.” However, as Wilfred Owen says there was a consciousness that “... men may not perform Great Deeds any longer, but they can be tough, stoical, and humorous under stress, they can be loyal to each other, they can feel pity, and they can perform their meaningless destructive duties faithfully and with skill.” Thus, the period after the First World
War, saw the exit of heroes and heroism in the traditional sense. In keeping with this scenario Auden's poetry projects individuals who are unlike the heroes of old but who, nevertheless are men of achievement and importance. Such men include airmen, climbers, travellers, miners and healers. A poem that effectively captures the mood of the period with reference to heroism is entitled 'Missing.' This poem makes an effort to define heroism. The first section of the poem presents a scene that is reminiscent of the world of the sagas. Though the tall leader may be unwounded but his followers are now dead as a result of his decision to indulge in "skyline operation." The leader's desire to prove his bravery and that of his men is the desire of one who is not a strong man. It is the weak who need to prove themselves. The poem also advocates a change in the mindset of individuals. Since the change that is desired must come from within, it is a psychological change that is being advocated and shows Auden's belief in psychological theories. While speaking of heroism, Auden distinguishes the Truly Strong Man and the Truly Weak Man. In the words of Edward Medelson, "The Truly Strong Man . . . is an idea that brings into focus Auden's divided wish for private satisfaction and public responsibility." Auden himself once wrote that the Truly Weak undertakes "blind action without consideration of meaning or ends." The tall unwounded leader as well as his doomed companions are examples Auden's "Truly Weak" men. Weak men undertake "skyline operations" in order to prove that they are strong. Such weak men are responsible for quarrels, wars, bloodshed and destruction that have become so rampant in the contemporary
world. Similar ideas about the “Truly Weak” are found in the first section of ‘Shorts’:

Pick a quarrel, go to war,
Leave the hero in the bar;
Hunt the lion, climb the peak:
No one guesses you are weak.

Showing his inclination of reforming man, Auden, in the seventh section of ‘Shorts,’ appeals to his reader to honour and abide by the dictates of the “Truly Strong” represented by the “vertical man,” who is presented as the ideal to be followed by mankind. But the people of the modern world neither have the attributes of such a strong man nor follow his command, and therefore, do not have the courage to stand and face reality. They are the followers of the “Horizontal one” who represents the doomed, corrupt and psychically sick people of society:

Let us honour if we can
The vertical man,
Though we value none
But the horizontal one.

(‘Shorts’)

Auden believes that a hero is one who must undertake the challenge of changing the world around him. He must work at both the social as well individual level. The heroes’ acceptance of this task of changing the world has been taken up by the Auden in the poem ‘O Where Are You Going.’ The “rider,” the “farer” and the “hearer” have undertaken a journey of quest, undeterred by the obstacles and fears referred to by the “reader,” the “fearer” and the “horror.” The
aim is to bring about the much needed change. At the psychological level, "reader / rider," "fearer / farer" and "horror / hearer" are aspects of a divided self. About the divided self presented in the poem, Peter Edgerly Firchow states that "the frontier dividing the opposing selves is very small, yet immensely difficult to cross."\(^{22}\) Auden's Quest Hero is expected to overcome the psychological barriers that represses man's natural instincts, ignoring all fear and doubt. Here Auden effectively presents the conflict between the conscious and the unconscious mind. In order to be victorious in this conflict, the Quest Hero must resolutely eliminate his fear and self-doubt. Thus, crossing the psychological frontier or barrier that causes the repressing of natural instincts is also a significant challenge for Auden's hero.

Auden's Quest hero, tracing all evils to man's conscious or unconscious mind attempts to bring about a change and reform society. But, sometimes Auden seems to be pessimistic, because he fails to find the kind of hero that he thinks is needed to bring about the required change in society. The poem 'Missing' has effectively tackled this issue. The suffering, the hysteria, the neurosis and other psychological diseases which had become hallmarks of the modern world are focused upon by Auden in his poem 'Consider.' In this poem, the reader is urged to bring about the necessary change. "Auden . . . in the Thirties . . . thought of himself as a healer, and did believe that words could affect beliefs and therefore action."\(^{23}\) So, after adopting a rational stand, the reader is urged to take action. The focus is on man's individual self which is divided due to the conflict between his unconscious and conscious mind. The "clouds rift
suddenly” imply the divided self while the “cigarette-end smouldering” stands for the conflict between them. This conflict leads to neurosis. People of the modern age are struggling hard to get rid of or at least alleviate their neurotic anxiety by doing a lot of things like enjoying the beauty of nature, sitting in a restaurant, and listening to music. But they do not pay any attention to the root causes of their neurotic illness.

Auden traces the cause of the deplorable condition of man to the “Supreme Antagonist.” According to some critics, the supreme Antagonist is the death wish. But according to Fuller:

... the tautology implicit in death making the highborn mining-captains ‘wish to die’ seems clumsy. Both the Old English *Bestiary* and *Paradise Lost* (1,200) compare the whale with Satan, as ... Auden is doing. In Auden’s glossary of Christian and psychological terms (B M Notebook, fol. 44) Satan is seen as the Censor, responsible for repressing man’s natural instincts and bringing about that self-consciousness which separates him from the rest of the animal kingdom. It is this division in men and society, keeping them from their real desires, that Auden is anatomizing in the poem.²⁴

Thus, the repression of natural instincts in man leads to psychological illness like neurosis. Man has now been reduced to the "insufficient units" as he has become impotent and incapable of enduring the pangs of a new life. Instead of seeking to
face his problems, man evades them by listening to music or viewing beautiful scenes.

Auden's poetry exhibits his admiration and searching for a “Good Place” ('The Prophets'), a place inhabited by healthy and happy people. But he is unable to find such a place. Wherever, he goes he finds “. . . silted harbours, derelict works,” “In strangled orchards,” and a “silent comb.” With the use of such phrases, Auden tries to communicate the deplorable condition of man caused by his failing mental health. It is the human psyche which is sick. This sickness of man's psyche is effectively communicated in the poem 'Consider' by phrases such as “Infected sinus”, “ruined boys”, and “arterial roads”. These phrases elucidate Auden's keen observation of man and his life, and his ability to convincingly express his ideas. As said earlier, according to Homer Lane, all physical illness is of psychological origin. This idea of Lane has also influenced Auden's poetry to a great extent. Physical illness resulting from psychic disorder also finds expression in this poem 'Consider.' The suppression of instincts by the conscious mind leads to diseases such as amnesia, mania and other abnormalities. All these diseases accelerate the disintegration of human personality: “To disintegrate on an instant into the explosion of mania / Or lapse for ever into a classic fatigue.” Thus, man should not repress his natural instincts. This action of his can change human life for the better.

That the suppression of natural instincts is unhealthy is the theme of another early poem entitled 'Adolescence' which figures in The Orators as well as in Collected Shorter Poems 1927 to 1957. Adolescence is the period of quick
growth which heads to adulthood. The suppression of man’s instinctual life during adolescence adversely affects his physical as well as mental health as an adult. Auden advances the argument that neurosis is the result of this suppression of natural instincts. Moreover, in the poem, Auden has portrayed “adolescent” as the “Truly Weak Man” who is deceived by his mother in his quest for a natural life. This deception makes him suffer from neurosis. Adolescence metaphorically stands for the natural human instincts whereas love for the mother functions as the psychological barrier or the repressor. The adolescent’s obsession with his mother leads to his easy exploitation by her, as Seth Shaw was exploited by his mother in Paid on Both Sides. As a result the mother succeeds in suppressing and deceiving the adolescence. Finally, the mother turned giantess scolds him, accusing him of deception. He was under the mistaken notion that he had embarked on his quest out of bravery, but in reality he had undertaken this quest “to please his mother.” The adolescent emerges as a “Truly Weak Man” because he does not fulfil his instinctive, sexual urges:

In a green pasture straying, he walks by still waters;  
Surely a swan he seems to earth’s unwise daughters,  
Bending a beautiful head, worshiping not lying,  
‘Dear’ the dear beak in the dear concha crying.  

(‘Adolescence’)

‘The Witnesses’ . . . describes the despair of a hero who discovers that he is ‘not the truly strong man’: his exploits, therefore, though heroic, have been in vain . . .” and the resultant guilt. At the social level, the witnesses stand for the authority, the hostile atmosphere created by the capitalist society or the bourgeoisie who suppress the common people. They also function as repressors
of the natural instincts. Thus, they are the enemies or repressors of the hero, who finds himself in their clutches. The poem shows the influence of Marxism as well. The dominance and authority of the witnesses or society finds full expression in the following lines:

You are the town and We are the clock.
We are the guardians of the gate in the rock,
The Two.
On your left and on your right,
In the day and in the night,
We are watching you.

Wiser not to ask just what has occurred
To them who disobeyed our word;
To those
We were the whirlpool, we were the reef,
We were the formal nightmare, grief
And the unlucky rose.
('The Witnesses')

At the social level the hero emerges as a "radical bourgeois" while at the psychological level he is a "restless neurotic." The atmosphere of fear created by the witnesses or society results in mental illness in man. The first stanza of the poem depicts the tension in the life of common man very effectively:

Young men late in the night
Toss on their beds,
Their pillows do not comfort
Their uneasy heads,
The lot that decides their fate
Is cast to-morrow,
One must depart and face
Danger and sorrow.
('The Witnesses')

The "uneasy heads" of the young is the result of persistent conflict between the id and the ego within their minds. Despite such a menacing atmosphere, Auden is
hopeful of changing man and society. But only the action of facing with boldness
the reality of life, will bring about the desired change: “The lot that decides their
fate / Is cast to-morrow, / One must depart and face / Danger and sorrow.” Auden
hopefully says, “This might happen any day; / So be careful what you say / And
do.”

Auden’s “tendency to fuse social and psychological elements” finds
expression in a number of poems such as ‘Miss Gee’ and ‘Victor.’ ‘Miss Gee,’ a
ballad written in the comic mode, narrates how Miss Gee’s cancer has been
caused due to the suppression of her natural sexual urge, a suppression that is
socially induced. Miss Gee is portrayed as a prude who has consciously,
throughout her life been interested in exhibiting her modesty. She looks the other
way when she comes across couples making love and buttons up her clothes
right up to her neck:

She bicycled to the evening service
With her clothes buttoned up to her neck.

She passed by the loving couples,
She turned her head away;
(‘Miss Gee’) (‘Miss Gee’) (‘Miss Gee’) (‘Miss Gee’)

But she cannot stifle her natural sexual urge altogether. Her sexual instinct
finds expression in her dreams. She dreams that while she is riding her bicycle, a
bull with the face of the Vicar of the Church of Saint Aloysius charges her with his
“lowered horn.” The “lowered horn” functions as a phallic symbol and in the light
of psychological theories can be interpreted as her hidden wish to be chased and
assaulted:
She dreamed a dream one evening
    That she was the Queen of France
And the Vicar of Saint Aloysius
    Asked Her Majesty to dance.

But the storm blew down the palace,
    She was biking through a field of corn,
And a bull with the face of the Vicar
    Was charging with lowered horn.

('Miss Gee')

That Miss Gee ends up with a cancer, introduces an element of seriousness in the ballad. "The idea that if you refuse to make use of your creative powers, you produce a cancer instead, was one of those implicit in the psychosomatic theories of Homer Lane . . . Auden would have found it also in Grodeck, who makes much of the idea that even male cancer can be a compensation for the inability to become pregnant."

'Childless women get it
    And men when they retire;
It's as if there had to be some outlet
    For their foiled creative fire'.

('Miss Gee')

Like Miss Gee, many people of the modern age do not allow their natural instincts to function properly and evade an essential aspect of life, due to social pressures. This repression can lead to diseases like cancer. Despite this, preventive measures are not taken and disaster strikes "like some hidden assassin." This poem appeals to its readers not to trifle with their instincts.

Besides Miss Gee, Auden has portrayed another "repressed personality" in another ballad 'Victor,' a companion piece to 'Miss Gee.' The entire tale of Victor is a serious one, narrated in comic mode. Auden shows that like Miss Gee,
Victor also has psychological problems that are socially induced. “Like Miss Edith Gee, his “creative fire” has been foiled by a narrow-minded tradition that confuses chastity with goodness, but in his case, instead of turning inward and causing harm to himself, he is impelled by his “Father” to go after his unfaithful spouse with a carving knife.”32 Victor too, like Miss Gee, is a prude. Not only that, he suffers from grandeur neurosis since he imagines himself to be the Son of Man or Christ:

He sat as quiet as a lump of moss
  Saying, ‘I am the Son of Man’.

Victor sat in a corner
  Making a woman of clay:
  Saying; ‘I am Alpha and Omega, I shall come
  To judge the earth one day.’
  (‘Victor’)

The influence of Homer Lane’s ideas is also apparent in Victor. “Lane made love central to his psychology.”33 Lane’s concept of love also includes the concept of hate: “If he hates, his behaviour is untrue to himself, to mankind and to the universe, but the energy is still love, for his act of hatred is love perverted. The hateful act is destructive of the man’s self and also of the happiness and welfare of mankind, thus retarding the perfection of the universe. It is wholly unnatural.”34 This is fully applicable to Victor’s behaviour in this ballad.

Man’s psychological problems induced by society are also highlighted by Auden in another ballad entitled ‘As I walked out one Evening.’ The poem explores the happy mood of a lover who sings a song expressing his love. The intensity of the lover’s love for his beloved, which springs out of his unconscious
mind, is clearly expressed in the third, fourth and fifth stanzas of the poem. But he is unfortunate to live in a world where rules of morality have been reversed. Using nursery rhymes Auden portrays a world where "morality has been thrown to the wind."\(^{35}\)

\begin{quote}
'Where the beggars raffle the banknotes
And the Giant is enchanting to Jack,
And the Lily-white Boy is a Roarer,
And Jill goes down on her back.'
\end{quote}

('As I walked out one Evening')

At the same time, he is conscious of Time that "destroys youthful joy in two ways: it destroys actual manifestations of it in physical exuberance and prowess . . . and it also destroys it in the metaphor of a girl's party dress, breaking her necklace and her 'brilliant bow'."\(^{36}\) Thus, the lover is frightened by both time and society that act as the repressors of his natural instincts, leading to neurosis.

Social and psychological elements are also blended by Auden in another poem entitled 'The Decoys' which is a part of The Orators and is included in the Collected Shorter Poems from 1927 to 1957. Like in 'Adolescence,' the suppression of man's natural instincts and its consequence also finds expression here. The poem can be interpreted at two levels. Metaphorically, "these valleys" in the opening line of the poem stand for capitalism, whereas "some birds" refer to the capitalists or the dominant class of society which are well trained to entrap the "real unlucky dove" that symbolizes the suppressed common people. About the situation of man explored in the poem, Edward Mendelson states that 'The Decoys' "exposes an innocent seeming landscape as fatal trap."\(^{37}\) According to
Barbara Everett "the 'real unlucky dove' is caught by the 'intimate appeal' of its trained doubles ... is locked within a landscape donated by the false 'They'." But, psychologically, the "real unlucky dove" stands for the natural instincts of man, whereas "some birds" refer to the repressors of natural instincts. Suppression of natural instincts produces the "real unlucky dove," one who suffers from psychic ailments.

Often the conflict between the political and the social on one hand and the instinctual on the other is presented very effectively in Auden's poetry 'O What Is That Sound' is one such poem. This poem shows a soldier lover who has to go to war leaving his beloved behind, though she is persuading him not to go. This shows the beloved's strong desire for her lover to stay with her. But the situation is such, according to the soldier, that he is compelled to go. As a result, fear and tension emerge in their relationship. Thus, the circumstance forces the beloved to repress her desires, and she is left in a state of fear. This fear and tension find expression in the following stanza:

O where are you going? Stay with me here!
Were the vows you swore deceiving, deceiving?
No, I promised to love you, dear,
But I must be leaving.
('O What Is That Sound')

Thus, both the soldier lover and the beloved are forced to repress their natural instincts, as he is unable to do what his heart desires, and can no longer enjoy the company of his beloved. He must leave because he has to fulfil his obligation towards society or the country that he lives in.
Love is one of the most dominant themes in Auden’s poetry. But throughout his poetry his concept of love does not remain static. It keeps changing in keeping with the intellectual influences of thinkers such as Homer Lane, Freud, Marx and Kierkegaard. Among literary writers Blake and Lawrence have played a significant role in shaping Auden’s concept of love. According to Auden, “Love . . . is “the flood on which all move and wish to move” . . . is the source of all that is 'lucid' and 'civilized' . . . in human societies; it encourages . . . a “natural climate”, the “birth of natural order” . . . is a creative force . . . refused a normal growth, it may take a horrible disguise.^^ Thus, love is the only seed which sprouts into a tree that nurtures human beings. But at the same time the poet warns his readers of the disastrous effects of self-love or perverted love. Auden is not reluctant to ridicule love that is linked with materialism and acquisitiveness, and the love in which sex is sterile and not productive. He favors love that is pleasure-giving, protective and productive, peaceful and healthy, which function as a bond between men and women and helps in their survival. The poet wants love to grow in the heart of man and to be instrumental in bringing about a change in every aspect of life. Auden seems to urge man to become conscious of the role that love can play in building our life at the social as well as individual level. Absence of love leads to emptiness in the life of individuals as well as society. Auden talks about both carnal love i.e. “Eros” and universal or spiritual love i.e. “Agape”. He tries to find solutions to all problems concerning human life in “Agape”, and man, he thinks, should take shelter in
"Agape". The second stanza of the poem 'Lullaby' shows Auden's hope that "Eros" can be transformed into "Agape."

In Auden's early poetry "Love" is projected as "... a form of mental therapy, a gloriously effective psycho-analysis, a liberator, a cleanser, a releasing and enlarging power." So, Auden considers love to be very important for human life and human relationships, and thereby, in the formation of a congenial social atmosphere. He accepts Freud's concept of love that "the nucleus of what we mean by love naturally consists ... in sexual love with sexual union as its aim." According to Freud, "libido" is the energy of the instincts involved in the activities of love. Love permits the freedom of libido, and hence, it helps in the formation of a sexual relationship between two partners, so that they can lead a blissful and healthy life, blessed with their offspring. It plays a vital role not only in making the social environment amicable but also in perpetuating the human race.

Sexual love that leads to the union of two lovers finds expression in the group of poems entitled 'Five Songs.' In the first song, D. H. Lawrence's idea that "mind is the dead end of life" seems to have influenced Auden. The thought that if the conscious mind represses the "Eros" or sexual love, both the lovers may be adversely affected finds expression here. The poet does not believe in the suppression of libido or sexual impulse, as said earlier, but rather advocates its full expression:

Open your eyes, my dearest dallier;
Let hunt with your hands for escaping me;
Go through the motions of exploring the familiar;
Stand on the brink of the warm white day.
Rise with the wind, my great big serpent;
   Song I ('What's in your mind, my dove, my coney,')

The second song explores the lovers' excitement as well as tension because of their sexual passion. They are both exited and tense because they are aware that at night they can fulfil their sexual urge but the morning acts as a suppressor of their erotic impulse:

   That night when joy began
   Our narrowest veins to flush,
   We waited for the flash
   Of morning's leveled gun.
   Song II ('That night when joy began')

The third song stresses Auden’s affirmation of “instinctive gratitude for a happy love affair. Sex is seen as a necessary exchange . . .”43:

   Who goes with who
   The bedclothes say,
   As I and you
   Go and kissed away,
   The data given,
   The senses even.
   Song III ('For what as easy')

Thus, these songs explore love’s pivotal role in creation and how it leads to a healthy, pleasurable and fruitful life. They also express the importance of sexual expression and highlight how lack of an outlet to this instinctual energy can cause anxiety, tension and fear.

   Perverted love which results from the repression of love’s natural instincts is the subject matter of the poem entitled ‘Easy Knowledge':
Man’s “fatigued face” is the result of perverted love. To Auden, the “horizontal force” stands for the psychological frontier or repressor which is responsible for the repression of the “vertical thrust” or love’s natural instincts. According to the poet, people of the modern society are unable to understand their act of stifling the function of natural love. The violation of the “vertical thrust” produces neurosis. The poet highlights the idea that failure to go beyond the “. . . edges of the town” or the repression of man’s natural instincts is injurious for the psychological health of man.

In some poems like ‘May’ Auden points out the insufficiency of erotic love and how it leads to neurosis. May stands for spring, a month of abundance in nature. It “seems to symbolize a dawning of maturity . . . both personal and historical. On the personal level, the awakening is sexual.” But the poem points out how mere erotic urges are inadequate, as they fail to “account for the lost world of traditional morality” and the resultant neurosis and death wish are clearly revealed:

The real world lies before us,
Brave motions of the young,
Abundant wish for death,
The pleasing, pleasured, haunted:
A dying Master sinks tormented
In his admirers’ ring,
The unjust walk the earth.

('May')
Auden’s belief that society is sick psychologically and needs to be cured, is the motivating force of the poem.

The repression of natural impulses is explored by Auden in terms of schoolchildren being held captive in cells in the poem entitled ‘Schoolchildren.’ The schoolchildren are restrained in school which acts as a suppressor and is strongly reminiscent of Blake’s poem ‘The Schoolboy.’ Living in such condition hinders the normal growth of the children. Auden believes that the children should be treated with love and affection, and allowed to grow in a free environment. The idea that the suppression of the natural impulse leads to neurosis also finds a place here, like elsewhere. Freud’s belief in infantile sexuality is also expressed here. Hegel’s ‘Philosophy of Right’ according to which “it is through love and obedience that the groundwork of the ethical character is laid in childhood”46 is also challenged. According to Fuller:

Auden is questioning the validity of Hegelian education in the light of a real ‘rebellion’: how can the child become a free personality, as Hegel professed, when the educators are themselves ‘condemned’ and unable to become free? How can the child’s touching trust and fidelity ever of itself germinate ‘the new life,’ when adults themselves are unable to break loose from the easy tyranny?47

Auden presents love as an important source of pleasure in his poetry. He even focuses on different kinds of love like “Eros” and “Agape.” The former is physical or carnal love whereas the latter is spiritual or universal love. According
to his poetry, it is possible to transform physical or carnal love into spiritual or universal love. These ideas find full expression in his fine lyric ‘Lullaby.’ The lover accepts his defeat to time because man is subjected to death and decay, as the human is “mortal, guilty” and “the child ephemeral.” The poem echoes the psychological theories of Sigmund Freud. According to Rodway, “Freud’s influence is pervasive, but most evident in the second and fourth stanzas.” The first stanza of the poem highlights the dominance of time over human life. The second stanza explores the pleasure derived from love-making, which is equivalent to the ecstasy experienced by a hermit when he is in mystic union with God. This stanza highlights how “man is a psychosomatic unity, as Freud, Groddeck and Homer Lane had taught. Lovers are shown to move from the physical – culminating in an ‘orgasmic swoon’ . . . On the other hand, the hermit, starting from an ‘abstract insight’ into the supernatural, and universal love and hope, ends in accordance with Freudian theory, in what is essentially a sensual ecstasy.” The third and fourth stanzas explore the gratification of carnal passion and also emphasize its transience. However the fact that this love existed will serve as a “reservoir that may provide salvation in time of drought”:

Every farthing of the cost,
All the dreaded cards foretell,
Shall be paid, but from this night
Not a whisper, not a thought,
Not a kiss nor look be lost.

('Lullaby')

The theme of Auden’s verse play ‘Paid on Both Sides’ has been greatly influenced by his knowledge of psychology. This play is a portrayal of a
psychologically sick society and simultaneously of “an individual psyche, sick and irrevocably divided (Fuller, 15).” ‘Paid on Both Sides’ has political implications as well, since “… The Nower-Shaw family feud also represents the German-Jewish conflict (Fuller, 14) which was one of the major issues of Auden’s time.

Thus, largely assimilating ideas from Sigmund Freud’s and Homer Lane’s psychological theories, Auden’s early poetry seeks to resolve the problems faced by man. But subsequently, he realizes that these psychological theories alone are inadequate for solving man’s problems. Highlighting the condition of Auden at this juncture, Firchow states, “After discovering to his dismay that, despite his efforts to cure them, his English patients stubbornly insisted on remaining unwell, and, indeed, from the standpoint of economic health, were even becoming worse, he shifted from advocating primarily psychological remedies to proposing socioeconomic ones.” In this way, Auden’s poetic wheel starts to roll over the road which is constructed by Marxism, opening the door of the next phase.
References:

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CHAPTER: 3

Politics in Auden’s Poetry

During, what can be called in some ways the second phase of Auden’s literary career (1932 – 1939), his attention is largely focused upon the problems arising out of social complications and class divisions in capitalist society. Earlier, as already reiterated, since Auden thought that all illness is of psychological origin, he focused on solving man’s problems by emphasizing his psychological ailments and their cure. But he soon realizes that the social environment in which man lives also has an impact on his life. Auden reacted against the great social disparity that existed between the rich and the poor that led to the plight of the downtrodden in the capitalist society of his time, resulting in conflict and suffering. Marx had already stated that "society as a whole is more and more splitting up into two great hostile camps, into two great classes directly facing each other: Bourgeoisie and Proletariat." It is in this light that Auden came to perceive the society of his time. In a capitalist society, it is the bourgeoisie that holds the key to the treasure and does very little work. On the contrary, the proletariat does hard work but enjoys no leisure and is also subjected to exploitation and suppression by the bourgeoisie. This exploitation and suppression are the cause of great economic disparity and social inequality. Due to this increasing economic disparity, Auden feared "civilization was approaching catastrophe." He also observed that "the cause of inequality is Greed. The cure is the abandonment of money-getting as a motive." Auden believes that "mass
production, advertising, the divorce between mental and manual labour, magazine stories, the abuse of leisure,"⁴ are all "symptoms of an invalid society, and can only be finally cured by attending to the cause."⁵ He seems to agree with Marx that, "All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses, his real conditions of life, and his relations with his kind."⁶ Auden understood that the psychological theories of Sigmund Freud and Homer Lane, on which he had relied upon to a great extent earlier, were insufficient and would not alone help man solve his problems. Man is not an isolated being. He lives in a society. If he is to lead a healthy and normal life, it is essential that man as an individual as well as the society in which he lives, both should be healthy. Justin Replogle points out that "society's sickness, Auden now claims, comes not from each person's psychological repression, but from human failure to control industrialism."⁷

Commenting on the literature produced in England in the 1930s, Samuel Hynes states:

The decade of the 'thirties was a time of crises, and the most important writing of the period is best seen as a series of efforts to respond to crisis. Auden posed the problems very acutely in the mid-'thirties when he wrote, in a birthday poem to Isherwood:

So in this hour of crisis and dismay,
What better than your strict and adult pen
Can warn us from the colours and the consolations,
The showy arid works, reveal
The squalid shadow of academy and garden,
Make action urgent and its nature clear?
Who give us nearer insight to resist
The expanding fear, the savaging disaster?

In these questions there is a new and different conception of the literary act, adapted to a sense of the critical nature of the time. The writer must be **strict** and **adult**, adjectives that impose moral commitment and discipline upon the act of writing. By his pen – in his role as a writer, and not simply as a citizen – he will make men aware of the need for action, and what action means. His insight will give men strength to resist their enemies, without and within. This is more than simply a moral theory of literature, it asserts a direct relation between literature and action in the public world.

The poetry that Auden writes during this period concentrates to quite an extent on the political, social and economic conditions of the 1930s and as a result has a great impact on the people of the time. His contemporaries like Louis Mac Niece, Stephen Spender and C. Day Lewis too have written similar poems. These poets function as the intellectuals of the times who were concerned with the misery of the common people and believed that Capitalism was the cause of their plight. Even when Auden focuses largely on man as an individual seen, and dealt with through the psychological theories of Freud, Lane and Groddeck, he is conscious of the adverse impact of the Capitalist system on man. In a number of poems like ‘The Witnesses,’ ‘O What is That Sound,’ ‘Adolescence,’ ‘The Decoys’ etc. both these strains are found together. As mentioned earlier, he picked up both Marxism and Freudianism as complementary to each other, for the former is concerned with the world that lies outside the individual’s mind.
whereas the latter with the world that lies within the individual. Along with the psychological doctrines of Freud and Lane, the concept of society visualized by Marx, Auden believed, would be instrumental in improving man’s lot. So to Auden both become important. Auden learns from both Freud and Marx and comes to believe that all problems — both inner and outer — are inextricably interwoven, and one procreates the other. An individual’s problems can be caused by same psychic disorder or inner conflict as well as by the social environment, and both cause as well as affect each other. Edward Mendelson points out that Auden’s “politics in the early 1930s were governed by his sense of the impending ruin of his class. In 1932, seeing no hope for the bourgeoisie, he approached a ‘conversion to Communism’ and awaited the triumph of the workers.”⁹ Auden seeks the removal of the class system which, he thinks, is the root cause of all social evils, with the help of a revolution initiated by the proletariat against the dominant bourgeoisie.

Discussing the contemporary social and political situation of Europe in the 1930s, Stephen Spender states in his autobiography World Within World, “From 1931 onwards, in common with many other people, I felt hounded by external events.”¹⁰ Spender’s statement makes it clear that the public events of the times had a very strong impact on individuals. Auden too felt that the private world of individuals was being encroached upon. This is well documented in the poem ‘A Summer Night.’ This poem explores the European political crisis and “foressees the inevitable overthrow of the bourgeoisie ruling class by the proletariat.”¹¹ Samuel Hynes has given the similar view that ‘A Summer Night’ “... is a Marxist
poem: it is about the sickness and death of the bourgeoisie, and the revolutionary new world that is coming." It presents "two contrasting phases: the first evoking the moment of felt peace and harmony in one's private and personal world and the second giving a simultaneous sense of ominous events in the outer public world." The private or mystic world experienced by Auden that night in 'A Summer Night' seems to be ideal, as it is free from fear, grief and death:

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

Auden, on one hand, seems to have discovered a utopian world by his mystic experience, while on the other ominous events at the public level also make their presence felt. He contemplates how people who are well off are totally indifferent to the anguish and agony of their fellow human beings:

And, gentle, do not care to know,  
Where Poland draws her eastern bow,  
What violence is done,  
Nor ask what doubtful act allows  
Our freedom in this English house,  
Our picnics in the sun.  
('A Summer Night')

Auden mentions the forces of change, the revolution and the death wish of the affluent class leading to the birth of a new world order that is the need of hour and is welcome. He foresees that a time will come ushering in a revolution which will destroy the prevailing corrupt social order which is the root cause of all evils
that exist within the individual and in human relationships. The "crumpling flood," Auden believes, is analogous to the "force" that will replace all diseased systems that have chained man. He is very hopeful about this change in human society:

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

('A Summer Night')

Thus, Samuel Hynes aptly points out that the poem "is about the sickness and death of the bourgeoisie, and the revolutionary new world that is coming." The phrase "the crumpling flood" signifies the revolution to be initiated by the proletariat. When the revolution is successfully over, the authority of the bourgeoisie shall disappear from society, bringing an end to their tyranny:

But when the waters make retreat
And through the black mud first the wheat
In shy green stalks appears,
When stranded monsters gasping lie,

('A Summer Night')

Auden has used the image of "the wheat" coming out of the "the black mud" "in shy green stalks" to give expression to his ardent zeal for the replacement of the corrupt and decayed capitalism with communism.

Since it was the bourgeoisie who were in governance, the failure of the 'old world' to solve its problems as Spender put it was their failure. "There was ever-increasing unemployment in America, Great Britain, and on the Continent. The old world seemed incapable of solving its problems, and out of the disorder
Fascist regimes were rising. The bourgeoisie is unable to solve man’s problems because of its own selfishness and greed. They suppressed the proletariat for the sake of their own interests. This act of suppression and the resultant conflict find expression in the poem entitled ‘Let the History Be My Judge.’ This poem wonderfully explores what appears to be a version of the General Strike. It focuses on the activities undertaken by the privileged class in order to safeguard their interest, crushing the revolt of the workers. The poem highlights the effort of the bourgeoisie to keep things as they are so that they can continue to exploit common people. That the uprising against the bourgeoisie visualized in the poem is serious and can lead to drastic changes is clear from the following statement of the speaker: “Since there could be no question of living
/ If we did not win.”

A poem in which the strains of psychology and Marxism run parallel to one another is ‘The Witnesses.’ It is an exploration of the condition of common people particularly the unemployed young men living during the Great Depression of the nineteen thirties. As already pointed out in the previous chapter, the witnesses represent the bourgeoisie in a capitalist society who suppress common people. The poem effectively portrays how common people are in the clutches of the bourgeoisie. It also shows Auden’s optimism and belief that a revolution to do away with the dominance of the privileged bourgeoisie is possible and desirable. Auden appeals to his reader to face reality and be ready for such a revolution:

This might happen any day;
So be careful what you say
And do.
Be clean, be tidy, oil the lock,
Weed the garden, wind the clock;
Remember the two.
(The Witnesses’)

Another poem that blends both social and psychological elements is entitled ‘The Decoys’ which is an important part of The Orators and is also included by Auden in his Collected Shorter Poems, 1927-1957. In metaphoric mode, the poem presents how, in a capitalist society, common man is deceived and exploited by the privileged. Auden blames them for creating a hostile atmosphere that acts as a threat to the down-trodden, while the privileged themselves lead a blissful life:

Under the spell completely
They circle can serenely
And in the tricky light
The masked hill has a purer greenness
Their flight looks fleeter.
(The Decoys’)

This happy life of the privileged is effectively contrasted with the plight of the underprivileged with the help of the image of the “unlucky dove” in the last stanza of the poem.

Often, in order to do away with the evils inherent in capitalist society Auden introduces the voyager, the wanderer or the man on a quest. He is a man of action who is in search of order and the meaning of life. His search is goal oriented and he is unlike the others who are indifferent and lazy. The hero on a quest or the voyager is strong willed and is ready to face and overcome all dangers that lie in his path. One comes across such a voyager in the Epilogue to
The Orators. He is strong being who is ready to overcome all the problems and difficulties that he is faced with. “Fear” which is personified, fails to undermine his courage. A man who sets out on a journey of quest is no ordinary being. He is an extraordinarily brave person and because of this he achieves his goal, seems to be Auden’s message. In this poem, as Fuller aptly remarks, “Auden shows the Quest hero discarding the qualities that have hitherto hindered him — intellectualism, fear and neurosis (‘reader’, ‘fearer’ and ‘horror’) — and setting out with a fresh determinism.”16 Despite “That valley is fatal when furnace burn,” the hero is determined to go “Out of this house.” This house stands for the old, corrupt social and political system which the quest hero is yearning to destroy so that a new one may be ushered. Thus, he is a man who is committed to crossing the frontier of the old social and political systems of the world in order to bring in the new ones.

The reformer or the redeemer in Auden surfaces quite often in his poetry. The sonnet entitled ‘A Misunderstanding’ by implication proposes that society cannot be reformed without a strong revolutionary action initiated by the proletariat that is represented by the garage boy and the deaf girl. Auden states that though he himself “hoped to be the incendiary who would destroy ancestral constraints;” but in reality, “behind the smile of the grumpy boy, the real working-class incendiary may be waiting to act.”17 Auden is critical of his own ability to function as their redeemer:

More, their talk always took the wished-for turn,
Dwelt on the need for someone to advise,
Yet, at each meeting, he was forced to learn
The same misunderstanding would arise.
('A Misunderstanding')

Auden's focus upon the condition of man and society finds expression in the sestina entitled 'Paysage Moralise.' The poem however does not deal with a specific historical period but assesses human civilization from the beginning up to Auden's own time. This gives it an element of universality. The poem displays an allegorical landscape. Valleys, mountains water, islands, cities and sorrows are the key words which have been used symbolically and contribute to the success of the poem by providing continuity at the level of theme. Auden highlights the founding of the human civilization and man's disenchantment with it. According to the poem, man's romantic and escapist attitude towards life is largely responsible for this dissatisfaction. The valleys did not provide the bliss that early civilizations hoped for. The cities built subsequently also failed to make man happy. Harvests decay in the valley, mountains too are barren and exposed and romantic escape routes also do not make man happy. Starvation, suffering and sorrow seem to have been man's lot:

Hearing of harvests rotting in the valleys,
Seeing at end of street the barren mountains,
Round corners coming suddenly on water,
Knowing them shipwrecked who were launched for islands,
We honour founders of these starving cities
Whose honour is the image of our sorrow.
('Paysage Moralise')
The poem effectively portrays man's condition, Auden's dissatisfaction with it and his hope that the desired change is possible if man ceases to lead an isolated and selfish life symbolized by islands and rebuilds his cities:

It is our sorrow. Shall it melt? Then water
Would gush, flush, green these mountains and these valleys,
And we rebuild our cities, not dream of islands.

(Paysage Moralise)

With its emphasis on the end of isolation of the individual, the desire for change and the image of the decaying civilization of man the poem can be read as "an acceptance of the Marxist theory of the inevitable decay of capitalist society . . ."^18

In keeping with the Marxist concern with common man the hero that is presented by Auden in the poem entitled 'Who's Who' is "a perfectly average man"^19 who does ordinary things alongside great ones:

How father beat him, how he ran away,
What were the struggles of his youth, what acts
Made him the greatest figure of his day:
Of how he fought, fished, hunted, worked all night,
Though giddy, climbed new mountains; named a sea:
Some of the last researchers even write
Love made him weep his pints like you and me.

According to Fuller "The idea that the hero is perfectly average man (the innocent youngest son, in fact) is very common in Auden. Sonnet XVI of 'The Quest' is a development of the idea"^20 and there too the hero is an ordinary man, who in spite of the great things that he has done continues doing ordinary things:

For he was always glad to mow the grass,
Pour liquids from large bottles into small,
Or look at clouds.

Such poems by Auden promote the notion that common, ordinary people are capable of heroic deeds. In other words the proletariat is in a position to rescue itself from the clutches of the bourgeoisie or those who are in position of power.

The poem entitled ‘Look, Stranger,’ the title of which was later changed to ‘On This Island’ and included in the *Collected Shorter Poems, 1927-1957,* is another poem which expresses Auden’s sense of alienation. It begins with the arrival of the quest hero at the border between the land and the sea, after the completion of his journey. The importance that Marx attached to the human will finds expression here in the hero’s questing journey. Both Auden himself and his readers have been portrayed as strangers in their own land, as “such ‘alienation’”21 is consistent with Auden’s belief in Marxism. Auden wants his reader to be involved in this kind of a journey so that an equitable society may emerge in the world. In the first stanza, the phrase “The leaping light of your delight” refers to the peaceful and harmonious atmosphere which Auden longs for. Thus, the world with the leaping light seems to be Auden’s Utopia:

Look, stranger, on this island now
The leaping light for your delight discovers,
Stand stable here
And silent be,
That through the channels of the ear
May wander like a river
The swaying sound of the sea.

('Look, Stranger')
The hero was inspired to undertake this journey by his strong will for action. In this poem, according to Allan Rodway:

... we start with light and end with enlightenment ('the full view'), or looking becomes memorable vision. Time, dualism, and body/spirit are also obviously latently there (witness: the passing of summer, and 'now', which implies a previous unenlightened view; 'stable' and 'swaying', or the cliffs opposing the tide; and the intangible 'clouds' in the physical mirror of the harbour, like memories or ideas in the brain, at once physical and meta-physical). But more fructifying than these is the quest-seed. Little more needs to be given than the hint in 'stranger', 'floating seeds' (which will one day arrive, root, and flower) and the full 'view'. For this seems to be an expression of the Successful Quest, the partial view having passed into the full view, opposed elements having been harmonized in a balance delight, and the 'stranger' come home to himself and his land – for the moment, as the gull lodges a moment.22

But fear of war is also communicated simultaneously by the "urgent voluntary errands" in which the ships are engaged being mentioned, as if, though as of now they can function as seeds that germinate but this may not be possible soon as the clouds present can be instrumental in making the "leaping light" of the first stanza a bit less bright or even dim.

Auden's belief in the human will leading to action which is necessary for change to take place, an idea that he got from Marx as pointed out earlier, is explored in 'O doors to be open and an invite with gilded edges' of the 'Twelve
Songs,' a poem about "art as wish-fulfillment." The poem is concerned with the exploration of the fact that "it is a sick society which allows some to live in absurd luxury while others have nothing but envious dreams of it." According to Rodway, "Lord Lobcock and Count Asthma . . . not only seem to symbolize a sick society, but to be less capable of enjoyment than the beggars." The capitalist society is a sick society because of its class-structure and Auden wants this unfair social stratification to come to an end. This is in keeping with belief in Marxist ideas:

- 'And these shops to be turned to tulips in a garden bed,
  And me with my crutch to thrash each merchant dead
  As he pokes from a flower his bald and wicked head' —
  ('O doors to be open and an invite with gilded edges')

Marx's belief that it is the interaction between man and his environment that creates both history and human knowledge also impressed Auden who declares: "On the whole, Marx seems to me correct in his view that physical conditions and the forms of economic production have dictated the forms of communities." Alienation is a characteristic of capitalist societies and according to Rodway Auden was drawn to "Marx's theory of man's alienation under the capitalist system . . . this was once an alienation of man from his work and its products – of which he experiences only a small part." That alienation adversely affects man's life is the subject matter of the poem entitled 'The Capital.' Fuller points out that the poem "contains one of Auden's most obsessive subjects, the alienation of the big city." The poem explores Auden's social concerns presenting the picture of both the dominant bourgeoisie and the common
working-class people living in urban areas. The opening line of the poem shows the immorality of the rich who always seek out the “Quarters of pleasure.” The “Dim-lighted restaurant” exists only for the rich urban dwellers who can afford it since they have the money. Thus, the immorality of the rich who dwell in cities is highlighted by Auden:

Quarter of pleasures where the rich are always waiting,  
Waiting expensively for miracles to happen,  
Dim-lighted restaurant where lovers eat each other,  
Café where exiles have established a narrow village.  

(The Capital')

The downtrodden and underprivileged are alienated from the fruit of their toil because the capitalists are very selfish and inclined to fill their own coffers by hook or by crook. These capitalists appoint the underprivileged when the necessity arises, and dismiss them when they are no longer required. Moreover, Auden’s attention is also focused upon the inclination of the underprivileged to migrate from the countryside to the city where all their illusions about city dwellers are shattered as they discover man’s indifference to the sufferings of his fellow human beings. In the fourth stanza, the images of “collars, chairs, rooms or pebbles” are used to delineate the picture of the apocalyptic social order of the world in general and particularly Europe:

In unlighted streets you hide away the appalling;  
Factories where lives are made for a temporary use  
Like collars or chairs, rooms where the lonely are battered  
Slowly like pebbles into fortuitous shapes.  

(The Capital')
Man's alienation and isolation is explored further, by Auden in his poem 'Musee des Beaux Arts' as well. The poet has employed the mythical figure of Icarus who helplessly falls from the sky, and nobody bothers about his tragedy, to communicate man's isolation and loneliness. Though man lives in a society, yet he leads an alienated and isolated life due to his selfish and indifferent attitude towards other members of society. This is an undeniable reality of modern man's life. With the flight of Icarus with the help of the wings made up of wax that melt in the heat of the sun, Auden tries to explore modern man's unsuccessful effort of escape from reality. Auden now seems to believe in existentialist philosophy according to which no one can escape from suffering due to his existence. Thus, human suffering is inevitable. Highlighting this aspect of the poem, Peter Edgerly Firchow states that:

Auden's sociopolitical ironies notwithstanding, the unmistakable message of the poem is that suffering is an inescapable part of the human rather than the social condition – an existentialist phenomenon, rather than a Marxist or Freudian one (and indeed, at about this time Kierkegaard began to replace Marx and Freud as Auden's preferred reading).\(^\text{29}\)

This poem shows the erosion of Auden's belief in Freudianism and Marxism in solving man's problems. Auden through Icarus contemplates over the situation of man, presenting the helplessness of Icarus that is analogous to that of modern man by giving an account of the famous painter Brueghel's painting:
In Brueghel’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.

(*Musee des Beaux Arts*)

Auden now realizes that neither Freudianism nor Marxism can be instrumental in
mitigating man’s suffering since this suffering is an essential part of life. The
paintings of like Brueghel make clear that they understood that suffering is an
essential part of life and it is futile to attempt to change this state of things. This
poem by Auden is reminiscent of Yeats’ poem ‘Lapis Lazuli’ which also highlights
a work of art:

Like Auden’s Old Masters, Yeats’ old Chinamen understand
the immutable verities of existence, and the futility of
attempting to change them. All one can do is to change
one’s attitude towards those verities, rather like Camus’s
imagined Sisyphus. Entering the museum in order to gaze
at the paintings of the Old Masters, or looking at a precious
stone carved into a work of art – these are the (only) things
we can and should do; they are the only *actions* to perform
if we wish to gain a modicum of calmness, perhaps even
gaiety. *While it may be regrettable that*, as Yeats’ speaker
tells us, Aeroplane and Zeppelin come out and King Billy –
not just William of Orange but also Kaiser Wilhelm II and
perhaps even chancellor Adolf Hitler – begins to pitch
bomb-balls, or, as in Auden’s poem, human beings fall to
their deaths out of the blue sky, these are marginal events
of which one takes cognizance only to dismiss them in favor
of what truly matters: ploughing the earth, sailing the sea, climbing the mountain of truth. In these two poems, Yeats and Auden are, so it would appear, not so far apart after all.30

Thus, the Old Masters seem to have a remarkable influence on Auden’s concept of human life, at this stage, extending the subject matter of his poetry latter on in poems such as ‘The Riddle,’ ‘Herman Melville’ etc.

The important place that change occupied in Auden’s set of beliefs leading to freedom of action too seems to have been inspired by Marx. This idea finds expression in the rise and fall of human civilizations in the poem entitled ‘The Fail of Rome’. The fall of the Roman civilization lets the poem focus on the inevitable destruction of the declining modern civilization. According to the poem, as the Roman Empire which was once a grand empire, declined, lost its pre-eminence and came to an end, in the same way the modern civilization, Auden felt, was on the way to its decline in the post-war period. Thus, the poem shows Auden’s belief in the historical process of the rise and fall of civilization. The fall of Rome was caused by immoral practices represented by “private rites of magic,” “temple mate prostitute” etc. This is “a brilliant poem on the perspectives of change”31 and is in keeping with Auden’s Marxist belief.

The poetry that Auden produced during the nineteen thirties advocates the freedom or liberty of man. Auden realizes that Capitalism as well as dictatorship, lead to the loss of liberty or the individuality of man. It is this loss that finds expression in the poem ‘The Unknown Citizen.’ This is an aspect of subjugation,
exploitation and oppression of not just the underprivileged class but also an expression of the suppression of the liberty and individuality of the average man at the hands of the establishment. Auden here shows in a satirical mode, the modern industrialized and capitalist world, wherein man has lost even his own individual identity and has been reduced to a “mere number.” He has no other way out but to work passively for the interest of his master, the bourgeoisie, the owner of the material wealth, or the bureaucrat or the technocrat. He leads a regimented life and has to fall in line with all whims of the establishments even to the point of begetting the exact number of children that deemed for the times: “He was married and added five children to the population, / Which our Eugenist says was the right number for a parent of his generation.” He had no individuality and lived in absolute conformity with the standards set by the modern world, of which he was a product. The title of the poem ‘The Unknown Citizen’ too “(parodying the grave of the Unknown Soldier) suggests an administrative chimera, whose predictability Auden wittily laments.” Going into details Auden points out that no complaint was lodged against him, he never lost his job, he satisfied his employers by working properly, his views were in keeping with what was expected of him, he got along well with colleagues, “And had everything necessary to the Modern Man, / A phonograph, a radio, a car and a Frigidaire.” He fulfilled all his obligations to “Social Psychology,” the employer employs “Union” as well as the “Press.” With the use of the subtle irony, Auden presents a picture of man in the modern world who lives life according to the dictates of the establishment. The standards set by the establishment are very rigid as well as
narrow and man’s individuality is annihilated as a consequence. This effectively reveals Auden’s “pro-worker and anti-capitalist” / anti establishment stand.

The disturbance of the social and political life of the world particularly Europe resulting from the outbreak of the Second World War finds expression in the poem entitled ‘September 1, 1939.’ The setting of the poem is a bar in New York. September 1, 1939 is the day when Hitler started the military campaign against Poland. It describes the horrifying war which resulted in the “Wave of anger and fear” that controlled and “darkened lands of earth.” Auden’s attention is focused upon the adversely affected private life of man by the war. Throwing light on the past history of Germany he points out that from the time of Luther to that of Hitler the promotion of aggressive nationalism altered the mindset of the Germans and led to violence and war. Auden seems to believe that since Hitler himself suffered violence when he was a child, he becomes a psychopath and indulges in violence himself. This is Auden’s understanding of the situation. Presenting the condition of Hitler, Auden writes: “Those to whom evil is done / Do evil in return.” Dictators like Hitler exploited and abused the democratic principles and deceived people for their personal benefit. The poem also highlights the helpless condition of man and points out how politicians have befooled common man. Auden emphatically disapproves the Imperialism and Capitalism that he realizes contaminate the political atmosphere. About the negative impact of capitalism and imperialism, Samuel Hynes states that “Protestantism and its correlative capitalism begot imperialism, and imperialism brought war.” Dishonesty became common among mankind leading to hardship and misery.
The entire human race suffered as a result of this. Under these circumstances, Auden as a poet seems to be helpless and states:

All I have is a voice
To undo the folded lie,
The romantic lie in the brain
Of the sensual man-in-the-street
And the lie of Authority
Whose buildings grope the sky:
There is no such thing as the state
And no one exists alone;
Hunger allows no choice
To the citizen or the police;
We must love one another or die.

('September 1, 1939')

Auden strongly disapproves dictatorship that deprives common man of his freedom of action. The buildings that "grope the sky" or the skyscrapers are symbols of the establishment that has exploited and deceived the common people. Auden's slant towards Marxism is apparent here. Reflecting on the action and its consequence of dictators like Hitler and Mussolini, in the poem 'Gare du Midi,' Auden concludes, "He walks out briskly to infect a city / Whose terrible future may have just arrived." Here, "He" stands for the dictators like Hitler and Mussolini. Pointing out his attitude towards dictators, Humphrey Carpenter aptly remarks that Auden "realized that the rise of Hitler had shown how easily the values of liberal humanism, in which he had been brought up, could be overthrown." A similar attitude of Auden towards dictators, who always think of their own power and dominance over not only the common people of their own country but also of other countries, is expressed in the comic mode in the poem 'Epitaph on a Tyrant':
He knew human folly like the back of his hand,
And was greatly interested in armies and fleets;
When he laughed, respectable senators burst with laughter,
And when he cried the little children died in the streets.

The political events of the 1930's express themselves in the poem entitled 'A Bride in the 30's' though the poem is primarily concerned with love:

Ten desperate million marching by,
Five feet, six feet, seven feet high,
Hitler and Mussolini in their wooing poses,
Churchill acknowledging the voter's greeting,
Roosevelt at the microphone, van der Lubbe laughing.

The poem highlights that:

society is conditioned by the will of the individual, that Hitler and Mussolini and the rest are somehow the product of the inadequate and stunted private love, and that the child's conditioning narrows his choice and puts limits to his natural desires . . . In such a situation it is imperative that the individual should be aware of the deep division between his private desires and the public good which should result from them . . . man . . . has this power to choose, through love, the kind of society he wishes to have.\(^{36}\)

The turmoil that characterized the time is also focused upon; but ultimately it is man who has to make a choice which has far reaching consequences. Man cannot remain indifferent to public events; the poem asserts:

Trees are shaken, mountains darken,
But the heart repeats, though we would not hearken:
Yours the choice to whom the gods awarded
The language of learning, the language of love,
Crooked to move as a money-bug, as a cancer, 
Or straight as a dove.'
('A Bride in the 30's')

The quester’s search for a “juster life” find expression in the poem entitled ‘Whither?’, which is a part of a sequence of six poems composed by Auden after his return from his visit to China in 1938 undertaken along with Isherwood. But the “journey is false because the traveller refuses to change; the ship is a false island both because it is only like an island and, in a moral sense, because it is a place of faithless isolation.” The poem highlights Auden’s belief that isolation will not lead to a “juster life.”

The historical process of the rise and fall of human civilization, as already discussed in ‘The Fall of Rome,’ also finds an echo in the sonnet entitled ‘The Sphinx.’ The poem presents an Egyptian sphinx with minute details. The sphinx, a relic of an ancient civilization, serves as a harsh recollection of the transience of all civilization. It also functions as a “numinous reminder of the eternal possibility of suffering.” The poem highlights Auden’s belief in the process of change, inspired by Marxism.

Imperialism that adversely affects man’s social and political life finds expression in the sonnet entitled ‘Hong Kong’ of the sonnet sequence ‘A Voyage.’ According to the poem, imperialists always endeavour to accumulate more and more wealth and power, often using force, and this leads to war, violence and bloodshed in the world. According to John Fuller, “... the Hong Kong financiers have created a sophisticated world where all violence is forced to
The scene of war is clearly presented by Auden in the following stanzas:

Ten thousand miles from home and What’s-Her-Name
A bugle on this Late Victorian hill
Puts out the soldiers light; off-stage, a war

Thuds like the slamming of a distant door:
Each has his comic role in life to fill,
Though life be neither comic nor a game.

('Hong Kong')

The sonnet entitled ‘Macao’ expresses the Imperialist designs of the Portuguese. According to the poem the Portuguese were the first to bring the Roman Catholic influence to Macao. They founded there “stone houses,” “churches” and “town,” and Macao:

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

('Macao')

This poem shows Auden’s consciousness of the evils of imperialism.

The poetry that Auden wrote during the 1930’s, broadly speaking was greatly influenced by International politics of the period. In a nutshell,

Hitler’s policy of rearmament . . . threatened the peace and liberties of Europe . . . the Spanish Civil War and the Italian conquest of Abyssinia forced writers to take definite political sides. . . There was also a growing and fully justified fear that Spain, Ethiopia, and . . . Manchuria were only preludes to an all-out assault by the new Nazi, Fascist and in Japan
This darkening of the political scene leading to the Second World War figures in a number of poems written by Auden. One such poem is 'Spain 1937.' It is often classified as his most well known political poem. With great objectivity Auden shows that a close connection exists between the political scene and the personal troubles of people. It advocates actions and commitment at the personal level in the fight against Fascist forces, "... it makes the necessity for action more urgent and its nature more clear, but only leading us to the point where it is possible for us to make a rational and moral choice." There is an element of hope in man's ability to choose the good over the evil. The poem makes it clear that it is the values of civilization that are under threat and need to be safeguarded.

The sonnet sequence of 'In Time of War' the title of which was later changed to 'Sonnets from China' and included in Collected Shorter Poems, 1927-1957, is the exploration of human history. In these sonnets, as Humphrey Carpenter aptly remarks, history "... is seen as a failure to achieve 'The Good Place'. The war in China ... is shown to be the product of this universal human failure." Thus the sonnet sequence explores the Sino-Japanese war, a major political crisis of the decade of the nineteen thirties and though it grapples with how man can achieve justice and happiness. According to Fuller, this sonnet sequence is also "an attempt to evaluate man's predicament in 'the epoch of the
Third Great Disappointment’ (the first two being the collapse of the Roman Empire and of medieval Christendom.” Herein, Auden surveys human history from the very beginning and portrays it as a struggle between good and evil. The first sonnet (“So from the years the gifts were showered; each”) highlights that all creatures, other than man became what they were to be with ease, be it the fish or the bee:

So from the years the gifts were showered; each
Ran off with his at once into his life:
Bee took the politics that makes a hive,
Fish swam as fish, peach settled into peach.

And were successful at the first endeavour;
The hour of birth their only time at college,
They were content with their precocious knowledge,
And knew their station and were good for ever.
Sonnet I ('So from the years the gifts were showered; each')

Of all created things man was a “childish creature,” one who could be either evil or good. But he had the ability of choice in spite of the instability of his nature:

Till finally there came a childish creature
On whom the years could model any feature,
And fake with ease a leopard or a dove;

Who by the lightest wind was changed and shaken,
And looked for truth and was continually mistaken,
And envied his few friends and choose his love.
Sonnet I ('So from the years the gifts were showered; each')

Sonnet XVIII ('Far from the heart: of culture he was used') focuses on a dead Chinese Soldier and points out how like him, many common people become the victims of war. Auden highlights that the soldier sacrificed his life so that the world may become a better place:
He turned to dust in China that our daughters

Be fit to love the earth, and not again
Disgraced before the dogs; that, where are waters,
Mountains and houses, may be also men.

Sonnet XVIII ('Far from the heart of culture he was used')

From his observations during his stay in China during the Japanese invasion, Auden realized how greed and lust for power on the part of politicians impact the life of human beings and affect the destiny of entire nations. This sonnet also shows how common people and their sacrifices are forgotten when the time comes to record their deeds:

Far from the heart of culture he was used:
Abandoned by his general and his lice,
Under a padded quilt he closed his eyes
And vanished. He will not be introduced

When this campaign is tidied into books:
No vital knowledge perished in his skull;
His jokes were stale; like war time, he was dull;
His name is lost for ever like his looks.

Sonnet XVIII ('Far from the heart of culture he was used')

The consequences of the evil practices of man particularly that of the greedy politicians find expression in Sonnet XIV ('Yes, we are going to suffer, now; the sky'). This sonnet "effectively links the historical preamble with the present war."44 It is from history that Auden discovers that it is man's greed that leads to war and violence that have engulfed human society. Even the advancement made in the field of science and technology fails to prevent such violence and war because "... the earth obeys / The intelligent and evil..." The image of a night raid is used very effectively by Auden to “draw an analogy
between what the searchlights reveal and the evil that is in all men – the private hatred of which war is a metaphor and an enactment:

Yes, we are going to suffer, now; the sky
Throbs like a feverish forehead; pain is real;
The groping searchlights suddenly reveal
The little nature that will make us cry,

Behind each sociable home-loving eye
The private massacres are taking place;
All Women, Jew, the Rich, the Human Race.
Sonnet XIV (‘Yes, we are going to suffer, now; the sky’)

Thus, Auden seems to have felt that it is impossible to prevent human civilization from being hit by violence, bloodshed and war which causes man’s misery and suffering.

Sonnet number XV (‘Engines bear them through the sky: they’re free’) highlights the leaders of these wars who are out of touch with their armies and their people. But the isolation of these leaders is a self imposed isolation:

Engines bear them through the sky: they’re free
And isolated like the very rich;
Remote like servants, they can only see
The breathing city as a target which

Requires their skill;
Sonnet XV (‘Engines bear them through the sky: they’re free’)

The horror of war that brings anguish and distress to the entire human race has an important place in these sonnets. During a war, the common soldier suffers immensely. For the leaders, the war is a detached happening since they themselves are not exposed to its dangers the way the ordinary soldiers are:
Here war is simple like a monument
A telephone is speaking to a man;
Flags on a map assert that troops were sent;
A boy brings milk in bowls. There is a plan

For living men in terror of their lives,
Who thirst at nine who were to thirst at noon,
And can be lost and are, and miss their wives
And, unlike an idea, can die too soon.

Sonnet XVI ('Here war is simple like a monument')

This sonnet poignantly expresses the premature loss of precious human lives and leaves a gaping wound in the lives of their dear ones. The third stanza highlights the fact that though wars can be both just and unjust, but the loss of human life too is a common factor:

But ideas can be true although men die,
And we can watch a thousand faces
Made active they one lie.

Sonnet XVI ('Here war is simple like a monument')

The war in China caused by the Japanese aggression made Auden acutely conscious of the plight and suffering of both the Chinese soldiers as well as the common people. Sonnet number XVII ('They are and suffer; that is all they do') focuses on the pain and loneliness of the injured who lie in a pitiable condition in a "military hospital in Shang-kui . . . where the isolation of suffering cannot be imagined by the uninjured":

They are and suffer; that is all they do:
A bandage hides the place where each is living,
His knowledge of the world restricted to
The treatment that the instruments are giving.

And lie apart like epochs from each other
– Truth in their sense is how much they can bear;
It is not talk like ours, but groans they smother –
And are remote as plants; we stand elsewhere.

Like ‘Spain,’ ‘In Time of War’ turns in its final movement to questions of the moral values by which the future may be redeemed. The last seven sonnets address themselves to the examples of the defeated, the simple, ‘all who seemed deserted’ – all those, that is, whose lives deny the reigning values of war, violence, and power. The moral of those lives is not very complicated: man is free and fallible, ‘Nothing is given: we must find our law,’ and the foundation of that law must be love. Our efforts will be imperfect, because men are imperfect; but we must go on trying."^47

This sonnet sequence sensitizes us to the sufferings caused by wars which are “a necessary consequence of history” but it also, through it focuses on war, highlights the general evil present in man, which he must struggle to overcome.

It is clear that a number of poems written by Auden during the 1930’s focus on the plight of common man, as well as the political events and disasters of the times. Auden’s poetry is political in the sense in which Spender defines it:

When I say that modern poetry is political . . . I am not thinking of John Cornford giving up in order to fight the fascist in Spain, but of the fact that the best poetry of our time, the outstanding poems of Thomas Hardy, the war poems of Wilfred Owen, Eliot’s Waste Land, much of Auden’s poetry, is concerned with the individual faced by an unprecedented crisis in the history of civilization, and with far-reaching public calamities such as the Great War, the
References:

4. Ibid., p. 318.
5. Ibid., p. 318.
20. Ibid., p. 105.
22. Ibid., p. 114..
25. Ibid., p. 112.
30. Ibid., p. 158.
34. Ibid., p. 383.
39. Ibid., p. 120.
48. Ibid., pp. 269-270.
CHAPTER: 4

Religion in Auden’s poetry

Most of the poems that Auden wrote before his migration to the U.S.A. are largely concerned with the psychological, social and political problems of man and society, but only some of them such ‘A Summer Night’ and ‘Musee des Beaux Arts’ have religious overtones. However a considerable amount of the poetry written by him after his migration to the U.S.A. is dominated by religious belief. Earlier, Auden was fascinated by the psychological theories of Homer Lane and Sigmund Freud, and then by Marxism, which he found out, ultimately failed to solve man’s problems. He finally realized, as Gareth Reeves points out, that “Psychoanalysis, Freudianism, Marxism, are all partial and monistic explanations, whereas Christianity is complete.” He begins to realize that “Christianity subsumes all other systems; it is the system to end all systems.” As a result, both Psychology and Marxism begin to be replaced by his belief in Christianity, and subsequently, religious belief begins to figure in his poetry in a predominant way. Auden’s mother, understandably an early childhood influence was a devout Christian who had a more than a usual impact on the child since Auden’s father was away on war service for “four vital years.” It was his mother who had once inculcated in Auden the spiritual values and faith in religion which emerge in a pronounced manner in his poetry. It is also being pointed out here that once working as a school teacher at the Downs School, Auden had a mystical experience which he describes in the following way:
One fine summer night in June 1933 I was sitting on a lawn after dinner with three colleagues, two women and one man. . . Incidentally, we had not drunk any alcohol. We were talking casually about everyday matters when, quite suddenly and unexpectedly, something happened. I felt myself invaded by a power which, though I consented to it, was irresistible and certainly not mine. For the first time in my life I knew exactly – because, thanks to the power, I was doing it – what it means to love one’s neighbor as oneself. I was also certain, though the conversation continued to be perfectly ordinary, that my three colleagues were having the same experience.4

It is clear that his return to Christianity is not as sudden as it is made out to be sometimes.

One of the events that led Auden onto the road to religion was his visit to Barcelona when Spain was reeling under civil war in 1937, since:

many years later he recalled one surprising reaction. ‘On arriving in Barcelona,’ he wrote, I found as I walked through the city that all the churches were closed and there was not a priest to be seen. To my astonishment, this discovery left me profoundly shocked and disturbed. The feeling was far too intense to be the result of a mere liberal dislike of intolerance, the notion that it is wrong to stop people from doing what they like, even if it is something silly like going to church. I could not escape acknowledging that, however I had consciously ignored and rejected the Church for sixteen
years, the existence of churches and what went on in them had all the time been very important to me.⁵

His return to religion is also attributed to his meeting with Charles Williams at Oxford in 1937. This encounter made him conscious of the existence of holiness. Auden, as quoted by Carpenter, said:

For the first time in my life . . . I felt myself in the presence of personal sanctity . . . I had met many good people before who made me feel ashamed of my own shortcomings, but in the presence of this man – we never discussed anything but literary business – I did not feel ashamed. I felt transformed into a person who was incapable of doing or thinking anything base or unloving.⁶

Besides these, Auden’s return to the Christian fold was also influenced by his watching the film “Sieg im Poland” in a Yorkville cinema situated in an area of the city largely populated by German speaking people in November 1939. “When Poles appeared on the screen he was startled to hear a number of people in the audience scream ‘Kill them!’ He later said of this: ‘I wondered then, why I reacted as I did against this denial of every humanistic value. The answer brought me back to the church.’”⁷ From this it is clear that Auden returns to the church and Christianity in his search for humanistic value.

Auden’s faith in religion and God was greatly strengthened by his exposure to the Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard’s Christian existentialism. According to Kierkegaard, man “lives either aesthetically, ethically or religiously.”⁸
Further, “Kierkegaard divides existence into two realms, the realm of God and the realm of man.” The ideas of Kierkegaard impressed Auden much and become the foundation of a lot of poetry he wrote in the later phase of his career. Arthur Kirsch clearly describes Auden’s commitment and faith in Christianity at this stage:

Auden praised Saint Augustine for showing that “the Christian faith can make sense of man’s private and social experience,” he explained his own faith in those terms. He wrote that as distinct from the presuppositions of “a faith which applies to some specialized activity,” scientific research, for example, “there is the Faith by which a man lives his life as a man, i.e. the presuppositions he holds in order that 1. He may make sense of his past and present experience; 2. He may be able to act toward the future with a sense that his actions will be meaningful and effective; 3. That he and his world may be able to be changed from what they are into something more satisfactory. Such a faith can only be held dogmatically, for in man’s historical and mortal existence, no experiment is ever identically repeatable.”

In a very insightful manner Allan Rodway highlights those aspects of Kierkegaard’s philosophy that appealed to Auden and are in keeping with his poetry:

Kierkegaard argued, the divine is infinitely removed from the human, therefore, though man must obey God’s will, he cannot know what is God’s will. He must act in blind faith. One good reason for angst. Another good reason inhere
man's absolute freedom and duty to choose. He cannot blame what he is or does on either heredity or environment; he is responsible for himself, and he must choose in order to be fully human – but he may choose wrongly, and cannot know whether he has done so or not, for his choice is not to be judged by its social results but by it correspondence to the divine will. A third reason for angst is that a proper faith cannot be arrived at on satisfactory human grounds, for it can be demonstrated that Christianity is neither moral (because of the necessity of obedience), nor rational (because of its commitment to the unknowable), nor socially beneficial (witness the historical record). Faith, then, must be arrived at by 'a leap in the dark.' What will persuade men to take such a leap? Worldly disasters. Logically, then, reform and improvement are hardly to be welcomed, though they may be desired. Another cause for angst. On the other hand, it means one doesn't need to bother; that whatever one does may be wrong, so one can do as one likes (provided it is done in the faith that it is what God commands). Auden puts it this way:

The command of God is 'Choose to do what at this moment in this context I am telling you to do'.

(Introduction to The Living Thoughts of Kierkegaard, 1952. Forewords and Afterwords, ed. Mendelson, p. 177)

Hardly logical, but it fits well with the existentialist emphasis on the moment, the obligation of constant free choice, and tends to cancel out the implications of other aspects of the doctrine – summed up by Auden as follows:

To show the non-believer that he is in despair because he cannot believe in his gods and then show him that Christ
cannot be a man-made God because in every way he is offensive to the natural man is for Kierkegaard the only true apologetics.

(ibid. p. 180)

For someone whose commitment is intellectual rather than emotional, someone always inclined anyway to see things in a long perspective and with some irony or frivolity, there is as much reason, then, for serene human comedy as for despair – and indeed both can go together: the self-made misery, the self-destruction, of the species that considers itself the highest of the animals (and a rational one, to boot) is wryly comic – if one can stand far enough back to see it so.\textsuperscript{11}

After his migration to the United States of America, Auden continues to focus on the failings of man and society but from a religious point of view. In this way the social relevance of his poetry continues. Richard Hoggaart, commenting on the religious aspect of Auden’s poetry remarks:

The most striking characteristics of the considerable body of work which Auden has produced in America is that in all of it, whether in poems, general essays, critical articles reviews or lectures, and whatever his ostensible subject, he discusses religious belief. His most important creditors – as important as Freud and Marx earlier – have been Kierkegaard and Niebuhr. Neither influence is surprising. Not only are Kierkegaard’s examinations of profound relevance today, but he laid much emphasis on the individual soul (rather than on the body of the church), its
suffering and arrival at faith, and on the importance of moral choice. Niebuhr similarly discusses matters of special interest to Auden, in particular ‘the situation of the time’ the conflict between freedom and necessity, and the exact nature of sin.¹²

Based on the Christian existentialism propounded by Soren Kierkegaard Auden wrote a number of poems, with considerable social implications, during the later phase of his poetic career. The longer poem entitled “New Year Letter” is one such example. Quest for religious values is an important theme. Modern man is portrayed “as an existentialist hero”¹³ who is out on religious quest in the world that is spiritually sick. The poem consists of three parts that can be compared to the “three categories of experience: the Aesthetic, the Ethical, and the Religious.”¹⁴ According to Kierkegaard, human existence is either aesthetic or ethical or religious. The poem, as Richard Hoggart aptly remarks, is “pervaded by a sense of world’s misery, and of spiritual sickness of which that misery is, to Auden, a symptom. Though the central theme is the conflict in the individual will, the applications are predominantly social.”¹⁵

The first part highlights the sin and guilt of man that he would rather forget but which are part and parcel of the disorder and chaos that surround him. It also explains the concept of art and its importance and limitation in human life. But the aesthetic approach to the reformation of man and society is not completely played down. It shows an artist’s perception of things from the aesthetic point of view – whether beautiful or ugly. It also explores human society, its chaos and
disorder, and man's unsuccessful struggle to restore order and harmony. The poem opens with a description of the chaotic condition of the European continent where everyone is in danger from the Second World War. The world left helpless “Under the familiar weight / Of winter...” leading to “the sleepless guests of Europe...” who could no longer find the love, cheer or happiness necessary for a harmonious existence, but live in a state of continuous “... loneliness and fear.” The whole of mankind is threatened by the disastrous war: “to every bedside all the same / the dreadful figure swiftly came.” The inhabitants of the entire world, especially the Europeans are flung into the darkness of the most devastating war that the world had ever seen. In this hour of crisis, Auden desires to find the solution of man’s problems in art, but he fails. Highlighting the importance and limitation of art, Richard Hoggart states that “The moments of personal illumination which art gives may suggest the possibility of harmony, but do not teach us how to acquire it: art has its own kind of order, analogous to ‘life-order’, but reached by abstraction from it and not a guide to it.”

Auden explains the concept of art in the following manner:

For art had set in order sense
And feeling and intelligence,
And from its ideal order grew
Our local understanding too.

('New Year Letter')

At the same time, Auden exposes art’s limitation:

Art in intention is mimesis
But, realized, the resemblance ceases;
Art is not life and cannot be
A midwife to society,
For art is a fait accompli.
('New Year Letter')

Auden, in spite of being a poet, does not falter in expressing the art’s limitations, its failure in reforming man and society, though he shows his appreciation of its beauty. Art is produced only for the sake of man’s aesthetic pleasure but it cannot make anything happen. It would be unnatural if one expects art to create a utopia in our real world. It can only create such a world in our imagination. Art’s helplessness in such a situation becomes clear from the following lines:

... language may be useless, for
   No words men write can stop the war
   Or measure up to the relief
   Of its immeasurable grief,
   ('New Year Letter')

Thus, this section explains the inability of art to change life. Reflecting upon this helpless condition of art, Hoggart states that “... our present situation everywhere reveals guilt and vast spiritual disorders, and the section closes with the reflection that under such conditions we are all tempted to surrender to “the grand apocalyptic dream,” to admit moral bankruptcy, and relinquish humane values in favour of violence.”

The second part of the poem explores the “limitations of those one-sided systems, ideologies, and Utopias which reason has from, time to time, proposed as ultimate order.” All these limitations have resulted from the intellectual’s fascination with the commands of Mephistopheles, or the Devil. In the late
nineteen thirties, for instance, Auden was fascinated by Marxism, for it would clean human society promising the power of the proletariat by destroying the dominance of the bourgeoisie. But ultimately he discovers its limitations as it could not do what he had earlier expected it to do:

We hoped; we waited for the day
The state would wither clean away,
Expecting the millennium
That theory promised us would come,
It didn't.

('New Year Letter')

Auden's attention is focused upon the role played by the Devil in human affairs:

O how the devil who controls
The moral asymmetric souls
The either-ors, the mongrel halves
Who find truth in a mirror, laughs.
Yet time and memory are still
Limiting factors on his will;

('New Year Letter')

At the same time, Auden says that the Devil “. . . never tells us lies, / Just half-truths.” Thus, ideologies propounded by the intellectuals, Auden suggests, spread confusion and despair among mankind. Elsewhere, Auden himself has said that

The one infallible symptom of greatness . . . is the capacity for double focus. [Great Men] know that all absolutes are heretical but that one can only act in a given circumstance by assuming one . . . They are sceptical about human nature but not despairing; they know that they are weak but not helpless: perfection is impossible but one can be or do better or worse.
The third part of the poem deals with theology, philosophy, history and political theory and shows that the quest is for religious faith. According to Richard Hoggart herein Auden proposes that “... if we yearn for . . . continuous happiness . . . we shall be miserable . . . we are . . . fear-ridden . . . we are in Hell. . .” So, “we must do our best with life, climb our “purgatorial hill” not miserably but with “a reverent frivolity,” refuse to give our allegiance simply out of desperation to any of those who clamour for it.” Man must tackle the social issues at hand, pay attention to his value system and save himself, from being overwhelmed by the machine age which is adversely affecting his emotional state. The right choices need to be made in order to restructure society. Finally Auden appeals to God for guidance, whom he presents as a unicorn as a dove and as a fish, which are traditional Christian images and signify religious belief:

O Unicorn among the cedars,
To whom no magic charm can lead us,
White childhood moving like a sigh
Through the green woods unharmed in thy
Sophisticated innocence,
To call thy true love to the dance,
O dove of science and of light,
Upon the branches of the night,
O Ichthus playful in the deep
Sea-lodges that forever keep
Their secret of excitement hidden,

('New Year Letter')

The American title of the poem ‘The Double Man’ effectively communicates the poem’s central theme which is the conflict in man’s being, his divided consciousness. It ends secure in the concept of universal love as a means of putting an end to the violence that grips the world:
Like T. S. Eliot, most of Auden's later poetry is full religious belief. Auden seems to return to Christianity in his search for a system which would replace the failed systems of the world. The theme of quest figures in Auden's poetry in a pronounced way, be it the poems of the early period during the 1930s where the objective of the search is to remove the sickness of man and society or the later period wherein broadly speaking the quest is for a faith that can bring peace. It can be said that the quest embodied in the earlier poems is a secular quest, while that which is undertaken in the later poetry such as the 'The Quest' sonnets of the *New Year Letter* is concerned with the dilemmas of the man of faith. This sonnet sequence, as Arthur Kirsch states, "constitutes a search for a self which can find its integrity in faith, and it deals with many religious subjects, including sonnets on three temptations of Christ as well as on a number of religious themes developed by Kierkegaard." Commenting on this sonnet sequence Richard Hoggart states, "Its subject is, obviously, the search for the Way, for the secret of that Unknown which puzzles man all his life and which his philosophies are attempts to explain." The sonnet sequence seems to reflect Auden's own personal experience to a certain extent. Temptation is an important dilemma and is the theme of sonnet number VI 'Ashamed to be the darling of his grief,' VII 'His library annoyed him with its look' and VIII 'He watched with all his organs of concern.' Sonnet number VI explores the quester's failure in search of happiness.
and peace in aestheticism or art's magic rather than in religious and spiritual values:

And when Truth met him and put out her hand,
He clung in panic to his tall belief
And shrank away like an ill-treated child.

Sonnet number VII 'His library annoyed him with its look' is about the quester's "nihilistic disgust with the material world and the flesh." This nihilistic disgust affects him adversely:

And his long-suffering flesh, that all the time
Had felt the simple cravings of the stone
And hoped to be rewarded for her climb,

Took it to be a promise when he spoke
That now at last she would be left alone,
And plunged into the college quad, and broke.

Sonnet number VIII 'He watched with all his organs of concern' describes how the quester is tempted by the power and wealth of the world. He moves away from the spiritual world and concentrates solely on the material world. He begins to worship Satan in order to achieve more and more wealth and power. As a result, he is subjected to worry and unhappiness:

Approaching down a ruined corridor,
Strode someone with his own distorted features
Who wept, and grew enormous, and cried Woe.
(Sonnet number VIII 'He watched with all his organs of concern')

These temptations are reminiscent of Christ's temptations as recorded in the Bible. However, the quester's illusions are shattered when he finally realizes that
his refuge in religion leads to peace and happiness. This idea of the quester finds expression in sonnet number XX 'Within these gates all opening begins.' It advances the idea that innocence is the important prerequisite for the achievement of the goal of the quester and consequently, the quester must strive to regain lost innocence. The rose garden in this sonnet, as John Fuller aptly remarks, “is not, in fact, an individual subconscious, but a state of authenticity of being that is achieved largely through love: it is not unrelated, in fact, to the garden in the Roman de la Rose or in Eliot’s Burnt Norton, a poem which as Eliot himself confessed, also makes use of Alice.”

The garden also implies the “world of innocence” where the hero’s quest journey will end, and where all complications, anxieties and tensions due to disparity and inequality are resolved:

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All journeys die here: wish and weight are lifted:
Where often round some old maid’s desolation
Roses have flung their glory like a cloak,

The gaunt and great, the famed for conversation
Blushed in the stare of evening as they spoke
And felt their centre of volition shifted.
(Sonnet number XX ‘Within these gates all opening begins’)
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Thus, this sonnet exhibits Auden’s belief in Kierkegaard’s Christian existentialism according to which man can get rid of his despair only by following Christianity.

Auden’s theme of spiritual quest also finds expression in the poem entitled ‘Herman Melville.’ The poem seems to reflect Auden’s own personal experience in his quest for spiritual values. Auden discovers that “Man is a fallen creature with a natural bias to do evil,” and thus, he is subjected to inescapable
suffering. This is an existentialist idea. According to Auden, Melville becomes extraordinary mild, after a state of frenzied activity in his youth and discovers that “Evil is unspectacular and always human.” The mild behaviour exhibited by Melville is interpreted by Auden as a sort of goodness and love that Melville achieves after leading an average and adventurous life. His friendship with Nathaniel shatters all illusions about his own perfection or Goodness as well as that of human beings in general. According to John Fuller, the final stanza shows God “as a projection of parental images: Melville’s friendship with the older Nathaniel Hawthorne prompted his discovery that ‘his (i.e. Melville’s) love was selfish,’ that the real love is Agape, the Christian charity, and that man must surrender to this love so that the City of God can be reformed...” Selfless love that is universal in nature is a central tenet of Christianity, is advocated in this poem and signals Auden’s return to the Christian fold. Commenting on this poem, Peter Edgerly Firchow states, “While the poem is unquestionably primarily a poem about Melville’s life and Melville’s discovery of spiritual peace, it seems equally evident that Auden was working out his own problems of identity through the subjective correlative of Melville’s career.”

The condition of man after his fall from Eden is explored by Auden in the poem entitled ‘The Riddle.’ This is an important Christian theme that Auden has assimilated in the poem. This poem explores man’s relationship to God at two levels, the physical or material and the spiritual. This dual relation is the “duality of freedom and necessity, whose origin is located with the fall of man in the Garden of Eden.” Though not directly, the poem has social implications. That
belief in the spiritual world avails universal love or “Agape,” that can lead to a
happy and peaceful life is expressed in the following lines:

All our terrors burned away
We can learn at last to say:
‘All our knowledge comes to this,
That existence is enough,
That in savage solitude
Or the play of love
Every living creature is
Woman, Man, and Child’.

(The Riddle)

The quest for moral and spiritual values in the modern world finds
expression in the poem entitled ‘The Shield of Achilles.’ The quest here is
different from the one that is expressed in other poems like ‘New Year Letter’ and
the sonnet sequence of ‘The Quest.’ The poem contrasts between “ideals of
harmony and humane community, and practices of mass-manipulation, moral
blindness and militarism.” It is the exploration of the collapse of religious, moral
and spiritual values in modern society. The ancient shield in the poem is
reminiscent of the Grecian Urn of the famous Romantic poet John Keats.
Through the shield of Achilles Auden brings out the contrast between the ancient
Greek civilization and the modern world. By juxtaposing the modern world which
belongs to the present with the Greek world which is a part of history, Auden
effectively contrasts the unheroic present with the heroic past. The poem
showcases the Greek civilization which was characterized by order, religious
ritual, value system and artistic achievements:

... vines and olive trees,
Marble well-governed cities
And ships upon untamed seas,
. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .
. . ritual pieties,
With flower-garlanded heifers,
   Libation and sacrifice,
. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .
Men and women in a dance
Moving their sweet limbs
   Quick, quick, to music.
   ('The Shield of Achilles')

These reminiscences of the glorious Greek civilization of the past are contrasted with scenes from modern life wherein military operation and mindless violence stand highlighted:

A plain without a feature, bare and brown,
   No blade of grass, no sign of neighbourhood,
Nothing to eat and nowhere to sit down,
   Yet, congregated on it blankness, stood
An unintelligible multitude,
A million eyes, a million boots in line,
Without expression, waiting for a sign.
   ('The Shield of Achilles')

The classical myth of Achilles and his shield has been used to communicate the barrenness, the brutality and cruelty of contemporary life. It is Thetis, the mother of Achilles who has been looking for order, organization, art and religious rituals signifying a value system which were part of classical life. Instead of all this, among other negative things, she finds concentration camps where "three pale figures were led forth and bound / To three posts driven upright in the ground." This appears to be a travesty of the crucifixion of Christ and highlights the cruelty, violence and futility of contemporary life. The conclusion of the poem has religious implications. The dismay of Thetis at the death of the old
world order and the birth of the new world order devoid of any system of values and human sympathy, saturated with desolation, barrenness and violence is communicated with great simplicity.

That the landscape on the shield was created by the god Hephaestos seems to suggest that there was design and motive in this action of the god, suggesting that the expiry of the world order is inevitable:

Hephaestos’s provision of such a shield seems significantly like the Christian God’s provision of man’s free-will, as though the landscape of evil were a necessary condition for redemption. Any optimism in the thought of the death of the ‘iron-hearted man slaying Achilles’ is beautifully and ironically understated in the conclusion of the poem, so that it is enabled to concentrate instead on the bleak inevitability of the ‘unseemly deeds’ which he represents:

The thin-lipped armourer,
Hephaestos hobbled away,
Thetis of the shining breasts
Cried out in dismay
At what the god had wrought
To please her son, the strong
Iron-hearted man-slaying Achilles
Who would not live long.
(The Shield of Achilles)

In ‘In Praise of Limestone’ Auden uses the idyllic world of limestone that he presents with the dexterity of a master, to talk of art, of good and evil present in the life of man and of religion. It is “a statement of the spiritual temptations, and of the eternal opposition between those who recognise the demanding reality of sin and death, and those who feel that virtue and human happiness are within
man's reach." Auden's land of limestone is reminiscent of T. S. Eliot's waste land. The people of both these lands resemble each other. Auden projects comically and ironically the thought, behaviour and attitudes of the modern intellectuals towards life, because they do not even have the courage to stand on their own feet and face the reality of the unknown and death in the world as they are morally and spiritually dead. They have become "the band of rivals" and behave childishly. They are always in competition among themselves and as a result trample on their fellow human beings. Man's wish to improve his own art on the art of nature is also revealed when the voice of the ocean tempts him: "I am the solitude that asks and promises nothing; / That is how I shall set you free. There is no love; / There are only the various envies, all of them sad." The modern world is revealed to be a: "dilapidated province, connected / To the big busy world by a tunnel, with a certain / seedy appear . . ." But when the poet visualizes "the life to come" or even love he hears the tranquil "murmur / of underground streams." Thus the importance of love and spirituality in man's life is stressed upon.

Auden's poetry written after the 'New Year Letter' shows his strengthening belief in Christianity and God. The argument advanced in the 'New Year Letter' is continued in 'For the Time Being' taking Auden closer to Christianity. It is, as John Fuller aptly remarks, "suffused with an eagerness to make the sort of difficult peace with the Flesh (and, interestingly enough, peace with the mother) that is found in Augustine's Confessions." Arthur Kirsch also highlights the religious aspect of 'For the Time Being' and states that "Auden conceived of 'For
the Time Being’ – as he conceived of religious faith in his own life.” According to Auden:

“As a spirit, a conscious person endowed with free will . . . every man has, through faith and grace, a unique ‘existential’ relation to God, and few since St. Augustine have described this relation more profoundly than Kierkegaard.” “But every man . . . has a second relation to God which is neither unique nor existential: as a creature is composed of matter, as a biological organism, every man, in common with everything else in the universe, is related by necessity to the God who created that universe and saw that it was good, for the laws of nature to which, whether he likes it or not, he must conform are of divine origin.”

Though the setting of the poem is Palestine as a part of the Roman Empire before the arrival of Jesus Christ, it mirrors the condition of modern man living in the corrupt capitalist society during the period of the Second World War. ‘For the Time Being’ subtitled ‘A Christian Oratorio’ consists of nine parts. Most of these parts correspond to the traditional division of the nativity story. The first part “Advent” explores man’s pitiful condition in the corrupt capitalist society. This section highlights that hostility is so entrenched in man’s life that even the strong and powerful Hercules may not be able to protect the human race from destruction. The Semi-Chorus says:

Can great Hercules keep his
Extraordinary promise
To reinvigorate the Empire?
Utterly lost, he cannot
Even locate his task but
Stands in some decaying orchard
Or the irregular shadow
Of a ruined temple, aware of
Being watched from the horrid mountains.
('For the Time Being')

This condition of the world gives rise to feelings of utter despair and hopelessness: “dreading to find its Father lest it find / The Goodness it has dreaded is not good: / Alone, alone, about our dreadful wood.” This is the situation in which the quester seeks the just society which Auden longs for.

The prediction of the arrival Christ on this earth finds expression in the section ‘The Annunciation.’ When Mary says to Gabriel, “light blazes out of the stone, / The taciturn water / Burst into music,” he realizes that she is expected to do something of great significance to mankind. In other words what Mary says indicates the birth Jesus Christ who would come to rescue mankind from evil due to the fall of man. Gabriel says to Mary:

When Eve, in love with her own will,
Denied the will of Love and fell,
She turned the flesh Love knew so well
To knowledge of her love until
Both love and knowledge were of sin:
What her negation wounded, may
Your affirmation heal today;
Love’s will requires your own, that in
The flesh whose love you do not know,
Love’s knowledge into flesh may grow.

('For the Time Being')

Thus, in this section, Auden shows his interest in the “idea of the encounter of the Eternal and the Temporal: as a mysterious marriage and a divine gestation.”
In the fourth section ‘The Summons,’ three types of intellectuals namely the scientist, the philosopher and the sociologist who correspond to the three wise men of the nativity story, attempt to structure the just society by formulating the way of discovering truth or reality. John Fuller aptly remarks that “the experimental scientist proves that objective reality can provide no clear answers about the truth; the philosopher discovers that the present does not exist; and the sociologist tries to make Eros . . . instead of Agape the basis of the just society by a simple smokescreen of utilitarian political theory.” But finally they realize the mistake they commit in doing so, and call themselves “three old sinners.” Thus, like in ‘New Year Letter,’ here as well, Auden blames the intellectuals who are responsible for man’s despair and unhappiness.

In ‘The Flight into Egypt,’ the quester seems to get rid of anxiety and grief by getting into Egypt and this sense of safety and happiness is explored when Mary and St. Joseph present and describe the condition of Egypt that symbolizes man’s faith in religion and spiritual values:

Safe in Egypt we shall sigh
For lost insecurity;
Only when her terrors come
Does our flesh feel quite at home.
(‘For the Time Being’)

In the final section of ‘For the Time Being,’ the chorus presents the quester’s faith in religion which shows him the way to the Just City where he can lead a harmonious life:

He is the Way.
Follow Him through the Land of Unlikeness;
You will see rare beasts, and have unique adventures.

He is the Truth.
Seek Him in the Kingdom of Anxiety;
You will come to a great city that has expected your return for years.

He is the Life.
Love Him in the World of the Flesh;
And at your marriage all its occasions shall dance for joy.

('For the Time Being')

'For the Time Being' describes the period from Christ's coming to the flight to Egypt. It is a Christian Oratorio in the sense that it is a unique incarnation, and an attempt to understand the event that is central to Christian belief. In a sense, 'For the Time Being' is an act of spiritual quest on the part of Auden himself.

'Horae Canonicae,' which consists of seven poems based on the canonical hours marked by the Church for the purpose of prayer as well as meditation can be said to be Auden's final statement on the subject of religious belief in the context of Christianity. A major concern of this sequence is man's conscious acceptance of guilt and the awareness that in spite of this he is offered salvation.

In the first poem entitled 'Prime,' the poet focuses upon the will of man and the fall of Adam and these seem to be related to Auden's own consciousness of his thoughts and actions. The poem puts psychology and theology together in order to describe his consciousness of the creation of Adam. Adam's act of eating the fruit of the forbidden tree is "an historical mistake." Here Auden's mistake is probably his act of straying away from the path shown by
Christianity, and his temptations were psychology and Marxism. Thus, Auden realizes the mistake he and Adam once committed, and finally becomes a true Christian:

Holy this moment, wholly in the right,
   As, in complete obedience
To the light’s laconic outcry, next
   As a sheet, near as a wall,
Out there as a mountain’s poise of stone,
   The world is present, about,
And I know that I am, here, not alone
   But with a world and rejoice
Unvexed, for the will has still to claim
   This adjacent arm as my own,
The memory to name me, resume
   Its routine of praise and blame,
And smiling to me is this instant while
   Still the day is intact, and I
The Adam sinless in our beginning,
   Adam still previous to any act.

('Prime')

Commenting on the relation of the poem with Auden’s own personal experience, Arthur Kirsch aptly remarks that the poem is “an image of Auden’s assimilation of his faith, of the world of nature, and of both secular and Christian history into his own sense of being.”

The second poem in this sequence entitled ‘Terce’ is an exploration of the crucifixion which also constitutes an important subject matter of the later poem ‘Nones.’ The poem begins with the declaration of imminence of crucifixion. The poet also describes how the teachings of Christ express his exceptional kindness to mankind, “whose bark would tell the world that he is always kind.” But in spite of Christ being exceptionally kind, people did not pay any attention to his
crucifixion or his teachings. They did not to react to the crucifixion. The poem highlights the contrast that exists between Christ and man focussing on Christ's spirituality and man's evil:

At this hour we all might be anyone:  
It is only our victim who is without a wish,  
Who knows already (that is what  
We can never forgive. If he knows the answer,  
Then why are we here, why is there even dust?)  
('Terce')

The theme of 'guilt and redemption' is carried over to the next poem entitled 'Sext.' The act of crucifixion and the lack of reaction on the part of the crowd are focussed upon:

the crowd stands perfectly still,  
its eyes (which seem one) and its mouths  
(which seem infinitely many)  
expressionless, perfectly blank.

The crowd does not see (what everyone sees)  
a boxing match, a train wreck,  
a battleship being launched,  
does not wonder (as everyone wonders)  
('Sext')

The crucifixion of Christ and man's consequent guilt is the theme of the poem 'Nones.' This poem opens with predictions of the arrival of Christ. According to the poem, the birth of Jesus Christ was predicted by the pagan priests:

What we know to be not possible,  
Though time after time foretold  
By wild hermits, by shaman and sybil
The poem highlights that the crucifixion of Christ has already been forgotten by man, “the blood / Of our sacrifice is already / Dry on the grass.” This has created a terrible void and an oppressive silence fills the world. The description of Christ’s crucifixion and that of the “faceless” crowd that gathers to watch it highlights man’s dehumanization. The images of violence that are used by Auden conjure up the condition of the modern world as well, in an effective manner: “Blown up, burnt down, cracked open, / Felled, sawn into two, hacked through, torn apart.” After the crucifixion of Christ, a sense of guilt haunts man. Man loses his creativity. His tasks lie incomplete as his tools like the “Pile driver, concrete mixer, Crane and pick axe” lie unused. Man has been misled by the devil and indulges in behaviour that is lustful. Instead of building the “Just City” he builds brothels where he can have sexual gratification:

... Fat Belial make
Our wives waltz naked; meanwhile
It would be best to go home, if we have a home,
In any case good to rest.

('Nones')

Thus, the poem ‘Nones,’ as Arthur Kirsch aptly remarks, “focuses most on the consequences of the corrupt human will for the earth as well as for humankind.”

‘Vespers’ highlights man’s desire to construct the “Just City.” Auden contrasts the spirituality of Eden with the materialism of New Jerusalem. In this way Auden speaks of two worlds. Commenting on two worlds in *The Dyer’s Hand and Other Essays*, Auden says: “In their relation to the actual fallen world, the
difference between Eden and New Jerusalem is a temporal one. Eden is a past world in which the contradictions of the present world have not yet arisen; New Jerusalem is a future world in which they have at last been resolved.\textsuperscript{41}

As the poem ‘Prime’ deals with awakening, ‘Compline’ is concerned with falling asleep. Religion is incomplete without prayer and ‘Compline’ the sixth poem of the sequence is especially significant since Auden concludes it with a prayer for himself, for Chester Kallman and for all beings “quoting the Requiem Mass”\textsuperscript{42}:

\begin{quote}
Can poets (can men in television)  
Be saved? It is not easy  
To believe in unknowable justice  
Or pray in the name of a love  
Whose name one’s forgotten: \textit{libera}  
\textit{Me, libera C} (dear C)  
And all poor s-o-b’s who never  
Do anything properly, spare  
Us in the youngest day when all are  
Shaken awake, facts are facts,  
(And I shall know exactly what happened  
Today between noon and three)  
That we, too, may come to the picnic  
With nothing to hide, join the dance  
As it moves in perichoresis,  
Turns about the abiding tree.  
\textit{('Compline')}\textendquote

According to Arthur Kirsch, the “youngest day” mentioned in the poem “is both the next day, the day of renewal in which Christians remember and acknowledge their guilt, and also the last day, when they wake up to the Last Judgment . . . The abiding tree at the centre of the dance is the living Christ.”\textsuperscript{43} This poem beautifully expresses Christian religious beliefs.
'Lauds' the last poem of the sequence 'Horae Canonicae' celebrates the act of worship and begins with the singing of birds and a metaphorical awakening signalled by the crowing of the cock: "Among the leaves the small birds sing; / The crow of the cock commands awakening." At the personal level the poem seems to focus on the role played by religion in overcoming Auden's loneliness. The refrain "In solitude, for company," according to Arthur Kirsch, "... celebrates the liturgy, a thing done together, a community of worshippers in church that incorporates the natural and historical beings of each communicant. The whole of 'Lauds' is itself a sung Eucharist, one of Auden's most compelling, as the whole of 'Horae Canonicae' is a culmination of the expression of Christian faith in his poetry."

Thus, the poetry that Auden wrote which began with an exploration of man's problems and its psychological cure, culminates with his realization of the fact that it is the Christian faith alone that can help man overcome the guilt, anxiety, trauma, loneliness and other social and political problems that man is faced with. Commenting on Auden's poetry, Allan Rodway states:

In the English period the quest is for a new society, though admittedly this is not seen as independent of a new self. Auden never fully accepted the Marxist view that men are what they are wholly by reason of their environment. Indeed his references to a death wish in the bourgeoisie and the need for personal rebirth in those who would lead the way to the promised land often suggest the opposite. However, the chief end in view remains that of a new society, which will arise from the ruins of the old. Later on, it becomes a
quest for a new life, signified in its full form by a Kierkegaardian journey from the aesthetic through the ethical, to the religious state; the Just City now being no more than an unattainable though approachable ideal.¹⁴
References:

2. Ibid., p. 189.
7. Ibid., p. 282.
16. Ibid., p. 162.
17. Ibid., p. 163.
21. Ibid., p. 166
25. Ibid., p. 144.
26. Ibid., p. 147.
33. Ibid., p. 213.
36. Ibid., p. 45.
38. Ibid., p. 152.
40. Ibid., p. 128.
43. Ibid., p. 137.
44. Ibid., p. 140.
CHAPTER: 5

CONCLUSION

W. H. Auden emerges as a major modern poet, with varied interests, be they psychological, social, scientific or religious. There has never been any doubt about Auden being the most representative poet of the 1930s, one who from the beginning of his career seems to have no difficulty in putting to poetic use ideas that he got from different fields of study irrespective of the period from which they were drawn. Be it the old world of the Sagas from which the feud aspect of the charade ‘Paid on Both Sides’ is taken and used to communicate the sick psyche of the individual as well as contemporary society, or beliefs from the field of modern psychology which provide raw material for poems such as the light and humorous ballad ‘Miss Gee’ or the comparatively more serious one entitled ‘Victor.’ Though Auden has made different experiments, as he grew and developed as a poet, man remains his central concern throughout his long career.

In order to explore man’s social, political and religious problems Auden has used different modes with considerable success. Broadly speaking it can be said that he has written poems in the argumentative mode such as ‘Let History Be My Judge’ and ‘The Secret Agent,’ in the contemplative mode such as ‘A Summer Night’ and ‘The Shield of Achilles,’ the metaphoric such as ‘The Watershed’ and ‘Paysage Moralise,’ the comic mode such as ‘Miss Gee,’
‘Epitaph on a Tyrant’ and ‘Victor’ and in the fantastical mode such as ‘As I Walked Out One Evening.’

The allegorical landscape, a device through which Rilke expressed human life, greatly appealed to Auden, who uses the landscape of rusting machinery and “comatose” industry as he does in ‘The Watershed’ for example, to portray the heart and soul of the country. One of the most remarkable achievements of Auden during the early phase of his career was the creation of the landscape of his poetry or what Samuel Hynes calls the “Auden Country.” This landscape is full of a mixture of opposites in some ways such as derelict machinery and nature of which ‘The Watershed’ and ‘Consider’ are good examples and the public world and private world which is well exemplified by the poems entitled ‘A Summer Night’ and ‘September 1, 1939’.’ Auden’s landscape also has a lot of borders and frontiers which are psychological concepts largely but also accommodates the concept of borders that were really disintegrating as a result of the wars that were being fought.

The strong impact of public events of the times on the private lives of individuals is also highlighted by Auden’s poetry. The encroachment of man’s private world by external events which leads to the loss of his sense of security and causes anxiety figures in poems such as ‘A Bride in the 30s,’ ‘A Summer Night’ and ‘September 1, 1939.’ The crisis of the decade of the 1930s is mirrored energetically in Auden’s poetry with all its urgency and tension. The period is described as an “hour of crisis and dismay” and the need of urgent action is stressed. Auden, along with other contemporaries like Stephen Spender felt
"hounded" by external events and this finds expression in Auden’s poetry in an effective manner.

The poetry that Auden wrote during the early phase of his poetic career is to a great extent the exploration of the condition of man living in the capitalist society. The problems arising due to Capitalism, Auden believes, in the early phase of his career, could be solved with the help of the psychological theories of Freud and Homer Lane. Man’s problems are often referred to as his sickness and psychological concepts such as anxiety, death wish, repression, guilt, suppression of the unconscious and the resultant diseases and abnormality, conflict between the ego and the super-ego, psychic maladies in individuals, and neurosis become an integral part of a lot of poems such as ‘No Change of Place,’ ‘1929,’ ‘The Questioner Who Sits So Sly,’ ‘Adolescence’ and ‘The Decoys,’ written during this period. According to Auden’s poetry written during the early period, anxiety in man often leads to inner conflict, a conflict that is confined within his self. His poetry also offers psychotherapy as the means of healing psychological ailments that man is suffering from. Besides this healing by psychotherapy, Auden’s poetry proposes that change is very essential in order to improve man’s life or to help him get rid of his anxiety. This change must involve the social, individual and psychological levels, as discussed in the poem ‘1929.’ Auden’s poetry often focuses the idea that death is instrumental in bringing about the change needed for the improvement of man’s lot. This death wish occurs frequently in Auden’s poetry. Poems like ‘1929’ and ‘Consider’ are good examples.
Auden's poetry advocates an instinctive life which he believes, in keeping with the psychological theories to which he was exposed, will make it possible for man to live a healthy and peaceful life. The suppression of natural instincts by the conscious mind of an individual leads to psychological diseases such as amnesia, neurosis, mania and other similar abnormalities. 'Miss Gee' and 'Victor' are good examples of such poems. Auden even argues that trifling with the natural instincts can make man a "Truly Weak Man," as presented in the poem 'Adolescent.' He proposes that the suppression of natural instincts can also cause physical illness like cancer. Miss Edith Gee is a person whose cancer is the result of the suppression of natural instincts. The health of man, as an individual seems to be his primary concern in the beginning.

But Auden's poetry bears witness to the fact that a little later he became conscious that psychology alone was not the answer to man's problems and socio-economic measures were needed simultaneously in order to restore the health of man. Now Auden focuses his attention on the health of society as well. He realizes that the masses are being exploited by the capitalists and that Marxism offers a solution to the crisis of the period to quite an extent. Auden learns from both Freud and Marx and consequently, in many poems such as 'The Witnesses,' 'O What is That Sound,' 'Adolescence,' and 'The Decoys' written during the early period, both psychological and social elements blend together. It is clear that along with the psychological problems of man, Auden's poetry focuses on the negative impact of the Capitalist system on common man through a number of poems such as 'The Unknown Citizen,' 'Who's Who' and 'Look,
Stranger.' Capitalism leads to the exploitation of the under-privileged proletariat by the dominant bourgeoisie, resulting in the accumulation of material wealth in a few hands and huge economic disparity between the haves and have-nots. 'Let History Be My Judge' vividly reveals this economic disparity and the suppression of the poor and the powerless. The loneliness and sense of alienation of common man under the Capitalist system are also highlighted in a number of poems such as '1929,' 'The Capital,' 'Musee des Beaux Arts' and 'The Unknown Citizen.' In order to improve the lot of common man and bring to an end the tyranny of the bourgeoisie Auden's poetry sometimes advocates a revolution initiated by the proletariat. Such a revolution is visualized by Auden in 'A Summer Night.'

However, Auden's poetry, most of the time does not advocate a violent revolution but expresses a desire for 'change' in life. This change is essential in order to reform man and society according to Auden. But his concept of this change varies from time to time in his long poetic career. A number of early poems such as '1929' and 'O Where Are You Going' make a case for psychological and bodily change in order to cure man of his sickness. Soon, under the influence of Marxism, the change that his poetry often advocates is a revolutionary change to be brought about by overthrowing Capitalism and replacing it with Communism. 'A Summer Night' and 'A Misunderstanding' are poems that urge the common man to initiate a revolution so that the tyranny of Capitalism and oppression of the proletariat may come to an end. 'The Fall of Rome' and 'The Sphinx' are two brilliant poems that add the historical angle to the prospect of change but simultaneously highlight that change is needed in
Auden's own times. By the time Auden migrated to the United States of America the change that his poetry advocates is a religious one, initiated by Soren Kierkegaard's Christian existentialism. A large number of poems such as 'Herman Melville' and the sequence of 'Horae Canonicae' advocate such a change.

Closely related to this concept of change is the idea of quest in Auden's poetry almost from the beginning to the end of his long poetic career. But his quest also does not remain the same all the time, but varies in keeping with the different intellectual influences on his poetry. During the early phase, the quest is for crossing the psychological frontiers in order to live a life in which natural instincts are not suppressed. The crossing of psychological frontiers finds expression in a number of poems such as 'O Where Are You Going,' 'Adolescence' and 'The Decoys.' The quest is to discover a new world by bringing to an end the tyranny of the bourgeoisie. This quest is undertaken by a hero who might be a garage boy or a wander or a voyager or a man of action, and can initiate and carry on a revolution for the sake of the welfare of mankind. A number of poems such as 'A Misunderstanding,' 'A Summer Night' are written to express such a quest. This quest is secular in nature. Finally, with Auden's return to Christianity, the quest becomes the quest for religious and spiritual values. Now, he deals with the problems of quest in the light of change in circumstances caused by faith. The intension of this quest is to unravel and resolve the predicament of a man of faith. Temptations function as the greatest impediments and sonnet numbers VI 'Ashamed to be the darling of his grief,' VII
‘His library annoyed him with its look’ and VIII ‘He watched with all his organs of concern’ of ‘The Quest’ series deal with this theme. The aim of the quester is to attain truth or God.

Love has always occupied an important place in Auden’s poetry. A number of early poems such as ‘Song I,’ ‘Song II’ and ‘Song III’ of ‘Five Songs’ advocate the full expression of the sexual or the erotic impulse. This leads to a healthy and fruitful life. On the other hand, repression of love’s natural instincts leads to psychological problems like neurosis and physical ailments like cancer as we witness in the poems entitled ‘Victor’ and ‘Miss Gee.’ Sexuality is viewed as the creative force of love and is linked to Auden’s belief in the freedom of the unconscious, in keeping with the theories advanced by Freud and Homer Lane. An individual who leads a sexually fulfilled life is psychologically and physically healthy and such individuals are essential for the new society that Auden yearns for. They will be capable of the “general social love” that Auden believed was essential for a healthy society. In ‘September 1, 1939’ Auden declares: “We must love one another or die.” But Auden’s poetry also emphasises the transformation of “Eros” or physical love into “Agape” or spiritual love as it does in the much acclaimed poem ‘Lullaby.’ Spiritual love or the love of God, a hallmark of faith will give birth to “Agape” or universal love, which is greatly emphasized in Christianity, will heal us as well as the society in which we live.

Auden’s poetry, under the influence of Kierkegaard’s Christian existentialism, explores the aesthetic, ethical and religious aspects of man’s life. Auden’s longer poem ‘New Year Letter’ is a significant poem that is concerned
with man's aesthetic, ethical and religious life. The poetry that Auden wrote during the religious phase of his poetic career also focuses on the duality of man's being, that is his physical body on the one hand and his spiritual self on the other, as well as his relation to God. Poems such as 'The Riddle' and 'Herman Melville' are concerned with these aspects of human life. A number of poems such as ‘New Year Letter,’ ‘The Sea and the Mirror’ and ‘The Age of Anxiety’ that Auden wrote during the later phase explore the relationship between creative art and life, and the importance and limitations of art in its ability to reform man and society. Christian themes of temptation, guilt and salvation are central concerns of poems such as ‘The Quest’ sonnet sequence, ‘Compline’ and ‘Lauds’ and serve to establish man's relationship with God.

W. H. Auden is a prolific and complex poet who makes heavy demands on the reader. His poetry embodies his response to the events and situations of his time, be they public or personal. He is well-versed in psychology, history, political theory and science. He emerges as a dedicated poet who has significantly contributed to the strength and growth of poetry written in the English language. Hailed in the 1930s as the leading and most representative poet of that decade Auden's reputation as a great poet was adversely affected by his migration to the United States of America, attracting the ire of the British critics who interpreted this as an unpatriotic act. Much has been made of the change that took place in the poetry that Auden wrote after his migration to the United States of America. But this change is no sudden change. It is part of Auden's growth and development. Auden himself has said “My poetry doesn’t change from place to
Auden had always been concerned with man and his plight and this concern about the fate of man grows into what is called his religious poetry, passing through stages of evolution in keeping with the needs of the times in which he lived, as perceived by him. That Auden's later poetry is as relevant today as his early poetry was in its own time can be demonstrated by highlighting the relevance today of a few lines from a poem like 'The Shield of Achilles':

... a weed-choked field.
A ragged urchin, aimless and alone,
Loitered about that vacancy, a bird
Flew up to safety from his well-aimed stone:
That girls are raped, that two boys knife a third,
Were axioms to him, who'd never heard
Of any world where promises were kept,
Or one could weep because another wept.

Some of the early poems written by Auden under the influence of T. S. Eliot are noted for their obscurity, caused largely due to the device of compression and also because of Auden's personal experience. But Auden grew out of this habit with the passage of time and his best work has the "... consummate ease that comes only from the most practiced and refined art, the art that conceals art." Few poets can equal Auden as far as the varied and impressive verse techniques used by him are concerned. In this respect he is irrefutably one of the greatest poets of all times. Auden's most accomplished poems are marked by a fusion of form and content that is the hallmark of all great writers.
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6. Ibid., p. 63.

7. Ibid., p. 34.
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